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First Digital, Print Daily of Balochistan

Editor: Asim Khan.

QUETTA VOICE

Rs. 10.00 Vol. VII: No: 140

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Friday 20, February, 2026



Ali Hassan Zahri Removed from Balochistan Cabinet

News Desk:

Ali Hassan Zahri has been removed from the Balochistan cabinet following a decision approved at the highest level. According to official sources, the move was made

on the advice of the Chief Minister of Balochistan and subsequently endorsed by the Governor of Balochistan. After receiving the governor's approval, the Chief Secretary issued a formal notification, giving immediate effect to the decision.

The development marks a change in the provincial cabinet as the government continues to review its administrative and political arrangements. Further updates regarding cabinet restructuring are expected in due course.



Re-Polling Announced for PB-36 Kalat on March 10

News Desk:

The Election Commission of Pakistan has scheduled re-polling at seven polling stations in Balochistan Assembly constituency PB-36 (Kalat). The polling process had earlier been deferred due to law and

order concerns following a request from the Balochistan government. According to an official notification, voters at the affected polling stations will now cast their ballots on March 10, 2026. Polling will be conducted from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm without any interval. The Election Com-

mission has appointed the District Returning Officer, Returning Officer, and Assistant Returning Officers to oversee the re-polling process. Authorities said all necessary administrative and security arrangements are being put in place to ensure an orderly and transparent exercise.

Balochistan CM Announces Increased Support for Persons with Disabilities

News Desk:

Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti chaired the second meeting of the Provincial Council of the Kumak Support Fund for persons with disabilities in Quetta.

The meeting was attended by Parliamentary Secretary for Social Welfare Haji Wali Muhammad Noorzai, Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, senior officials of

concerned departments, and representatives of organizations working for persons with disabilities. The council decided to expand and strengthen welfare programs for persons with disabilities across Balochistan, with a focus on effective implementation.

The chief minister directed a notable increase in monthly financial assistance for registered persons with disabilities. Approval was also

granted for the immediate procurement of special equipment, including electric wheelchairs and other assistive devices, to improve mobility and quality of life.

Addressing the meeting, the chief minister said the Kumak Support Fund would be extended in phases to cover every registered person with a disability in the province.

He emphasized that the Kumak Endowment Fund would play a key role in pro-

moting self-reliance among persons with disabilities. He further directed authorities to ensure educational assistance and scholarships for students with disabilities from matriculation to PhD level.

In addition, vocational and technical training, skills development initiatives, mobility-support equipment, and interest-free loans will be provided to facilitate dignified employment and economic inclusion.

PTI says govt's silence, lack of clarity over Imran's health only adding to public unease

NEWS DESK:

The PTI on Thursday once again voiced concerns regarding party founder Imran Khan's health, taking exception to the government's alleged "silence and lack of clarity" over the matter. The incarcerated ex-prime minister's family and party have been raising concerns about his health since his eye ailment — right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) — came to light in late January.

In a statement on X, the PTI expressed "profound concern over the growing anxiety spreading among the nation regarding Imran's health. Any ambiguity surrounding the health of a leader who commands the confidence of

specialised evaluations be needed, he must be permitted to be taken to a hospital or diagnostic centre of their choosing," the PTI demanded.

It added: "It is the government's responsibility to provide the nation with clear, verified, and unambiguous medical facts."

"A significant amount of time has already been wasted regarding concerns over Imran Khan's health," it insisted, adding that no further delay would be acceptable. Family members and senior party leaders have repeatedly attempted to meet him at Adiala jail in recent weeks, but most visits have been blocked by authorities.

The SC's intervention on February 10 allowed PTI lawyer



millions is unacceptable. The government's silence and lack of clarity have only intensified public unease rather than alleviating it," the PTI contended.

"This is not merely a political matter, it is a test of national trust, human rights, and the government's responsibility," the party asserted.

Stating that "any uncertainty regarding his health and safety is intolerable", it stressed that if the government had nothing to conceal, then there was no justification for "delaying full transparency". The party reiterated its demand that Imran's personal physicians be granted "immediate and unrestricted access so they may conduct all necessary medical examinations, including blood tests and any other required diagnostic procedures."

Salman Safdar to meet Imran, with the ex-premier telling the counsel he had "15 per cent" vision left in his right eye. This came after it emerged that Imran underwent a medical procedure on the night of January 24 — a development confirmed days later amid an apparent lack of knowledge by the family. A report prepared by a medical board formed by the government that visited Imran on February 15 stated that, unaided, the ex-premier's right eye had 6/24 partial vision and 6/9 in the left. It said that with glasses, the ex-premier's vision was 6/9 partial in the right and 6/6 in the left.

The opposition alliance Tehreek-e-Ihathiz-Ayn-e-Pakistan (TIAP), which had staged a six-day sit-in at Parliament House over Imran's health, also doubled down on its earlier demands on Friday.

OPINION VOICE Editor: Asim Khan

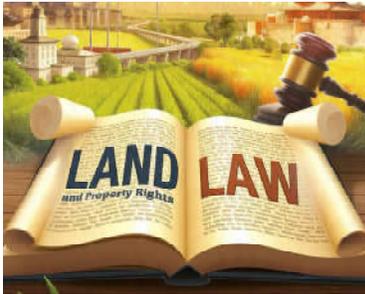
Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Pact – A Historic Milestone in Bilateral Relations

Editorial: For over eight decades, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have enjoyed close and cordial relations rooted in faith, friendship, and mutual cooperation. The recent visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to the Kingdom has further strengthened these historic ties, marking a new chapter in the relationship between the two brotherly nations. SMDA An Unprecedented Event The signing of a Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is unprecedented. For the first time, both states have formally pledged that an attack on one will be considered an attack on both. This landmark pact is not only a testament to their shared commitment to peace and security but also a reflection of the growing geopolitical importance of the Middle East and South Asia. Over the years, Saudi Arabia has stood firmly by Pakistan, extending support in critical times, whether financial, diplomatic, or strategic. At the same time, Pakistan has successfully managed to maintain positive ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, balancing its role in a region often marked by divisions. This ability to uphold cordial relations with diverse regional players demonstrates Islamabad's maturity in diplomacy. China, Turkey And Saudi Arabia Fully Support Pakistan This historic step deserves to be celebrated as a national achievement. It is a reflection of Pakistan's enduring diplomacy and its ability to transform longstanding friendships into strategic partnerships that ensure stability, prosperity, and peace for generations to come.

Land Law and Its Importance in Pakistan

By Amir Hamza Bashir

Land is one of the most valuable and contested assets in Pakistan. The legal framework that governs the ownership, possession, and transfer of land is known as Land Law. It ensures that property rights are protected and that disputes over land are resolved through legal and transparent means.



Historical Background of Land Law in Pakistan

The foundation of land laws in Pakistan was laid during the British colonial era through legislation such as the Land Revenue Act and the Registration Act. After independence in 1947, these laws continued to guide Pakistan's land management system. Today, major statutes like the West Pakistan Land Revenue Act, 1967, and the Transfer of Property Act, 1882, remain the cornerstone of land governance and property transfer in the country. Government has initiated significant reforms through the Punjab Land Records Authority (PLRA) and other provincial projects to digitize land records and reduce human interference in property registration and ownership verification.

Land Record Management and Reforms

Traditionally, the Patwari system has been responsible for maintaining land records across Pakistan. However, it has often been criticized for corruption, manipulation, and lack of transparency. In recent years, the government has initiated significant reforms through the Punjab Land Records Authority (PLRA) and other provincial projects to digitize land records and reduce human interference in property registration and ownership verification.

Challenges in Pakistan's Land System

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certainly for investors and ordinary citizens alike.

To overcome these challenges, there is a strong need for comprehensive digital record-keeping, specialized land tribunals, and public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about their property rights.

Land law is not just a legal framework—it is the foundation of economic stability and social justice in Pakistan. A fair, transparent, and efficient land management system encourages investment, infrastructure development, and public trust in state institutions. Strengthening land laws and ensuring their effective implementation are vital steps toward achieving legal certainty and sustainable growth in Pakistan. The Author is a Student of LLB (7th Semester).

Quetta's Traffic Chaos: Urgent Reforms Needed to Fix the Crisis

Anjela Kaynat

Quetta, once a city known for its peaceful ambience, now faces an escalating traffic crisis. Every day, thousands of commuters endure hours of gridlock, navigating congested roads, reckless drivers, and deteriorating infrastructure. From rickshaws and motorcycles to private cars, the overwhelming number of vehicles clogs major roads, while encroachments and illegal parking worsen the situation.

