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Balochistan Assembly Unanimously Passes Resolution Seeking Increase in Provincial, National Assembly Seats

Syed Ali Shah:

The Balochistan Assembly on Friday unanimously adopted a resolution demanding an increase in the number of provincial and national assembly seats allocated to the province, citing its vast geographical size, strategic importance, and longstanding political underrepresentation.

The resolution was tabled by Asghar Ali Tareen, a member of the Balochistan Assembly from

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F).

While speaking on the feasibility of the proposal, he said that Balochistan covers nearly half of Pakistan's total land area and holds a strategically vital position, yet its people remain underrepresented in key legislative forums.

"Fair representation is the foundation of democracy. Balochistan has contributed immensely to the federation, but its voice in the assemblies does not reflect its size, population spread,

and strategic role," Tareen told the House.

Under the resolution, the number of seats in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly is proposed to be increased from 65 to 85, while Balochistan's seats in the National Assembly should be enhanced from 16 to 40.

Lawmakers argued that the increase would ensure equal political participation and strengthen the federal structure. Members from both treasury

and opposition benches strongly endorsed the resolution.

Parliamentary Leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party in the Balochistan Assembly Muhammad Sadiq Unrani said the demand was "constitutional, democratic, and long overdue."

"Without equitable representation, the people of Balochistan cannot effectively raise their concerns at the national level," he said.

Senior assembly member Mir Zahoar Buledi stated that en-

hanced representation would help address political deprivation and promote national cohesion.

Meanwhile, Maulana Hidayat Rahman, also a member of the assembly, said that political empowerment was essential for peace, stability, and development in the province.

Speaker of the Balochistan Assembly Captain Abdul Khaliq Achakzai later put the resolution to a vote, after which it was passed unanimously by the House.

Balochistan to Adopt Long-Term Climate Action Plan: CM

News Desk:

Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti said the provincial government is developing a long-term and practical strategy to mitigate the growing impacts of climate change, which are affecting Balochistan with increasing severity.

He expressed these views during a meeting with the Prime Minister's Coordinator on Climate Change Romina Khurshid Alam, where discussions focused on climate risks faced by the province and coordinated responses at both federal and provincial levels.

The meeting agreed on strengthening environmental cooperation, improving access to resources, and expanding technical assistance to support climate-related initiatives in Balochistan.

The chief minister said climate change has emerged as a serious challenge, making Balochistan more vulnerable to floods, droughts, and other environmental disasters. He noted that the province has established its first Climate Fund to ensure



timely execution of environmental projects and targeted interventions in vulnerable areas. Highlighting climate equity concerns, Mir Sarfraz Bugti said Balochistan's share in green-

house gas emissions is minimal, yet it suffers disproportionately from climate impacts, making stronger federal and inter-provincial coordination essential. Romina Khurshid Alam as-

sured full federal support in addressing climate challenges and appreciated the provincial government's efforts, particularly the inclusion of women and marginalized communities in cli-

mate policies. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to working together to enhance climate resilience and promote sustainable development in Balochistan.

SC stays trial of PM Shehbaz's Rs10bn defamation suit against Imran

NEWS DESK:

The Supreme Court (SC) stayed on Friday a trial by the court of an additional district judge in Lahore in a Rs10 billion defamation suit filed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif against PTI founder Imran Khan.

In his suit filed in 2017, PM Shehbaz said Imran levelled baseless allegations against him.

He sought a decree for the recovery of Rs10bn as compensation from the defendant for the publication of defamatory content. The defamation suit said Imran wrongly accused PM Shehbaz of offering Rs10bn to the latter through a common friend in exchange for withdrawing the Panama Papers case.

The PTI founder had contended in his reply that he had disclosed the alleged incident for the consumption of the public at large, and an act in the interest of the public good did not constitute any defamation.

He maintained that he did not specifically attribute any statement to the PM Shehbaz while narrating the incident.

A three-judge SC bench, headed by Justice Ayesha A Malik and including Justices Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar and Ishaq Ibrahim, took up a set of review petitions filed by Imran in the case. The court also issued a notice to the respondent as no one was present on behalf of PM Shehbaz and directed the court office to fix the case for a hearing at the earliest.

Senator Barrister Ali Zafar, who was representing Imran, argued before the SC that his client could not appear before the trial court as he was injured after being shot in the leg, referring to an assassination attempt on the former premier in November 2022.

Zafar said the trial court had closed the right to defend despite previously acknowledging the PTI founder's injury.

Now, a trial court has commenced recording evidence and testimonies of witnesses in the case, the counsel said. At that, Justice Malik wondered how the trial court had "terminated the right to defence" after acknowledging that Imran had been injured. Subsequently, the SC issued a notice to the respondent and directed the court office to fix the review petitions for hearing at the earliest.

Imran had filed review petitions in the case after the trial court had closed the right to defence — a decision that was upheld by the Lahore High Court (LHC) and endorsed by the SC on February 21, 2023.

The trial court, through its order on October 20, 2022, had dismissed Imran's objections in the case over the rejection of PM Shehbaz's interrogatories — a set of written questions served by one party to the other — and directed the PTI founder to submit his answers.

Later, through a subsequent order of November 24, 2022, the trial court struck off the right of defence due to the non-submission of answers to the interrogatories.

Previously, the SC had held in a 2-1 majority judgment in the case that Imran had been "wilfully contumacious and disobedient" throughout the trial court proceedings and that the trial court had not committed any "illegality or material irregularity" in the exercise of its jurisdiction through its orders of closing the right to defend.

The LHC had also rightly declined to interfere in its revisional jurisdiction.

Former judge Syed Mansoor Ali Shah had observed at the time in the judgement authored by him.

He had made these observations as the court heard an appeal moved by Imran challenging the December 7, 2022 LHC order of upholding the sessions court's closure of Imran's right to defend.

Justice Malik, who was also a member of that bench, had dissented from the majority judgement.

QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

How Long Will Quetta Pay the Price for SSGC and Federal Negligence?

Editorial: Quetta is once again at the mercy of a winter crisis that has become all too familiar: low gas pressure, unannounced load shedding, and complete administrative silence. Every year, citizens are told to "bear with the situation" as temperatures fall and heaters, stoves, and geysers turn useless. Yet the authorities responsible — Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) and the federal energy managers — continue to operate without accountability.

A City Freezing While Authorities Look Away

The people of Balochistan are right to ask: Why is Quetta suffering the same crisis every winter while no structural reform is introduced? Why are consumers forced to pay heavy bills for a service that barely exists? And why do officials in Karachi and Islamabad continue to treat Balochistan's gas issues as a seasonal inconvenience rather than a governance failure?

D e s p i t e Balochistan being an energy-producing region, its residents struggle every winter for the very resource extracted from their own soil. This contradiction reflects a deep-rooted policy imbalance in the federation,

where Balochistan remains last on the priority list — not because of a shortage of resources, but because of a shortage of political will.

SSGC's Repeated Excuses and Decades of Mismanagement — The SSGC's performance adds another layer of frustration. Each year, the company offers the same explanations: "excessive demand," "pipeline pressure issues," "technical challenges."

Yet no one explains why these problems remain unresolved despite decades of complaints.

Why have there been no significant infrastructure upgrades? Why has the company failed to introduce a clear winter management plan for Quetta? Why is communication with consumers absent?

The unannounced nature of the load shedding exposes a complete disregard for public convenience. When outages are not scheduled or announced, families cannot plan meals, heating, or even basic daily routines. Hospitals and clinics struggle to maintain warm environments for patients. Small businesses suffer. And in a city where temperatures can drop below freezing, such negligence is not

just inconvenient — it is dangerous.

F e d e r a l Government's Weak Oversight and Balochistan's Low Priority

The federal government cannot escape responsibility either. Energy management is a national issue, and the pattern of winter mismanagement in Balochistan reflects weak oversight, poor planning, and an unfair allocation of resources. The silence of policymakers during these crises sends a clear message: Quetta's suffering is not a priority.

What Quetta needs is not another round of hollow statements. It needs a transparent winter gas plan, proper infrastructure investment, honest communication with the public, and real accountability for SSGC. Most importantly, it needs the federal government to finally treat Balochistan as an equal stakeholder in national resource management.

The people of Quetta have endured enough. Their patience should not be mistaken for acceptance. Without decisive action, this recurring winter crisis will continue to expose not only the inefficiencies of SSGC but also the government's unwillingness to address long-standing injustices.

Balochistan Vulnerable to Climate Crisis — It is noteworthy that almost 30 districts of Balochistan have been badly hit by the current climate emergency. People who were already drowning in man-made disasters of inflation, poverty,

The Looming threat of Climate Crisis in Pakistan



Sardar Mengal:

Climate change is unleashing its worst effects in the form of heavy rainfalls and disastrous floods. Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change had already warned multiple times in response to the contours of the crisis but we witnessed everything otherwise.

Political crisis are currently drowning in a Natural disaster. Nushki, Khuzdar, Lasbela, Bolan and Jhal Magsi received much of the inflections of flash floods.

People were left stranded to flow with the waves as seen in footages, circulating on social media. Unfortunately, disturbing pictures of dead bodies of children covered with mud, families who were sitting helplessly on debris of their houses and sinking valuables of the people couldn't awaken the government from its stupor. Even more gloomily, the enraging waves of floods engulfing lives and property, converting everything into dust & debris and wreaking havoc all

around, couldn't merit breaking news on national media.

Prior disregard and later delayed response have multiplied inflections of the catastrophe. Loss of land communication has further isolated the stricken areas making true estimation of destruction more exhausting.

Timely decision and act can reduce the effect of Climate Change.

To stop ballooning problems into crisis; rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations should be carried out on full scale as the current pace is insufficient to meet the requirement. NDMA and PDMA need to reach out to the peripheral areas that are out of the

radar.

It's high time for the provincial and federal coalition government to pay special attention to those whose lives are at the stake. Political parties need to rise above the traditional politics and launch concerted efforts to help out the calamity stricken at the earliest. Social welfare organisations should come forward to heal the lesions of suffering humans. On national media, there should be special discourse and discussion on settlement and rehabilitation of the affected people.