Key roads such as Jinnah Road, Sariab Road, Liaquat Bazaar, Masjid Road, and Zarghoon Road have become perpetual bottlenecks, choked by illegal encroachments, unregulated parking, and an ever-increasing number of vehicles. Without a structured urban transport model, these roads remain gridlocked, affecting daily life and economic activity.

Major Traffic Challenges in Quetta Severe Congestion on Key Roads Traffic congestion is worst in commercial hubs such as Liaquat Bazaar, Masjid Road, Jinnah Road, and Zarghoon Road, where vehicles move at a snail's pace during peak hours. With no alternative routes or bypasses, all traffic is funneled through these roads,

causing massive delays. Key intersections, including Balochistan University Chowk, Meezan Chowk, Prince Road, frequently experience severe traffic jams. The Surge of Non-Custom Paid (NCP) and Unregistered Vehicles The unchecked influx of non-custom paid (NCP) and unregistered vehicles has compounded the traffic crisis. A 2010 report estimated over 50,000 NCP vehicles on Balochistan's roads, causing an annual revenue loss of Rs 15 billion to the national exchequer. By 2024, this number has surged to nearly 80,000, with a significant concentration in Quetta (Excise and Taxation Department, 2024). Despite periodic crackdowns, including the 2023 seizure of 113 NCP vehicles worth Rs 982 million (ARY News, 2023), enforcement efforts have failed to stem the tide. Quetta's traffic police estimate that 40% of vehicles in the city are either unregistered or NCP (Think Transportation, 2023), worsening congestion and lawlessness on the roads. Lack of a Proper Public Transport System Unlike other major cities in Pakistan, Quetta lacks an organized public transport system. With no buses or mass transit options, residents rely on rickshaws, motorcycles, and private cars, further clogging the roads. Over 50,000 rickshaws operate within the city, creating congestion in already packed areas like Masjid Road and Liaquat Bazaar (Traffic Survey: Quetta Smart and Safe City, 2023). Although the government has revisited the Quetta Mass Transit Train project, financial constraints have delayed its execution, leaving residents without an efficient alternative to private transport. Encroachments and Illegal Parking Worsen Congestion Unauthorised stalls and illegal parking occupy nearly 30% of road space in busy commercial zones such as Prince Road and Jinnah Road (Think Transportation, 2023). Street vendors set up shop on sidewalks, forcing pedestrians onto the roads, while shopkeepers extend their businesses onto public spaces, further restricting traffic flow. Deteriorating Road Conditions Over 60% of Quetta's roads are in disrepair, riddled with potholes, cracks, and poor drainage systems (BRIX, 2024). Roads such as Joint Road, Sariab Road, Sabzal Road, and Nava Kili are among the worst affected. During rainfall, flooding exacerbates the problem, making navigation nearly impossible. A tragic reminder of Balochistan's road infrastructure crisis occurred in 2024, when a bus plunged into a ravine in Washuk district due to poor road conditions. Despite promises of road improvements, delays in infrastructure projects continue to endanger commuters. Weak Traffic Management and Enforcement A lack of proper traf-

fic regulation has led to frequent violations, reckless driving, and rising accidents. With an inadequate number of traffic police officers on the roads, many drivers ignore basic rules—running red lights, driving on the wrong side, and engaging in dangerous maneuvers. Although the Balochistan government announced plans to build flyovers and underpasses in 2024 to ease congestion, financial setbacks have stalled these projects (Balochistan Express, 2024). Practical Solutions to Fix Quetta's Traffic Woes To address Quetta's worsening traffic crisis, a multi-faceted approach is needed, combining road expansion, better enforcement, and public transport development. Here are some key solutions:

1. Road Expansion and Maintenance • Widen key roads such as Jinnah Road and Zarghoon Road to accommodate growing traf-

fic. • Improve drainage systems to prevent road damage and flooding. 2. Regulating Non-Custom Paid Vehicles • Enforce stricter measures to curb the influx of NCP vehicles. • Introduce policies to register or phase out unregistered vehicles. 3. Establishing a Public Transport System • Launch a city bus service to provide an affordable alternative to private cars. • Develop dedicated bus lanes to improve efficiency and reduce congestion. 4. Regulating Rickshaws and Motorcycles • Implement route-based restrictions for rickshaws to prevent congestion in commercial hubs. • Create designated parking areas for rickshaws and motorcycles. 5. Strengthening Traffic Law Enforcement • Deploy more traffic police officers to ensure compliance with traffic rules. • Impose heavier fines and penalties on reckless drivers. 6. Removing Encroachments and Illegal Parking

• Conduct regular operations to clear roads of unauthorized stalls and illegally parked vehicles. • Establish alternative vending zones to prevent the return of street vendors. 7. Traffic Awareness and Public Education • Launch awareness campaigns to educate citizens on traffic rules and road safety. • Integrate basic traffic education into school curriculums to instill discipline in future generations. Call to Action: A Collective Responsibility Every day, Quetta's residents face the frustration of endless traffic jams, reckless drivers, and poorly managed roads. Yet, the problem persists—not just because of weak governance, but because of collective negligence. Authorities must act swiftly to expand traffic police officers to ensure compliance with traffic rules. Citizens, too, have a role to play—by obeying traffic rules, avoiding illegal parking, and discouraging encroachments.

Aziz ur Rehman Agha

The Cold War may have ended, but the ideological clash between Capitalism and Communism continues to shape global politics, economics, and international relations. Even today, global alliances reflect these old ideological divisions. However, both Capitalist and Communist systems have failed to manage political and socio-economic affairs effectively. One system suppresses personal freedom; the other deepens inequality. Both carry serious structural flaws that make them unsuitable for modern societies. This calls for a new, balanced approach—one found in the Islamic socio-economic and political philosophy, which follows a middle path between the two extremes. The Flaws of Communism Communism lies at one extreme of the ideological spectrum. It suppresses individual freedoms such as speech, press, and trade. Historical examples from Maoist China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) show how intellectual expression was crushed—books and music not aligned with party ideology were banned, and private libraries were destroyed. Similarly, in the USSR, any deviation from party thought was treated as a crime.

Communism eliminates private property and discourages entrepreneurship. Without personal incentive, individuals lose motivation to innovate and work for economic growth. As a result, this system hampers development and limits prosperity. The severe restrictions on basic rights and freedoms make Communism unsustainable in modern nations.

The Problems with Capitalism Capitalism, which has enabled just 1% of the world's population to control more wealth than the remaining 99% combined. This system inherently promotes economic inequality, empowering elite industrialists while exploiting the working class. Under Capitalism, profit takes precedence over people; workers are overburdened, and ethical values are often sacrificed for industrial gains. Furthermore, Capitalism's obsession with rapid industrialization and profit maximization has led to environmental destruction, resource depletion, and climate crises. It prioritizes wealth accumulation over sustainability. These internal contradictions—growing inequality, moral decay, and ecological harm—make Capitalism an unfit model for an equitable, sustainable society. The Islamic Socio-Balanced Approach Both Capitalism and Communism fail because they represent extremes—one suffocates freedom; the other breeds inequality. Islam, however, offers a balanced socio-economic philosophy that harmonizes justice, freedom, and social welfare. The Islamic economic system allows private ownership and business freedom, but regulates them through moral and legal checks. The obligation of Zakat (charity) redistributes wealth, preventing concentration in the hands of a few. Meanwhile, the prohibition of Riba (usury) ensures financial fairness and discourages exploitation. Together, these principles foster economic justice, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Conclusion Neither Capitalism nor Communism provides a complete solution to humanity's political and economic challenges. Both contain inherent flaws—one curtails human freedom, the other destroys social equity. The Islamic socio-economic model, however, offers the ideal middle path—balancing individual rights with collective welfare. With its emphasis on justice, equality, and moral responsibility, Islam presents the most sustainable and humane political and economic philosophy for the modern world.

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Israel restricts Friday congregation at Al Aqsa to 10,000

NEWS DESK: Israel on Wednesday imposed restrictions on Palestinian worshippers from the occupied West Bank attending weekly Friday prayers at the Al Aqsa Mosque in east Jerusalem and capped the worshippers number at 10,000 during the holy month of Ramadan which began on Wednesday.

The Israeli authorities also imposed age restrictions on West Bank Palestinians, permitting entry only to men aged 55 and older, women aged 50 and older, and children up to age 12 to attend the Friday prayers. "Ten thousand Palestinian worshippers will be permitted to enter the Temple Mount for Friday prayers throughout the month of Ramadan, subject to obtaining a dedicated permit in advance," COGAT, the Israeli agency in charge of civilian matters in the Palestinian territories, said in a statement.

"Entry for men will be permitted from age 55, for women from age 50,



and for children up to age 12 when accompanied by a first-degree relative." COGAT said, adding that restrictions apply only to Palestinians travelling from the West Bank, which Israel

has occupied since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Imam of Al Aqsa arrested by Israeli police; Hamas condemns arrest, restrictions on worshippers' access to holy mosque. It

emphasised that all permits are conditional upon prior security approval by the relevant security authorities." COGAT said. "In addition, residents travelling to prayers at the Temple

Mount will be required to undergo digital documentation at the crossings upon their return to the areas of Judea and Samaria at the conclusion of the prayer day," it said, using the Bibli-

cal term for the West Bank. During Ramadan, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians traditionally attend prayers at Al Aqsa, Islam's third holiest site, located in east Jerusalem, which Israel

captured in 1967 and later annexed in a move that is not internationally recognised. Since the war in Gaza broke out in October 2023, the attendance of worshippers has de-

clined due to tough Israeli restrictions. Israel arrested Al Aqsa Mosque imam and police on Monday arrested the Imam of Al Aqsa Mosque, Sheikh Moh-am-med al-Ab-basi, from inside the mosque's courtyards in occupied Jerusalem. The Palestinian news agency Wafa, citing local sources, reported that Israeli forces detained Sheikh al-Ab-basi inside the courtyards of Al Aqsa Mosque without giving any reason.

It said the arrest "comes amid escalating Israeli measures against the blessed Al Aqsa Mosque, including restrictions on imams, preachers and worshippers stationed there, limitations on the entry of worshippers, and intensifying incursions carried out by settlers under heavy protection from Israeli police". On Tuesday, Hamas condemned the arrest of al-Ab-basi in a statement, saying he had been "served with an order banning him from the mosque".

Man missing amid France's record rain

NEWS DESK: A man has gone missing in the flood-hit west of France, an official said, as the country on Wednesday marked a record-breaking streak of 35 consecutive days of rain.

National weather service Météo-France said the country was experiencing its longest series of rainy days since measurements began in 1959, breaking the 2023 record.

Four departments in western France were placed under red alert over the risk of flooding, with others expecting the situation to worsen with the arrival of Storm Pedro,

which is poised to batter swathes of western Europe.

"It's incredibly distressing, really. Every morning we see the water coming closer and closer," said Isabelle

Molinari, who lives in the western town of Saintes north of Bordeaux.

"And with tomorrow's storm, I reckon it'll rise even further."

The mayor of Bordeaux, Pierre Hurmic, activated the southwestern city's emergency plan, the first time since record floods in 1999.

In the western town of Chalonn-

sur-Loire, which is located on the left bank of the Loire, as was the Arch of Germanicus, a historic monument which marked the entrance to the town in Roman times, AFP journalists saw.

"We're dealing with an exceptionally large-scale phenomenon," said Lefevre. "The flood warnings have now been in place for 33 days."

He said that once the water recedes, work will have to be carried out "to make cities more resilient to episodes that are likely to become more severe and more frequent due to climate disruption."

Several central streets were flooded, as was the Arch of Germanicus, a historic monument which marked the entrance to the town in Roman times, AFP journalists saw.

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White House tells Iran to do deal as Trump hints at US strikes

NEWS DESK: The White House warned Wednesday that Iran would be "wise" to do a deal with the United States as President Donald Trump once again hinted at military action.

The two sides recently resumed indirect talks, mediated by Oman, after Trump repeatedly threatened military action against Iran over a deadly crackdown on protesters last month.

A previous attempt at negotiations collapsed when Israel launched surprise strikes on Iran last June, beginning a 12-day war that Washington briefly joined to bomb Iranian nuclear sites.

"Iran would be very wise to make a deal with President Trump and with his administration," White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters. On Wednesday, Trump again suggested that the United States might strike Iran in a post on



his Truth Social site, with a US military buildup underway in the Middle East. He warned Britain against giving up sovereignty over the Chagos Islands in the Indian Ocean, saying that the archipelago's Diego Garcia airbase might be needed were Iran not to agree a deal, "in order to eradicate a potential attack by a highly unstable and dangerous regime." CNN and CBS reported on Wednesday that the US military will be ready to launch strikes against Iran as early as this weekend, though Trump has reportedly not made a final decision yet. The Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday that Trump has been briefed on his military options with "all of them designed to maximise damage", including a campaign to "kill scores of Iranian political and military leaders, with the goal of overthrowing the government", unnamed US officials told the newspaper.

Microsoft says it does not 'think' US ICE uses firm's tech for mass surveillance of civilians

NEWS DESK: Microsoft said Wednesday it did not think the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency was using its technology for mass surveillance of civilians, but added that it provided cloud-based productivity and collaboration tools to ICE.

The statement from the technology company came in response to a report by The Guardian that said ICE deepened its reliance on Microsoft's cloud technology last year as the agency ramped up arrest and deportation operations. The newspaper cited leaked documents.

ICE more than tripled the amount of data it stored in Microsoft's Azure cloud platform in the six months leading up to January 2026, a period in which the agency's budget swelled and its workforce rapidly expanded, The Guardian reported, adding ICE appeared to be using a range of Microsoft's productivity tools, as well as AI-driven products, to search and analyze the data it holds in



Azure. "As we've previously said, Microsoft provides cloud-based productivity and collaboration tools to DHS (Department of Homeland Security, of which ICE is a part) and ICE, delivered through our key partners," a Microsoft spokesperson said in a statement. "Microsoft's policies and terms of service do not allow our technology to be used for the mass surveillance of civilians, and we do not believe ICE is engaged in such activity." The company said

the US Congress, the executive branch and the courts should draw "clear legal lines" regarding the permissible use of emerging technologies by law enforcement.

ICE said it will not comment on specifics involving investigative techniques, tools and technologies used in ongoing criminal probes, but said it uses various forms of technology to aid arrests of criminals.

US President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown has faced criticism from human rights advocates

who say it creates an unsafe environment and lacks due process. ICE has become the symbol of Trump's crackdown, especially after the fatal shootings of two US citizens last month.

Trump has said his actions aim to improve domestic security and curb illegal immigration. Tech companies have attempted to warn their ties with Trump during his second term in office.

Microsoft has also previously faced scrutiny over the use of its technology by governments.

Eight backcountry skiers perish in California avalanche, ninth presumed dead

NEWS DESK: Eight backcountry skiers were confirmed killed and a ninth was presumed to have perished when their tour group was overtaken by a football-pitch-sized avalanche in California's Sierra Nevada mountains on Tuesday, in the deadliest US avalanche in 45 years, authorities said.

Six survivors were rescued after search teams on skis fought through blinding snow, darkness, treacherous terrain and gale-force winds to reach them in the rugged Castle Peak area near Truckee, California, about 10 miles (16km) north-west of Lake Tahoe's ski resort and the Tahoe Donner resort's Alder Creek Adventure Centre and approached the avalanche zone from the south and north.

High risk of avalanches is expected when the avalanche struck around 11:30am PT on Tuesday.

The surviving skiers, who took refuge in a makeshift shelter constructed partly from tarps, shivered after the avalanche, used emergency beacons and text messaging to communicate their location to rescuers.

One of the guides was among the survivors, Nevada County Sheriff Shannon Moon said at a press confer-



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One of the guides was among the survivors, Nevada County Sheriff Shannon Moon said at a press confer-

Pakistan summons Afghan envoy, hands demarche over Bajaur attack

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Foreign Office summoned the Afghan Deputy Head of Mission and delivered a strong demarche to the Afghan Taliban regime on the terrorist attack in Bajaur on February 16, 2026 in which 11 Pakistani soldiers were martyred. According to a statement issued by the Foreign Office spokesperson in Islamabad on Thursday, Pakistan condemned the vehicle-borne suicide terrorist attack followed by a fire raid on Pakistan Military and Law Enforcement Agencies' post in Bajaur carried out by Fimaaal-Khwarji/TTP. The ministry conveyed serious concern that FAK/TTP, whose entire leadership is based in Afghanistan, operates with impunity from Afghan soil. It was emphasized that Pakistan has repeatedly received assurances from the Afghan Taliban regime, but, regrettably, with no visible or concrete actions. The Afghan Taliban regime has been told to take immediate, concrete and verifiable measures against all terror groups operating from its territory, including their leadership, the FO spokesperson added. The spokesperson said that the Afghan Taliban regime has also been categorically informed that Pakistan reserves the right to respond and eliminate any Khwarji belonging to FAK group along with their affiliates, wherever they are located to ensure safety of its soldiers, civilians and territorial boundaries.



WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif reaches Washington D.C. to attend the inaugural session of Board of Peace.

Govt announces uninterrupted electricity, gas supply during Sehri, Iftar timings during Ramadan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The government has announced uninterrupted electricity and gas supply during Sehri and Iftar timings across the country during the holy month of Ramadan.

The announcement was made by Minister for Power Sardar Awaiz Ahmad Khan Leghari and Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik, at a news conference in Islamabad on Wednesday.

Awaiz Leghari said that the decision has been taken on the special instructions of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to facilitate people across

the country. He said that the Power Division and the Petroleum Division, after a detailed review of the situation, have finalised arrangements to ensure that no power and gas outage occur during Sehri and Iftar timings anywhere in the country. The minister said that the government has decided that even in high-loss or technically sensitive areas, electricity supply will remain uninterrupted during these hours.

He added that in case of any major technical fault, immediate action will be taken to restore power supply so that the

people do not face any inconvenience. Awaiz Leghari said that a special control room has been established to effectively monitor the situation and oversee all electricity feeders across the country.

He advised consumers to lodge complaints on helpline number 118 in case of any difficulty regarding electricity supply, adding that complaints will be addressed promptly.

In his remarks, Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik said that the government has made full arrangements in consultation with gas pipeline com-

panies to ensure gas supply at maximum pressure during 3 a.m. to 10 p.m.

He said that additional gas volumes have also been arranged based on lessons learned from the previous winter to improve supply reliability.

The minister said that dedicated monitoring control rooms have also been directed to ensure strict monitoring, especially at tail-end areas of the distribution network, to guarantee uninterrupted gas supply.

IHC issues notice to NCCIA in Imaan Mazari, husband tweets case

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday issued a notice to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) on appeals, seeking suspension of sentences awarded to human rights lawyer Imaan Mazari and her husband Hadi Ali Chattha in controversial tweets case.

Faisal Siddiqui Advocate, Zainab Janjua and others represented Imaan and Mazari in the case. Speaking on the occasion, Siddiqui said that the trial court gave the verdict despite the fact that the petition, seeking transfer of the case, was sub judice.

He further said that the statements by two witnesses were recorded in the absence of the suspects. The lawyer went on to say, "Nobody can stop the court from giving a sentence. But at least give suspects the right to a fair trial."

Siddiqui told the court that he had to come from Karachi for the case.

SC upholds life sentence for drug-addicted wife killer

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Supreme Court of Pakistan has dismissed the appeal of Waris Masih, a drug-addicted man convicted of murdering his wife, and upheld the Islamabad High Court's decision converting his death sentence into life imprisonment.

According to the detailed written judgment approved for reporting by the Supreme Court, the verdict was issued by a three-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, Justice Salahuddin Panhwar, and Justice Iftisq Ibrahim. The written judgment was authored by Justice Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar.

In its ruling, the apex court observed that men are protectors of women, not their killers. It emphasized that women are equal members of society and are entitled to protection, respect, and dignity. The court expressed concern over the growing trend of women being subjected to inhumane and brutal violence over

trivial matters. The judgment noted that drug addiction has become a significant factor contributing to savage violence against women and that no one can be permitted to violate the sanctity of relationships such as mother, sister, wife, and daughter.

The court held that it is the state's responsibility to curb violence against women through comprehensive legislation, effective enforcement mechanisms, and supportive programs.

According to the prosecution, the convict Waris Masih was addicted to narcotics and frequently quarreled with his wife, Jameela Bibi. At midnight on July 6, 2015, he attacked his wife and their two minor children. Rimsha and Ramesh, with sticks, inflicting severe injuries. The medical report confirmed that the deceased died due to a fractured skull and brain injuries.

The court noted that the convict's own daughter, Rimsha Waris Masih, testified as an eyewitness and injured witness against her father. The judgment stated that when a wife suffers an unnatural death within the confines of her home, the primary responsibility to explain the circumstances rests upon the husband. However, the accused remained silent during trial and failed to provide any plausible explanation.

The Supreme Court observed that the convict's absence after the incident, his failure to participate in the burial, and his failure to inform the police were incriminating circumstances against him. It is worth noting that the trial court had sentenced Waris Masih to death for the murder of his wife, along with one year of rigorous imprisonment and a fine amounting to five percent of the diyat for injuring his children.

Subsequently, the Islamabad High Court commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment, a decision that has now been upheld by the Supreme Court while dismissing the convict's appeal.

Ramazan moon sighted in Pakistan, first fast will be observed tomorrow.

PESHAWAR (INP): The Ramazan moon for 1447 Hijri has been sighted in various cities across Pakistan, and the first fast will be observed nationwide on Thursday.

Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad, announced the sighting of the moon, confirming that the first fast will be observed tomorrow, while the first Taraweeh prayers will be offered tonight.

The Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee

meeting to sight the Ramazan moon was held in Peshawar, chaired by Maulana Abdul Khabir Azad. The central meeting took place at the Auqaf Hall on Charsadda Road, while zonal committee meetings were held in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, Azad said weather conditions varied across the country, with clear skies in some areas and cloudy conditions in

others. He stated that moon-sighting testimonies were received from multiple locations, including Quetta, Islamabad, Waziristan, Dir, Karachi, Buner, Mardan and Tando Allahyar.

"After reviewing the evidence, the committee unanimously decided that the first day of Ramadan will fall on Thursday," he said. Members of the committee, along with representatives from the Meteorological Department, Pakistan Space and Upper At-

mosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), and the Ministry of Science and Technology, attended the central meeting.

Meanwhile, a separate meeting of the unofficial Ruet-e-Hilal Committee was also held at Masjid Qasim Ali Khan, chaired by Mufti Shahabuddin Popalzai. The Ramazan moon has also been sighted in Bangladesh and India, where the first fast will be observed tomorrow.

Pakistan rules out role in disarming Hamas, condemns West Bank annexation law

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan has strongly condemned Israel's recent law, following the annexation of parts of the West Bank, reiterating that it will support peace efforts but will not participate in any process aimed at disarming Hamas.

Responding to a question at the weekly media briefing, Fahir Hussain Andrabai said that Pakistan, along with eight Muslim countries, had last week denounced what it described as Israel's annexation move in the occupied West Bank. He added that Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar had made it clear that while Pakistan would take part in the peace process, it would not join any initiative to disarm Hamas.

The spokesperson added that the prime minister is currently in New York on an official visit to the United States.

At the invitation of Donald Trump, where he is scheduled to attend a Gaza Board of Peace meeting and hold talks with senior US officials. He further said Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar met the Permanent Palestinian Representative and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty to discuss regional developments.

Separately, Federal Minister Asim Iqbal attended the oath-taking ceremony of the newly elected prime minister of Bangladesh and held meetings with the country's leadership, highlighting Pakistan's continued diplomatic outreach. During the briefing, Pakistan's Foreign Office renewed its allegations of Indian involvement in terrorism following the arrest and guilty plea of an Indian national, Nikkil Gupta, in the United States over a foiled assassination plot in New York.

Andrabai said Pakistan has consistently raised what it calls Indian-sponsored terrorism at international forums.

Mohsin Naqvi inspects police stations in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (INP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi visited newly-constructed police stations in Islamabad on Thursday morning.

Mohsin Naqvi inspected Kohsar police station, under-construction Women Police Station G-6 and under-construction Coral police station.

The interior minister reviewed the modern facilities provided in the new building of Kohsar police station. Mohsin Naqvi visited the front desk and other sections in Kohsar police station and directed to provide more facilities for the visitors in Kohsar police station.

Mohsin Naqvi or-dered early completion of construction of Women Police Station in G-6 Sector of the federal capital. Provision of necessary resources in this regard will be ensured on priority basis, Mohsin Naqvi said. Mohsin Naqvi gave deadline to complete the new building of the Koral police station in two months. To make the policing system people-friendly, new police stations equipped with modern technology are being established, Mohsin Naqvi said. Mohsin Naqvi said the policing system of Islamabad will be made in line with world standards through the use of modern infrastructure and technology. IG Islamabad Police, Chairman CDA, Deputy Commissioner Islamabad and relevant officers were also present on the occasion.