In addition to ensuring: re-building of eroded infrastructure, compensation for losses, clean water, adequate supply of food, there should be numerical measures in pipeline to overcome the post-flood outcomes such as increased risk of infectious diseases. The flood-stricken area can become a breeding ground for many health related problems. Supplying preventive medicines and upholding precautionary measures can halt the onslaught of infectious diseases.

The state machinery in its all forms should come forward to navigate a safe passage out of this hurricane of climate emergency enveloping us now.

The author is a final year MBBS student at King Edward Medical University Lahore, Pakistan. He can be reached on twitter via @SardarMengal11.

IRC reaches to 29,000 out of school girls in Balochistan

By Shakoor Khan: International Rescue Committee (IRC) under its Teach & Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH) project reached out to 29,000 out-of-school girls of 5 districts of Balochistan including Pishin, Killa Abdullah, Nushki, Kharan and Chagai.

"IRC is striving hard to promote girl's education in Balochistan besides imparting vocational trainings on financial literacy and trades to make them financially independent," said Shareef Mengal, Head of IRC Balochistan during a policy dialogue titled "Improving future of girl's education in Balochistan held in collaboration with UK aid at local hotel here.

Balochistan Education Minister Naseebullah Mari was the chief guest while representatives from the Education ministry, Directorate of Special Education,

Literacy, Non-Formal Education & Human Rights Department, Balochistan Assessment and Examination Commission, Provincial Institute of Teachers Education, Education Support Programme, Global Partnership of Education, German Agency for International Cooperation, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Society for Community Strengthening and Promotion of Education, Balochistan, Institute for Development Studies and Practices, Japan International Cooperation Agency also attended the event.

The event hosted conversations with mul-

multiple stakeholders including education experts and government functionaries on the barriers faced by girls in the province in pursuing their education and discussed possible solutions to combat those barriers.

salient feature of the project IRC

While highlighting the salient feature of the project IRC chief in Balochistan Shareef Mengal said under the 'Girls Learn' stream of the project, 22,000 girls received classes on Package A, B and C of non-formal curriculum, of them 4000 enrolled in mainstream formal schooling system.

Under 'Girls Earn' stream of the project, 7000 girls completed Package A of the non-formal curriculum, out of these 7000 girls, 5000 received training on financial literacy and business development planning. 2400 girls received training on 8 vocational trades and toolkits and 250 girls received financial grants to start a business.

Naseebullah Mari, Education Minister Balochistan, on the occasion urged that "We must do our part to remove the barriers faced by girls in the region so that every girl can pursue her education and become a valuable member of society".

"The Government is making all out efforts to combat the low literacy rate which has affected

girls from all ethnic groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds,"

We are committed to assist and contribute to building economically prosperous, and educated Balochistan, so every child has access to education.

He however welcomed the support extended by the International Rescue Committee for providing educational and vocational training opportunities, saying he is very grateful for the on-ground initiative of community-based schools in Balochistan.

Abdul Rauf Baloch — Secretary Secondary Education on the occasion appreciated the contributions of IRC for girls' education in Balochistan.

He shared that education is a complex subject which cannot be discussed without WASH, health and other facilities.

This makes it a responsibility of all relevant departments and stakeholders who should play their role effectively.

Zain Ul Abedin Khan, Deputy Director Programs, IRC, in his remarks said that "We as a society need to commit to prioritize and focus on Girls' Education through adequate resources. Girls' education in Balochistan is one of the biggest challenges faced by the country and to deal with it we must work with innovative methods like Non-Formal Education."

He further added

that, "Over the years, we have realized that if girls are unable to reach school, all stakeholders need to fill the gap and provide access to long learning opportunities like productive skills and life-skills within communities.

Girl's education is correlated with lower rates of poverty

The panel discussions established an opportunity for the policy makers and practitioners to understand that girl's education is correlated with lower rates of poverty and improved health outcomes. While stimulating dialogue, the stakeholders pledged to work together to eradicate the barriers to girls'

education by providing gender inclusive facilities and quality of education.

The event was a culmination of three sessions where the first was hosted to discuss the barriers faced by girls in pursuing their education.

The panelists of the first session classified the barriers into 3 categories: Cultural, Economic and Service Delivery. The panelists recommended Accelerated Learning Programs (ALPs) as a viable option while integrated with skill-based trainings and digitalized education.

Initiatives to combat the barriers to education

The second session was focused on sustainable initiatives to combat the barriers with the help of Non-Formal Education in bridging the gap between primary and secondary schooling.

Chairperson of the session, Mr. Abdul Khaliq — Chief Planning Officer Policy, Planning, and Implementation Unit welcomed the participants and emphasized the importance of solutions to these barriers.

Mr. Ashraf Gichki — Director Literacy and Non-Formal Education shared contribution of NFE department toward provision of second chance of education to out-of-school children.

Personal struggles in overcoming the barriers to education

The third and final session gave the TEACH clients an opportunity to express their personalized struggles in overcoming barriers to education.