ISLAMABAD: His Excellency Mr. Khazar Farhadov, Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Pakistan, called on the Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik.

Pakistan to lead South-Central Asia trade, vows Aleem Khan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan announced Pakistan's vision to become an economic hub connecting South and Central Asia at the 88th session of the United Nations Inland Transport Committee.

He emphasized that Pakistan is moving beyond a transit country to a center of regional trade and connectivity. Addressing international delegates, Abdul Aleem Khan highlighted Pakistan's geographical significance and future economic impact. "Pakistan is not just a transit country but is becoming a hub of economic connectivity," he said, reiterating the government's commitment to making the country an economic bridge between South and Central Asia.

The minister underlined Pakistan's growing trade partnerships, noting that the National Logistics Cell (NLC) is spearheading a trade revolution with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. He emphasized that highways from Khunjerab to Pakistan's ports, along with a 100-acre terminal at Gwadar Port dedicated to Central Asian countries, provide landlocked states access to the sea.

Abdul Aleem Khan highlighted the M46 Motorway project as a highly profitable investment opportunity for both domestic and international investors. He also mentioned major activities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), including modern highways and port expansion projects, which reinforce Pakistan's role in regional connectivity. Additionally, the Ministry of Communications is implementing digitalization initiatives to increase transparency in traffic data, while the "Visa on Arrival" facility for 126 countries is expected to further boost trade and tourism links.



GENEVA: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan addresses the 88th session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee in Geneva.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kharan's Official Vehicle Taken by Armed Men

NEWS DESK: KHARAN: Unidentified armed men allegedly took away the official vehicle of the Deputy Commissioner from Kharan city on Thursday morning, according to police sources.

Police said the government vehicle belonging to the Deputy Commissioner Kharan was intercepted and seized by armed individuals. Deputy Commissioner Munir Soomro remained safe and was not inside the vehicle at the time of the incident. Following the incident, police and security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. Investigations are underway to trace the vehicle and identify those responsible.



Balochistan Finance Minister Chairs Consultative Meeting on NFC Award, Calls for Fair Provincial Share

QUETTA: A consultative meeting regarding the National Finance Commission Award (NFC Award) was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Shoaib Noshewari, Provincial Minister for Finance and Minerals. The meeting was attended by Mehfooz Ali Khan, Member NFC Balochistan, Lal Jan Jaffar, Secretary Finance, and other officials who participated in the sub-committee session of the National Finance Commission via video link. Addressing the meeting, Finance Minister Mr. Shoaib Noshewari emphasized that a comprehensive strategy must be developed to secure Balochistan's rightful share in the NFC Award, keeping in view the province's backwardness and financial needs.



He stated that the strategy should comprehensively cover all relevant aspects affecting the province. During the session, detailed discussions were held in the NFC sub-committee regarding the country's overall internal and external debt. Participants also deliberated on formulating a comprehensive policy for repayment of loans obtained from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other sources.

The meeting stressed the importance of reducing unnecessary expenditures in the upcoming fiscal year to prevent wastage of provincial funds. On the occasion, the Finance Minister reiterated that the present government of Balochistan is committed to a policy of balanced development and is making consistent efforts to put the province on the path of sustainable growth and economic stability.

Balochistan Secretary Communications Reviews Progress on Sports Complex Projects, Calls for Timely Completion

QUETTA: A key review meeting on ongoing sports complex projects across Balochistan was held under the chairmanship of Babar Khan, Provincial Secretary for Communications and Works. The meeting was attended by Chief Engineers, Superintending Engineers (SEs), and District Executive Engineers from all six zones of the department, along with other relevant officials.

During the session, participants were given a detailed briefing on the progress of ongoing sports complex projects, expected completion timelines, technical challenges, fund disbursement, construction quality, and other administrative matters.

Officials also highlighted the pace of work in each zone, obstacles encountered, and the measures taken to resolve them. Addressing the meeting, Secretary Babar Khan said that these sports complexes are high-priority projects that will play a vital role in providing youth with opportunities for healthy and constructive activities. He instructed that all projects must be completed within the prescribed timeframe to promote sports activities and provide positive opportunities for the younger generation.

He emphasized that all technical challenges should be addressed immediately, and work progress should be accelerated. The Secretary also made it clear that no compromise on construction quality will be tolerated, and transparency must be ensured in all project stages. He further stated that the timely and high-quality completion of all sports complex projects is essential to provide modern and standard sports facilities to the youth of the province, contributing to their physical development and engagement in constructive activities.



DC Jaffarabad Chairs DCC, DIC & DICC Meetings; Approves Development Schemes, Reviews Law & Order

JAFFARABAD: Important meetings of the District Coordination Committee (DCC), District Implementation Committee (DIC), and District Intelligence Coordination Committee (DICC) were held under the chairmanship of Khalid Khan, Deputy Commissioner Jaffarabad. The sessions reviewed district-level development matters, overall law and order, and departmental performance in detail. During the DCC meeting, various development schemes under BSDI Phase-II were approved. On the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan stated that priority would be given to development projects aimed at resolving issues directly raised by citizens during open courts (Khuli Kachehri). He emphasized that the core objective of the district administration is to implement initiatives that deliver both immediate and long-term benefits to the public. He directed that

schemes in education, health, public health engineering, local government, and other departments be designed strictly in line with public needs and welfare to ensure effective redressal of complaints. Subsequently, meetings of the DIC and DICC were also held under his chairmanship, attended by heads of district departments and representatives of intelligence agencies. The meetings comprehensively reviewed the overall law and order situation across the district, ongoing operations against criminal elements, security challenges, and other related matters. Various departments and agencies briefed the participants on current issues affecting peace and security, recent cases, and measures taken to curb crime. Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan directed all relevant institutions to ensure improvement in law and order.

Major Crackdown in Quetta: Large Quantity of Fake Rooh Afza & Jam-e-Shireen Seized Ahead of Ramadan

QUETTA: In a major action against counterfeit beverages, the Balochistan Food Authority (BFA) seized a large quantity of fake Rooh Afza and Jam-e-Shireen during raids conducted in different parts of the city. According to details, inspection teams

from Quetta Peshawar through the city (goods transport) He further stated that during the holy month of Ramadan, a special task force operation has been launched, tightening the noose around the adulteration mafia. Monitoring will be intensified, and in-



carried out raids at Breach Market, Satellite Town, and Old Fruit Market following a confidential tip-off. During the operation, a counterfeit production and distribution unit was exposed, and authorities traced parts of the supply chain. Investigations revealed that the fake beverage stock was being transported to

age brands were intended to be supplied across Quetta city and other areas, posing serious risks to public health. The DG BFA, Habibullah Khan, emphasized that public health is the top priority, and indiscriminate action will continue against those involved in the sale of substandard and counterfeit products to

Provincial Minister Sardar Abdul Rehman Reviews PHE Performance, Directs Timely Completion of Water Supply Schemes

QUETTA: Provincial Minister Sardar Abdul Rehman held an important meeting with Secretary Public Health Engineering (PHE) Hashim Alizai to review matters related to the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department. During the meeting, the Secretary PHE gave a comprehensive briefing on the department's overall performance, ongoing development projects, and administrative affairs. A detailed progress report was presented on

adopt a coordinated strategy for the prompt resolution of public complaints. He noted that public trust can only be maintained through improved performance and accountability. The meeting was also attended by Azam Zarkoon, Chief Engineer (North), and Abdul Mutalib Baloch, Chief Engineer (South), who briefed the Minister on projects underway in their respective regions and outlined future plans.



Ramzan Mubarak

Historic

RAMZAN RELIEF PACKAGE

by Prime Minister
Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

38 BILLION
Under the Ramzan Relief Package being distributed to beneficiaries via Digital Wallets and Bank Accounts

Benefiting **12.1 Million**
Deserving Families Nationwide
with Transparency & Dignity

28 Billion Fund for family cash relief
Benefiting 2.1 Million deserving families not receiving the Kadan award from the Federal Government

10 Billion Additional Stipend
Registered with Federal Governments Kadan Program

During Ramzan for **10 Million** deserving families
Benefiting more than **60** Million Pakistanis Nationwide

Information regarding transfer of money and nearest Bank shall be sent only through
HELPLINE 9999

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State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) raises Rs1.3tr via T-bill, PIB auctions

NEWS DESK: The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Wednesday raised over Rs1.31 trillion through auctions of short-term treasury bills and long-term floating-rate Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIBs), reflecting continued government reliance on domestic debt markets to finance budgetary needs.

According to the central bank, the government accepted Rs1.21 trillion against bids exceeding Rs1.26 trillion in the auction of Market Treasury Bills (MTBs) with settlement on February 19.

Separately, the SBP raised Rs95.33 billion in the auction of 10-year floating-rate Pakistan Investment Bonds (PIB).

In the MTB auction, the largest acceptance came in the 12-month tenor, where Rs406.83 billion in face value bids translated into a realised amount of Rs367.66 billion.

The three-month tenor saw Rs240.47 billion bids with Rs234.87 billion realised, followed by Rs112.5 billion bids for six-month paper (Rs106.87 billion realised) and Rs504.74 billion bids for one-month bills (Rs501.06 billion realised).

Cut-off yields showed a slightly upward slope across different



ent maturities, with 12-month MTBs accepted at 10.5909% compared with 10.4437% for six-month, 10.2853% for three-month and 10.1482% for one-month

securities. In the long-term segment, the position accepted Rs95.33 billion (face value) in the 10-year floating-rate PIB auction including

Rs2.83 billion non-competitive bids. The competitive portion amounted to Rs92.5 billion at a cut-off price of 96.7179 with a realised value of Rs89.54 billion.

Furthermore, the Pakistan rupee inched up 0.01% in the interbank market to close at 279.57 against the US dollar, strengthening by Rs0.03 from Tuesday's

279.60, according to the SBP. Meanwhile, gold prices in Pakistan rose, tracking a sharp recovery in the international market where bullion

gained more than 2% as investors weighed geopolitical tensions and awaited the US Federal Reserve's January meeting minutes. Locally, gold per

tola increased by Rs1,300 to Rs516,062, while 10-gram gold was sold at Rs442,439, up Rs1,114, according to the All-Pakistan Gems and Jewellers Sarafa Association. Silver also edged higher, rising Rs32 to Rs8,046 per tola. On Tuesday, gold had fallen sharply, with per-tola prices dropping Rs9,000 to Rs514,762.

Interactive Commodities Director Adnan Agar said the market was reacting to renewed fears of a US strike following stalled Iran-US negotiations.

"Gold, silver, and platinum were all up due to reports suggesting the US may launch an attack in the coming days," he noted. Agar added that if conflict escalates, gold could reach record highs, while calm could trigger a downward correction.

Internationally, spot gold climbed 2.6% to \$5,003.85 per ounce by 11:36 am ET, rebounding from a one-week low of \$4,841.74 on Tuesday.

Analysts are closely monitoring developments in the Middle East, the Fed's minutes, and upcoming US economic data, including December's PCE report, which could further influence gold and silver prices.

Punjab plans wider SME export financing

NEWS DESK: The Punjab government is working on pilot programmes to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and export-oriented industries with preparations under way for the next annual development plan, Secretary Planning & Development Board Punjab Razaqat Ali said on Wednesday.

Speaking at a meeting held at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), Ali said the government was working on several pilot programmes to support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and export-oriented industries.

According to a statement, he said that under the Asian Kites Scheme, industries were being provided interest-free financial assistance for export-related activities, adding that there was consideration to further expand the programme.

LCCI President Faheemur Rehman Saigol welcomed the secretary, while Vice President Khurram Lodhi and Executive Committee members

Rana Shouban Akhtar and Irfan Qureshi were also present.

In his address, Saigol said Pakistan's economy was approximately \$400 billion in size, with Punjab contributing more than 55% to the national GDP. He said strengthening Punjab's industrial base was therefore essential for sustainable economic growth. He welcomed the provincial government's decision to increase the development budget for fiscal year 2025-26 from Rs842 billion to Rs1,240 billion, saying the higher allocation would help boost economic activity.

He emphasised that development planning should be business-friendly so that investment, production and exports could grow simultaneously. He said Punjab had strong potential in value-added manufacturing, engineering goods, processed food, pharmaceuticals, light engineering and IT services, but added that internationally standard testing and certification laboratories were necessary to fully

realise this potential.

The LCCI president also proposed the establishment of sector-specific industrial parks and special economic zones for SMEs, where land could be provided on long-term leases at concessional rates. He said SMEs contributed about 40% to GDP and 25% to exports, and that focused attention on the sector could significantly increase employment and export earnings.

He further suggested that, given the country's large youth population, modern skill development centres should be set up under public-private partnerships to provide training aligned with global market needs. He added that promoting digitalisation, technology parks, startup support, e-commerce and artificial intelligence was also important.

Saigol stressed that industries should be supported through green financing to adopt environmentally friendly technologies and energy-efficient equipment.

Pakistan, US sign pact to redevelop New York's Roosevelt Hotel

Prime Minister Shehbaz

Sharif and Witkoff. "It establishes a structured, time-bound framework for joint evaluation of the technical, commercial, and economic parameters of co-operation, reflecting a shared commitment to transparent, disciplined, and mutually beneficial progress," the statement

noted the Roosevelt Hotel's prime location in Manhattan and the complexity of New York zoning and municipal process, saying the "institutional coordination aims to reduce execution risk, enhance regulatory clarity, and maximize transaction value".

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"Such facilitative frameworks are consistent with international practice in cross-border real estate and infrastructure projects," it added.

"The objective remains to secure maximum value for this property in alignment with the government's privatisation strategy while strengthening Pakistan-US economic ties," the statement concluded.

The GSA primarily manages federal property and procurement for US government agencies, and its publicly stated mandate does not typically include commercial redevelopment of foreign state-owned assets. It was not immediately clear under what authority the agency would facilitate the project.

Named after former US President Theodore Roosevelt, the century-old property in midtown Manhattan is seen as one of Pakistan's most valuable foreign assets, which it acquired in 2000. Faced with mounting losses, the over 1,000-room hotel was shut in 2020, and has also operated briefly as a migrant shelter.

The hotel is located near two of New York's destinations such as Grand Central Terminal, Times Square, and Fifth Avenue, placing it one of Manhattan's most valuable commercial zones.

"To advance this partnership, both governments have signed an MOU formalising their cooperation," the ministry added.

The statement said the MOU was signed by GSA Administrator Edward C Forst and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar Muhammad Aurangzeb on behalf of Pakistan, and was witnessed by

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Witkoff.

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Rice export rebate scheme revised

NEWS DESK: The Ministry of Commerce has further amended a rebate scheme on local taxes and levies to address concerns of larger rice exporters and make it more competitive on the international market.

A notification released on Wednesday fixed specific rates under the Duty and Taxes Remission for Export (DLT) scheme for various rice brands.

The scheme will come into effect retrospectively from Jan 23. The government has allocated approximately Rs15 billion for the subsidy scheme.

According to the notification, the commerce ministry has removed the ceiling cap price of \$1,275 per tonne FOB. As a result of this decision, according to sources, rice exporters will receive 9% of the FOB value of \$750 or above.

This will encourage over-invoicing by Basmati exporters with offices abroad in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the US, the EU, and the UK.

Govt removes \$1,275 per tonne price cap, allocates Rs15bn subsidy to boost com-



petitiveness.

Contrary to this, Indian exporters are currently offering Basmati rice at prices below \$300 per tonne, with a price range of \$900 to \$975 per tonne to foreign importers. There are apprehensions that the DLT incentive is being misused by Basmati exporters and that domestic prices have already inflated.

"Our growers have already sold their Basmati paddy at a price range of Rs5,500 to Rs6,000 per 40 kg," the sources further said. "According to the same sources, hoarders

are demanding Rs6,400 per 40kg.

Based on domestic paddy prices and a 9pc discount to DLT, sources estimate the net export price of Pakistani Basmati rice at \$1,200 per tonne. "Who will buy from us if Indian exporters are already supplying Basmati at \$900 per tonne?" according to sources.

It has been pointed out that almost all of the top 50 rice exporters have their entities at various destinations, including KSA, UAE, USA, Canada, Kenya, Rwanda and other African destinations. "Now they will

re-route their exports of Basmati and coarse rice through their overseas entities at a higher net value to grab the maximum of DLT incentives," the sources further claimed.

The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), in a letter dated Feb 16 to Commerce Minister Ishaq Dar, said the imposition of an export price cap could exclude a large number of genuine exporters from the DLT facility and adversely affect competitiveness and foreign exchange earnings.