Anam — client of TEACH project from Pishin shared that after joining TEACH ALP center,

she can read books and newspapers. Simra from the same district shared that her parents don't allow travelling long distances to attend school but after opening of ALP center at doorstep, she was able to join the classroom for first time in her life. Haleema from Nushki district shared that her mother is the only breadwinner of home and works at households of others to earn income. Haleema shared that she is the only child of her family who can read, thanks to joining ALP center.



PM Shehbaz meets Rubio after Board of Peace summit in Washington

NEWS DESK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Thursday, with the two sides discussing cooperation in critical minerals, energy, counter-terrorism and prospects for increased American investment, according to a State Department statement.

The State Department said the US secretary thanked Pakistan for supporting Trump's Gaza peace plan and for joining the first meeting of the "Board of Peace" as a founding member.

He also offered condolences over the Jan 31 attacks in Balochistan and the Feb 6 bombing in Islamabad and reaffirmed the importance of continued partnership in counter-terrorism.

The talks covered Pakistan's participation in the recent Critical Minerals Ministerial in Washington, with the United States welcoming Islamabad's engagement and discussing cooperation in developing Pakistan's energy and mineral resources, as well as commercial opportunities for American companies.

Separately, as per a press release issued by the Press Information Department (PID), during



his meeting with Rubio, the premier congratulated him and US President Donald Trump on the "successful" inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's readiness to "work with the Board of Peace for the implemen-

tation of the Gaza peace plan".

It added that during the meeting, "both sides underscored the importance of Pakistan-US strategic relations and expressed satisfaction over the momentum and positive trajectory of the partnership, under the

leadership of President Trump".

Both leaders also agreed to improve bilateral trade, economic activities, and mutual cooperation in counter-terrorism efforts, it further added.

During the meeting, the premier

"emphasised the importance of continued high-level engagement between Pakistan and the US to advance common goals in a rapidly evolving global environment," the statement said.

Meanwhile, in a post on X, Rubio reiter-

ated his appreciation for Pakistan's support for the Gaza Peace Plan and for joining the board.

"In our meeting, we discussed the importance of our strategic relationship on critical minerals development and counterterrorism," he further said.

Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar responded to Rubio's post and thanked him. He said Pakistan valued its "longstanding relationship with the United States". The foreign minister added that the two diplomats had

"meaningful discussions" on advancing peace, cooperation in fighting against terrorism, and expanding bilateral economic and trade ties.

"We look forward to further strengthening our strategic partnership in all areas of shared interest," said Dar.

Shehbaz stresses need to end ceasefire violations in Gaza

Earlier, addressing the inaugural meeting of the Board of Peace — formally established last month after being proposed in September 2025 — Prime Minister Shehbaz stressed the need for an end to ceasefire violations in Gaza, calling it "very important" for achieving durable peace in the war-torn territory.

"The people of Palestine have long endured the illegal occupation and immense suffering. And, to achieve long-lasting peace, it is very important that ceasefire violations must end to preserve life and advance reconstruction efforts," he said, adding that Palestinians must exercise full control over their land and future in line with UN Security Council resolutions. Praising Trump's role, the prime minister said.

War clouds loom as US amasses military hardware in Middle East

NEWS DESK: War clouds are looming over the Middle East, as US warplanes and aircraft carriers head toward Iran in preparation for possible military action.

Renewing his threats towards Tehran, President Donald Trump indicated on Thursday that the country has around 10 days to reach a deal with Washington, or "bad things will happen".

CNN and CBS reported on Thursday that the US military would be ready to launch strikes against Iran as early as this weekend, though Trump has reportedly not made a final decision yet.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Lea-vitt warned on Wednesday there were many reasons and arguments that one could make for a strike against Iran.

"Iran would be very wise to make a deal with President Trump," she

said. Trump's comments came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued his own warning to Iran saying, "If the ayatollahs make a mistake and attack us, they will receive a response they cannot even imagine".

The Wall Street Journal, meanwhile, reported that Trump had 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.

The US has, meanwhile, been building up its military forces near Iran, including warships, fighter jets and refuelling aircraft, laying the foundation for a potentially sustained campaign against Iran — should Trump give the

order. Washington has ordered a second aircraft carrier to the region, with the first, the USS Abraham Lincoln and its nearly 80 aircraft, positioned about 700 kilometres (435 miles) from the Iranian coast as of Sunday, satellite images showed.

Speaking at the inaugural Board of Peace meeting, Trump even praised the "magnificent" B-2 bombers that "totally decimated the nuclear potential" of Iran last summer, saying they helped bring peace to the Middle East for the first time in 3,000 years.

Iran has also sought to display its own military might, with its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps holding war games earlier this week in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's joint exercise with Russia came days into an extended series of Iranian naval drills in

the Gulf of Oman, with Iranian state television showing special forces units deployed on helicopters and ships.

Amid the escalating warnings, Poland on Thursday ordered all its citizens in Iran to "leave immediately".

Germany meanwhile moved troops out of northern Iraq, reducing its footprint to the minimum necessary to keep its base there functional, citing escalating regional tensions.