Mangla refurbishment project on track

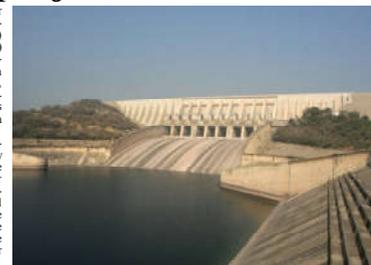
NEWS DESK: Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) Chairman Li Gen (Retd) Muhammad Saeed, during his visit to Mangla Hydel Power Station, was briefed that the refurbishment project was progressing ahead at a steady pace.

Four power generating units have already been refurbished and are in operation with their enhanced generation capacity; another two will also come online by the end of this year, while overall completion of the project is scheduled for 2030.

The chairman visited the control room, the generating units being refurbished in the turbine hall, and the intake structure to review progress.

He urged contractors to expedite work for completion of the project without delay to achieve energy security by reducing reliance on expensive yet eco-harmful thermal generation.

Wapda is implementing the Mangla Refurbishment Project with an approved PC-1 cost of



Rs5,224 billion. USAID has provided \$170 million as a grant; AFD is providing \$90 million in loans, while the balance is being arranged by Wapda from its own resources and through loans.

The refurbishment project is unique in the sense that it is being implemented without shutting down the entire power station.

Instead, it has been divided into several packages. Refurbish-

ment work is being carried out by closing down one tunnel, ie, two generating units at a time, to avoid energy loss.

On completion, the project will enhance Mangla Hydel Power Station's installed capacity to 1,310 megawatts from 1,000MW. Annual energy generation will increase from five billion units to 6.632 billion units.

Wapda has divided has 10 units with a generation capacity of 100MW each.

hydropower resources. It has not only initiated new hydropower projects but is also rehabilitating and upgrading its existing hydel power stations to maximise the ratio of clean, green and affordable hydel electricity in the national grid. The Mangla Refurbishment Project is one of the components of this strategy.

The Mangla station has 10 units with a generation capacity of 100MW each.

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T20 World Cup: India tune up for Super Eights with hard-fought win over the Dutch

NEWS DESK: Defending champions India beat a spirited Netherlands team by 17 runs on Wednesday ahead of their meeting with South Africa in the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup. India posted 193-6 and then kept the Dutch down to 176-7 with spinner Varun Chakravarty returning figures of 3-14 in Ahmedabad to stay unbeaten in their four matches in Group A.

But a tough test awaits the co-hosts at the same venue on Sunday when they face South Africa, who emerged top of a potentially tricky Group D that had New Zealand and Afghanistan.

India finished top of their group ahead of arch-rivals Pakistan, but need to fix holes in their batting, including the top of opener Abhishek Sharma, who fell for his third straight duck in the tournament. Abhishek Sharma hit a counter-attacking 66 and put on a



Dutt after India elected to bat first at the world's biggest cricket stadium. India were teetering at 110-4 before Shivam Dutt hit a counter-attacking 66 and put on a

key stand of 76 with Hardik Pandya (30). Several batters got starts but failed to capitalise as Ishan Kishan fell for 18, Tilak Varma made 31 and skipper Suryakumar Yadav contributed 34. Dube kept calm and hit a few lusty blows, including two sixes and a four off off-spinner Colin Ackermann, reaching his fifty off 25 balls. He and Pandya ensured India's innings finished strongly, although both were dismissed in the final over at the 110,000-capacity stadium, which had a turnout of over 68,000 fans. Dube, who hit four fours and six sixes in his 31-ball knock, was caught by substitute fielder Tim van der Gugten on the boundary rope, with Pandya picking out a fielder in the deep off a final delivery by Logan van Beek. Dutt returned impressive figures of 2-19 from his four overs.

openers started cautiously before Max O'Dowd fell bowled for 20 off Chakravarty and Pandya dismissed Michael Levitt for 24.

Bas de Leede and Ackermann attempted to put the chase back on track in their stand of 43 but Chakravarty broke through with his mystery spin. He sent back Ackermann for 23, and then bowled Dutt on the next ball, before the hat-trick was avoided by skipper Scott Edwards.

The ever-increasing run rate forced the Dutch to take risks and, in the process, lose their wickets as De Leede (33) fell to Dube and Jasprit Bumrah took down Edwards. Zach Lister-Jones (26) and Noah Cross, who made an unbeaten 25, hit regular boundaries in a desperate attempt to pull off a miracle but India had runs to play with and despite two dropped catches in the last over won the match.

Alcaraz, Sinner cruise into Qatar quarters

NEWS DESK: Carlos Alcaraz maintained his 100-percent start to the year by battling past Frenchman Valentin Royer in Doha on Wednesday, while his great rival Jannik Sinner also secured a quarter-final place.

The world number one, who became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam at the Australian Open earlier this month, notched his ninth straight win of 2025 with a 6-2, 7-5 success despite trailing 5-2 in the second set.

"There were some moments when I thought about a third set, I'm not going to lie, but obviously it was just a small place in my mind that was thinking that," Alcaraz said. "The rest was working to find solutions, to find the right way again."

The 22-year-old will play Russian seventh seed Karen Khachanov for a semi-final berth on Thursday.

Alcaraz has won all five of his previous meetings with Khachanov, losing only one set in the process. Alcaraz raced through the opening set against Royer, breaking twice without



facing a break point. But the 60th-ranked Royer raised his level in the second, missing a break point in the second game but making no mistake shortly afterwards to stretch 3-1 in front. Alcaraz immediately carved out an opportunity to hit straight back in the next game, but Royer managed to consolidate his break.

The Spaniard could not close out the set when he served for it, though, as Alcaraz broke back in game nine.

"I respect every player, but I always try to play my best tennis," Sinner said when told of that streak.

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Bodo/Glimt stun Inter in UCL playoff first leg

NEWS DESK: Norway's Bodo/Glimt stunned Inter Milan in the Champions League on Wednesday, beating last season's runners-up 3-1 in the first leg of their knockout phase play-off tie after Anthony Gordon scored four as Newcastle United hammered Qarabag 6-1 in Azerbaijan.

Elsewhere Atletico Madrid were held by Club Brugge in a thrilling 3-3 draw, while Bayer Leverkusen took a big step towards reaching the last 16 by beating Olympiacos 2-0 away in Greece. Bodo/Glimt, Norwegian champions in four of the last six years, made it to this stage after some impressive re-

sults during the league phase, including wins at home to Manchester City and away to Atletico in their last two games. The club from north of the Arctic Circle were therefore not afraid of the current Serie A leaders and went in front on 20 minutes through Sondre Brunstad Fet.

Francesco Pio Esposito equalised on the half-hour mark for three-time European champions Inter, the goal standing after a VAR check despite an apparent handball in the build-up. However, Bodo/Glimt went back in front just after the hour when Kasper Høgh's brilliant lay-off set up Jens Petter Hauge to score,

and Høgh found the net himself three minutes later. The result leaves Inter, who lost 5-0 to PSG in last season's Champions League final, facing a big challenge to overturn their two-goal deficit in next Tuesday's return leg at San Siro.

The winners of the tie will play either Manchester City or Sporting of Portugal in the last 16 next month. Newcastle made short work of Qarabag on their long trip to Baku, with the outstanding Gordon netting two penalties among his four goals on the night — he now has 10 goals in nine matches in this season's Champions League, a tally bettered only by

Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe on 13. Schick, double, Atletico held in last season's Champions League final, facing a big challenge to overturn their two-goal deficit in next Tuesday's return leg at San Siro.

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All World Cup matches sold out: Infantino



NEWS DESK: All 104 matches of the 2026 World Cup will be "sold out," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Wednesday, even though tickets are still available ahead of the tournament's June 11 kickoff.

"The demand is there. Every match is sold out," Infantino told CNBC. Infantino, in an interview from President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, said that there had been 508 million ticket requests in four weeks for some seven million available tickets. He said requests during the main sales phase in January came from more than 200 countries.

West Indies finish group stage unbeaten after easing past Italy in T20 World Cup

NEWS DESK: West Indies beat Italy by 42 runs in their final Twenty20 World Cup Group C match on Thursday in Kolkata, as the two-time champions maintained their perfect record heading into the Super Eight stage.

Skipper Shai Hope recorded his 11th T20 International fifty, getting 75 off 46 balls to set up a target of 166, despite a spirited bowling perfor-

mance from the opposition. Italy were rocked early in the chase when a nip-backer from Matthew Forde knocked down Justin Mosca's (2 off 5) stumps, before Akeal Hosen exacted revenge on Anthony Mosca — after being hit for two sixes — by decapitating the opener with a skwaller ball for 19.