Dozens of German soldiers have been relocated away from the base in Erbil, capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region. Russia has also called for restraint, with a Kremlin spokesperson saying, "We are currently witnessing an unprecedented escalation of tension in the region, but we still hope that political and diplomatic means will continue to prevail in the search for a settlement".

Alien files incoming: Trump orders government release of UFO records

NEWS DESK: President Donald Trump said on Thursday he would direct federal agencies to begin releasing government files related to aliens and unidentified flying objects, pointing to what he described as strong public interest in the issue.

In a social media post, Trump said he would order Pentagon chief Pete Hegseth and other agencies to release the information, calling the matter "extremely interesting and important".

Earlier in the day, Trump, without providing evidence, accused former President Barack Obama of improperly disclosing classified information when discussing aliens publicly, saying Obama "made a big mistake".

"He took it out of classified information... He's not supposed to be doing that," Trump told reporters while traveling to Georgia.

During an interview



with podcast host Brian Tyler Cohen released on Saturday, Obama was asked if aliens were real.

"They're real, but I haven't seen them, and they're not being kept in... Area 51. There's no underground facility unless there's this enormous conspiracy and they hid it from the president of the United States," Obama said.

Area 51 is a classified Air Force facility in Nevada that fringe theorists have speculated holds alien bodies and crashed spaceships. CIA archives released in 2013 said it was a test site for top-secret spy planes.

Pentagon investigations There was no indication in Obama's remarks that the former president released classified information. Obama's office did not respond to a request for comment.

"I saw no evidence during my presidency that extraterrestrials have made contact with us. Really?" Obama said in an Instagram post on Sunday.

In the post, Obama explained his belief that aliens exist by citing the statistical odds of life beyond Earth were high because the uni-

verse is so vast. He added that the chances of extraterrestrial life visiting Earth were low, given the distance.

Following his comments on Obama, Trump added that he had not seen evidence that aliens exist, saying, "I don't know if they're real or not".

In recent years, the Pentagon has investigated reports of UFOs, and senior military leaders said in 2022 they found no evidence to suggest that aliens had visited Earth or crashed here.

A 2024 Pentagon report said US government investigations during the end of World War Two had found no evidence of extraterrestrial technology and most sightings were misidentified ordinary objects and phenomena.

The website of the National Archives and Records Administration says it has records related to UFOs across numerous collections.



US negotiating with India on Venezuelan oil sale, US envoy says

NEWS DESK: The United States is in "active negotiation" over the sale of Venezuelan oil to India, to help India diversify its sources of crude oil, US Envoy Sergio Gora said on Friday.

The US has made diversification away from Russian crude a condition for cutting tariffs on goods imported from India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer.

"The Department of Energy is speaking to the Ministry of Energy here, and so we're hoping to have some news of that very soon," Gora told reporters on the sidelines of an event in New Delhi where India joined the US-led Pax Silica initiative aimed at building a silicon supply chain for high-tech products. US President Donald Trump this month agreed to cut tariffs on Indian goods to 15 per cent under an interim trade deal.

He also removed a

25pc punitive levy after India agreed to end the purchase of Russian oil, which the US said helps fund Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A final trade deal is set to become effective in April, and the US is likely to issue a formal notification this month to reduce its tariff on Indian goods to 15pc. India's trade minister, Piyush Goyal, said on Friday.

The US and allies imposed sanctions on Russia's energy sector following Russia's 2022

invasion. India then became the top customer for Russian seaborne crude, which it bought at rock-bottom prices, to the consternation of Western nations.

"On the oil, there's an agreement... We have seen India diversify on their oil. There is a commitment. This is not about India. The United States doesn't want anyone buying Russian oil," Gora said.

King Charles' brother Andrew released after arrest over misconduct relating to Epstein

NEWS DESK: King Charles' younger brother Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor was released from police custody on Thursday evening after being arrested on suspicion of misconduct in public office over allegations he sent confidential government documents to Jeffrey Epstein.

Mountbatten-Windsor, who turned 66 on Thursday, had been questioned all day by detectives from Thames Valley Police.

Earlier this month, the police force said it was looking into allegations that he had passed documents to the late convicted sex offender who was known as a paedophile. The arrest of the senior royal, eighth in line to the throne, is unprecedented in modern times. "I have learned with the deepest concern the news about Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor and suspicion of misconduct in public office," King Charles said in a statement.

A Reuters witness saw the former prince leaving a police station in Aylesham, eastern England, where he was met by a small group of photographers and television crews, just after 19:00 GMT.

A Reuters photograph taken after his release shows him seated inside a car, appearing visibly shaken.



Thames Valley Police said later on Thursday that "the arrested man" had been "released under investigation" but must take his course. Although Buckingham Palace was not informed in advance about the arrest, the monarch said in his statement. "Meanwhile, my family and I will continue in our duty and service to you all."

The king visited a fashion show in London on Thursday, making no further public comment.

Mountbatten-Windsor, the second son of the late Queen Elizabeth II, has always denied any wrongdoing in relation to Epstein,

and said he regrets their friendship.

His office did not respond to a request for comment and he has not spoken publicly since the release of more than 3 million pages of documents by the US government relating to Epstein, who was convicted of soliciting prostitution from a minor in 2008.

"Let me state clearly: the law must take its course," the monarch said in his statement. "Meanwhile, my family and I will continue in our duty and service to you all."

He was forced to step down from that role in 2011 after his close links to Epstein first emerged.

Following a thorough assessment, we have now opened an in-

vestigation into this allegation of misconduct in public office," Thames Valley's Assistant Chief Constable Oliver Wright said in a statement. "We understand the significant public interest in this case, and we will provide updates at the appropriate time."

The arrest marks a new low for the former prince, who was forced to quit all official royal duties in 2019 over his ties with Epstein and was then stripped by his older brother of his titles and honours last October amid further revelations about their relationship. Unmarked police cars earlier, six unmarked police cars and around eight plainclothes officers were pictured at Wood Farm on the Sandringham estate in eastern England where Mountbatten-Windsor now resides.

Nasirabad Education Group Meeting: DC Zulfiqar Ali Kakar Orders Activation of Closed Schools, Strict Action Against Harassment

NASIRABAD: An important meeting of the District Education Group was held under the chairmanship of Zulfiqar Ali Kakar, Deputy Commissioner Nasirabad. The meeting was attended by Assistant Commissioner Dera Murad Jamali Bahadur Khan Khoso, District Education Officer Abdul Hafeez Khoso, District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Hussain Jamali, District Accounts Office representative Amjad Bahrani, UNICEF representative UNICEF representative and other relevant officials. During the meeting, District Education Officer Abdul Hafeez Khoso gave a detailed



briefing on ongoing academic activities across the district, availability of teachers, closed schools, and other administrative and educational challenges. Addressing the participants, Deputy Commissioner Zulfiqar Ali Kakar stated that the government is taking serious measures to promote education. He warned that strict legal action would be taken against anyone obstructing newly appointed teachers from performing their duties. He particularly emphasized that individuals harassing female teachers would not be given any leniency. The Deputy Commissioner directed authorities to accelerate practical measures to make closed schools functional and ensure that deserving candidates from the respective Union Councils are appointed strictly on merit to strengthen the education system. He further instructed that effective monitoring mechanisms be implemented to ensure teachers' attendance in all schools. All Deputy District Education Officers (DDEOs) were directed to maintain proper financial checks and balances in accordance with the financial code. Additionally, he ordered the formation of a special committee to scrutinize medical leaves granted to female teachers to prevent misuse or unnecessary leave, ensuring that academic activities are not disrupted. The Deputy Commissioner reaffirmed that improving access to quality education remains a top government priority, and all departments must fulfill their responsibilities with integrity and commitment.

Balochistan Govt to Introduce Digital Media Policy as Newspaper Readership Declines: CM



NEWS DESK: Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti has said the provincial government is preparing a new digital media policy in response to declining readership of newspapers in Balochistan. Speaking in Quetta, the chief minister noted that only a limited segment of the population now reads newspapers published in the province, making it necessary for the government to shift its focus toward digital media platforms for broader public outreach. He emphasized that the proposed policy will align with Balochistan's media sector with modern communication trends while ensuring responsible journalism. The chief minister also directed newspaper owners to pay their employees' salaries in accordance with government-approved policies, highlighting the importance of safeguarding the rights of media workers. He added that the new digital media policy aims to strengthen information dissemination, improve transparency, and support fair labor practices within the media industry in Balochistan.

The Deputy Commissioner reaffirmed that improving access to quality education remains a top government priority, and all departments must fulfill their responsibilities with integrity and commitment.

Jaffarabad Polio Campaign Reviewed; DC Khalid Khan Orders Improved Micro-Planning and 100% Child Tracking

JAFFARABAD: An important review meeting regarding the ongoing anti-polio campaign in Jaffarabad district was held under the chairmanship of Khalid Khan. The meeting was attended by District Health Officer Dr. Abdul Mannan Lakti, DSM Faisal Iqbal Khoso, along with other health department officials, polio program staff, representatives of relevant departments, and field teams. During the meeting, a detailed review of the previous polio campaign was conducted, and reports received from various Union Councils were presented. The briefing highlighted that the recent campaign was overall successful across the district. Teams adopted an improved



strategy and conducted door-to-door visits to administer polio drops to children, resulting in satisfactory coverage rates. However, the meeting also emphasized that minor shortcomings and administrative weaknesses were identified in certain areas. It was stressed that these issues must be addressed in upcoming campaigns to ensure that no child is left unvaccinated. Addressing the participants, Deputy Commissioner Khalid Khan stated that the government is taking serious measures to eradicate polio and that all relevant departments must work in close coordination to achieve this objective. He directed officials to further strengthen micro-planning for field teams, pay special attention to high-risk areas, and ensure 100% tracking of missed children. He added that while the success of the previous campaign was the result of strong teamwork, even minor gaps cannot be overlooked, as eliminating them will guarantee the success of future drives. The meeting also decided that awareness campaigns would be intensified prior to the next polio drive, and community engagement at the local level would be strengthened to help achieve the national goal of complete polio eradication.