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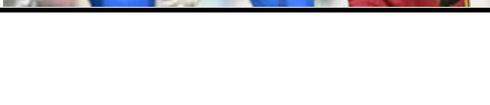
21) put on a fightback, but both fell to spinner Gudakesh Motie (2/24), ending Italy's hopes. West Indies pacer Shamar Joseph registered figures of 4/30, while Forde got three wickets for 19 runs as Italy were bowled out for 123 in 18 overs.

Hope's crucial knock steadied the West Indies ship early on after Italy pacers Ali Hasan (1/24) and Tho-

mas Drua (1/22) picked two quick wickets. Disciplined bowling from spinners Ben Manenti (2/37) and Crishan Kalugamage (2/25) shackled West Indies' lower-middle order and restricted them to 165-6 in 20 overs — a target that ultimately proved beyond the associate side, who bowed out of the tournament with a solitary win over Nepal.

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4 terrorists killed in intelligence-based operation in KP's Lakki Marwat: ISPR

NEWS DESK: Security forces killed four Indian-sponsored terrorists in an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lakki Marwat district, the military's media wing said on Thursday.

According to a statement by Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), security forces conducted an IBO last night on the reported presence of khawarij belonging to Indian proxy Fina al Khawarij.

Fina al Khawarij is a term that the state uses for the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan.

"During conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged the khawarij location and after an intense fire exchange, four khawarij were sent to hell," ISPR said.

It added that weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain terrorists, who "remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area".

It said that a sanitisation operation was being conducted to eliminate other Indian-sponsored terrorists found in the area.

It said that security forces and law enforcement agencies would continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

The development comes days after a terrorist attack, involving an explosive-laden vehicle, on a checkpoint in KP's Bajaur district, martyred 11 security personnel, as per ISPR.

12 terrorists were eliminated after security forces retaliated and "engaged the fleeing khawarij with precision," ISPR said.

KP has seen a rise in terrorist attacks in the past year.

According to the Annual Security Report 2025 from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS),

KP recorded a significant surge in violence last year as "fatalities rose from 1,620 in 2024 to 2,331 in 2025".

This marked an "absolute increase of 711 deaths, accounting for over 82 per cent of the net national rise and marking almost a 44pc year-on-year surge in violence in the province".

Pakistan backs Gaza peace efforts, won't engage in Hamas disarmament: FO

NEWS DESK: Pakistan will play a role in efforts to promote peace in Gaza but will not be part of any initiative to disarm Hamas, Foreign Office spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi said on Thursday.

Speaking at the weekly media briefing, he said Pakistan would only contribute to efforts aimed at establishing peace in Gaza and was not part of any decision against any group or organisation.

Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar had made it clear that while Pakistan would participate in the peace process, it would not join any initiative to disarm Hamas.

Dar expressed hope that the Gaza Board of Peace would help ease the hardships faced by the people of Gaza, the spokesperson added.

Responding to a question, Andrabi said Pakistan had taken note of reports re-



ECC approves release of Rs19bn for PM's Ramazan package

NEWS DESK: The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) on Thursday approved the release of Rs19 billion for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Ramazan package.

On February 12, PM Shehbaz had announced a Rs38bn Ramazan relief package, which would benefit more than 12 million families — around 36m people — through direct digital payments.

In a post on X, the finance ministry said Finance Minister M u h a m m a d Auzangzeb remotely chaired a meeting of the ECC.

The post said that the ECC approved the "immediate release" of Rs19bn for the prime minister's package to "ensure timely disbursement of assistance to vulnerable families".

"The remaining requirement out of the proposed Rs25bn will be released as and when necessary in line with fiscal space," the ministry said.

"The prime minister's Ramazan relief package 2026 is designed to provide targeted cash assistance to low-income households during the holy month, using National Socio-Economic Registry data to ensure transparency and objective beneficiary selection," the finance ministry said.

It added that the "funds will be disbursed directly through formal banking and digital channels to ensure secure, efficient and dignified delivery." The ministry further said that during the meeting, the ECC also granted "in-principle approval for Rs1bn operational ex-



Demarche issued to Afghanistan over terror attack in KP's Bajaur

NEWS DESK: Pakistan issued a demarche to the Taliban regime over the use of Afghan soil for a terrorist attack on security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bajaur that martyred 11 soldiers, it emerged on Thursday.

According to a press release by the Foreign Office (FO), the demarche was issued on Wednesday afternoon when the FO summoned the Afghan deputy head of mission.

"Pakistan condemned in the strongest possible terms the vehicle-borne suicide terrorist attack followed by a fire raid on Pakistan military and law enforcement agencies' posts in Bajaur, carried out by Fina al Khawarij [or] the TTP," the statement said.

Fina al Khawarij is a term the state uses for terrorists belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

The FO expressed concern that the group, whose entire leadership is based in Afghanistan, "operates with impunity from Afghan soil".

It re-emphasised that Pakistan had received repeated assurances from the Afghan Taliban regime, "but, regrettably, with no visible or concrete actions".

"The Afghan Taliban regime has been told to take immediate, concrete and verifiable measures against all terrorist groups operating from its territory, including their leadership," the press release said.

The ministry also "categorically informed" the Afghan Taliban that Pakistan "reserved the right to respond and eliminate any khawarij belonging to the group as well as their affiliates", wherever they were located.

"To ensure [the] safety of its soldiers, civilians and territorial boundaries" it is worth mentioning that Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said on Wednesday that Islamabad will not hesitate to launch air operations inside Afghanistan to combat militancy, characterising the current regional instability as the "price we are paying" for decisions made during the 1980s and after Sept 11 terrorist attacks.



Vawda calls Imran deal offers 'figment of Rana Sanaullah's imagination'

NEWS DESK: Senator Faisal Vawda on Thursday questioned Prime Minister's Adviser on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah over his assertion that the founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had twice been offered a political deal but chose not to accept it.

First, tell us when, where and how? Or is this one of those deals that exists only in your imagination and that only you know about?" Vawda asked in a post on X addressed to Sanaullah.

It added, "I believe you people are fortunate that, according to you, he did not accept the deal. If the PTI founder had accepted this alleged deal, you know very well that he would then have gone after the politicians — and he would not have spared you either."

Where the politicians would have gone after that, even I do not know."

Vawda further cautioned against what he described as firing "political arrows into the air," warning that such statements could rebound on those who make them. "Political manoeuvres of the past are now outdated. Think of something new," he concluded.

Sanaullah has previously said the PTI founder was offered a deal on two occasions but declined, without publicly detailing the nature or timing of the alleged offers. A day earlier, he claimed that during the PTI's November 2024 protest, Imran initially agreed to hold talks and not protest at D-Chowk but later withdrew, adding that it was a missed opportunity for his release.

In an interview on programme Capital Talk on a private news outlet on Wednesday, Sanaullah revealed that the government, including Interior Minister Naqvi, had made an offer to Imran, proposing that the party hold its planned November 2024 sit-in at Sangani instead of marching towards D-Chowk.

"He [Imran] was being given wise advice, and Mohsin Naqvi was directly engaged in talks with him, telling him not to come towards Islamabad or go to D-Chowk, but to sit in Sangani and hold talks there. Initially, Imran Khan agreed to this, but after agreeing, he backed out and said that Bushra Bibi would decide. Then she made the decision that they would go to D-Chowk," Sanaullah said.

He explained that if Imran had agreed, he would have received concessions, adding that the decision led to a missed opportunity for his release. Asked about whether Imran had allegedly said that he did not want to come out, Sanaullah replied, "You may say so." The PM's aide said that the PTI founder could have se-



cured his release from Adiala jail had the party chosen a more peaceful course of action during their 2024 protest.

Earlier on Thursday, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar strongly dismissed media reports suggesting any "deal" between the government and Imran.

In a statement shared on X, Tarar said, "There is neither any deal nor any leniency for Imran."

He added that any suggestion of the government granting Imran Khan concessions was "entirely false and misleading".

Tarar concluded with, "Imran Khan is a convicted criminal, and the news regarding his leniency is baseless. There is no truth in this news."

Khan, 73, has been jailed since August 2023 after convictions he and the PTI call politically motivated.

Since his 2022 ouster in a no-confidence vote, he has faced multiple cases, including state gifts and an unlawful marriage. Some convictions have been suspended or overturned, with appeals pending. He denies wrongdoing.