Rs1.3 Billion District Complex Under Construction in Usta Muhammad, Completion Expected by 2027

USTA MUHAMMAD: Deputy Commissioner (Buildings) Muhammad Yaseen Jamali provided a detailed briefing on the under-construction District Complex, Usta Muhammad, being built at an estimated cost of over Rs1.3 billion. The project, which also provides convenience to the public, eliminating the need to visit multiple departments for resolving their issues. The Executive Engineer added that construction work on the Deputy Commissioner's block has been accelerated. It is expected to be completed by the end of March or the first week of April, after which the Deputy Commissioner's

Office will be shifted to the new building, while work on other sections of the complex will continue. He noted that the project aligns with the vision of Mir Sarfraz Bugti to promote better government operations and improved public service delivery across the province. The provincial government is taking special interest in ensuring the timely and high-quality completion of this important project. In conclusion, he thanked Muhammad Ranzan Palal for his cooperation and guidance and reaffirmed his commitment to completing the project within the stipulated timeframe.

Nasirabad Health Committee Meeting: DC Zulfiqar Ali Kakar Orders Strict Monitoring of Hospitals, Labs and Staff Attendance

NASIRABAD: A meeting of the District Health Committee was held under the chairmanship of Zulfiqar Ali Kakar. The meeting was attended by District Health Officer Dr. Ayaz Hussain Jamali, Medical Superintendent Civil Hospital Dr. Habib Pindram, District Accounts Office representative Amjad Bahrani, PPHI DSM Tariq Shahbaz Katohar, Drug Inspector Dr. Ejaz Ali, and PS to Deputy Commissioner Manzoor Shirazi, along with other relevant officials. During the meeting, a detailed briefing was given on healthcare services being provided across the district, existing challenges, performance of health centers, and actions taken against absent doctors and staff. Addressing the participants, Deputy Commissioner Zulfiqar Ali Kakar stated that providing quality and timely healthcare services to the public is the fundamental responsibility of doctors and paramedical staff. He directed that all laboratories in the city be properly monitored and strictly in-



structed to refrain from conducting any tests that the district administration has prohibited. He warned that negligence in this regard would not be tolerated. The Deputy Commissioner further instructed all doctors to ensure their presence at their designated postings so that patients traveling from remote areas do not face inconvenience. He also directed that uninterrupted supply of medicines be ensured at Civil Hospital and all other health centers. In case of any shortage of medicines or essential facilities, concerned authorities must be informed in writing so that immediate action can be taken and patients do not return disappointed. He added that the district administration would conduct regular surprise visits to all health units to assess ground realities and initiate strict departmental action against absentee staff. The Deputy Commissioner emphasized that public health and access to basic healthcare facilities remain the government's top priority, and all departments must perform their duties with honesty and responsibility.

Khuzdar Price Control Committee Finalizes Ramadan Price List, Zero Tolerance for Hoarding and Overpricing

KHUZDAR: On the directives of Deputy Commissioner Akhtar Razaq Sasaki, a key meeting of the Price Control Committee was held under the chairmanship of Assistant Commissioner Hafeezullah Kakar to review and regulate prices of essential commodities ahead of the holy month of Ramadan. The meeting was attended by President of Anjum-e-Tajirun Khuzdar Hafiz Hameedullah, Chairman of Sheri Action Committee Bashir Ahmed Jatak, Livestock Department representative Dr. Sikandar, Statistics Officer Nazeer Ahmed, and representatives of various trader organizations. During the session, prevailing market

prices in Khuzdar and its surrounding areas were reviewed in detail. The Assistant Commissioner clarified that while setting prices in Khuzdar, the market situation in neighboring districts was also taken into account to protect the interests of both traders and consumers. After consultation, the price list was finalized unanimously. Addressing participants, Assistant Commissioner Hafeezullah Kakar stated that Ramadan is a blessed month and will not be allowed to become a source of profiteering. He directed all traders to strictly adhere to the officially notified price list.

NOTICE INVITING TENDER. THE DIRECTOR GENERAL, NORTH invites bids from Eligible Bidders for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates. Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPBRA GOB. The Executive Engineer Roads Kuchik CWP/RR Department Quetta invites bids from Eligible Bidders for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates. Tender Fee 1000 PKR for each work.

S.No.	Name of Works	Estimated Cost	Tender Fee	Bid Security	TSR No.
1.	SOLARIZATION OF GOVERNMENT HIGH-SCHOOL SECONDARY SCHOOLS & GCES (IN IN DISTRICT) SBI DIVISION	123,479,000	1,500	2%	252602978673
2.	SOLARIZATION OF GOVERNMENT HIGH-SCHOOL SECONDARY SCHOOLS & GCES (IN IN DISTRICT) ZHOB DIVISION	89,943,000	1,500	2%	252602978713
3.	SOLARIZATION OF GOVERNMENT HIGH-SCHOOL SECONDARY SCHOOLS & GCES (IN IN DISTRICT) LORALAI DIVISION	87,714,000	1,500	2%	35302914763

Procurement shall be made under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules - 2014. Eligibility of bidders: The criteria of basic eligibility given in the Bidding Document can be viewed at: www.bppra.gov.pk. Procedure of Procurement: Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding Procedure Bid Security: The bids must accompany the bid in the form of Bank Guarantee of Call of 2% of the bid submission. Bid can only be submitted electronically. Tender Documents: The NT & Bidding Document can be obtained electronically from www.bppra.gov.pk. Issuance of tender Documents: Complete Bidding Document can be viewed at: www.bppra.gov.pk. Last Date of bid submission: Bid can only be submitted electronically, issued by 10 March, 2026 at 11:00 AM through supplier dashboard. Tender opening: All tenders will be opened on same day at 12:00 PM on EPPS System Address: Office of the Executive Engineer Roads/Kuchik CWP/RR Department Spiny Road Quetta. Procurement Quetta. Executive Engineer Roads Kuchik CWP/RR Department Quetta. PPO No.3817/20-02-2026. E-mail: eppr@ppra.gov.pk

TENDER NOTICE. Note: In All Procurements of GOB Whether Through Electronic or Manual Bid Submission, it is Mandatory For All Bidders to Get Registered At Electronic Public Procurement System of BPBRA GOB. The Executive Engineer Roads Kuchik CWP/RR Department Quetta invites bids from Eligible Bidders for execution of following works for the Year 2026 based on Composite schedule rates 2023 on Percentage Rates. Tender Fee 1000 PKR for each work.

S.No.	Name of Works	Estimated Cost
1.	CONSTRUCTION OF BT ROAD SIDE DRAINS AT KILLI RAQHA SARAH GURJAI DISTRICT QUETTA TSE-25360297823 (B-Bid Only)	58,792,000
2.	CONSTRUCTION OF BT ROAD PEER MANA SAHAB STREET GRAHURJAI BYPASS DISTRICT QUETTA TSE-253602979263	14,826,000

Procurement shall be made under the Balochistan Public Procurement Rules - 2014. Eligibility of Bidders: Presence in Active Tax Payer List The bidding firm must not be blacklisted by any procuring agency of Pakistan. Balochistan Revenue Authority Registration is required. The bidder must have completed 2 Assignment of similar nature of work Procedure Of Procurement: Single Stage Two Envelope Bidding Procedure Bid Security: The bids must accompany the bid in the form of Bank Guarantee/Deposit of Call of 2% specified above in the name of the under signed from a scheduled bank. Tender Documents: The NT & Bidding Document can be obtained electronically from www.bppra.gov.pk. Issuance of tender Documents: Complete Bidding Document can be viewed at: www.bppra.gov.pk. Last Date of bid submission: Bid can only be submitted electronically, issued by 10 March, 2026 at 11:00 AM through supplier dashboard. Tender opening: All tenders will be opened on same day at 12:00 PM on EPPS System Address: Office of the Executive Engineer Roads/Kuchik CWP/RR Department Spiny Road Quetta. Procurement Quetta. Executive Engineer Roads Kuchik CWP/RR Department Quetta. PPO No.3817/20-02-2026. E-mail: eppr@ppra.gov.pk

Food exports hit steep decline as imports surge

NEWS DESK: Paksitan's food import bill surged to \$5.502 billion during the first seven months of the current fiscal year, marking a 19.27 per cent increase from \$4.613bn in the corresponding period last year, largely driven by higher arrivals of sugar and edible oil.

In contrast, exports of raw food items plunged 35.21pc to \$2.988bn in 7MFY26, compared with \$4.613bn a year ago.

Export volumes declined across nearly all major food categories, except meat. The steepest decline was recorded in rice exports, including both basmati and non-basmati varieties.

The increase in food imports underscores the country's growing dependence on foreign supplies amid persistent domestic production and supply constraints.

The surge was largely fuelled by higher purchases of sugar, edible



oil and tea to meet local demand.

According to data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, palm oil ac-

counted for the largest share among imported food items, followed by pulses, tea, soyabean oil, and sugar.

Pakistan imported 308,741 tonnes of sugar during the July-January period, representing an unprecedented year-on-year

increase of 13,494.93pc, up from 2,271 tonnes in the same period last year.

In terms of value, sugar imports rose

sharply to \$174.614m, up from \$2.181m in 7MFY25, a surge of 7,906.15pc, according to official trade data.

The dramatic rise comes in response to the government's decision to allow sugar imports in a bid to address domestic short-

ages and stabilise market prices.

Retail sugar prices have been fluctuating between Rs160 and Rs190 per kg in various cities, prompting authorities to step in and ease supply constraints through imports.

The value of palm oil imports surged 24.69pc to \$2.350bn in 7MFY26, up from \$1.885bn a year ago. In terms of quantity, import of palm oil rose 15.63pc to 2.182m tonnes from 1.887m tonnes in the corresponding period last year.

This growth indicates higher consumption of edible oil and ghee in Pakistan.

However, the arrival of pulses fell 21.89pc to \$492.095m from \$630.019m in 7MFY25. Similarly, soyabean oil imports plunged 42.27pc to \$94.991m from \$164.550m.

The import bill for all other food items rose 34.37pc to \$1.672bn.

PSX stages sharp rebound as KSE-100 gains 999 points

NEWS DESK: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) staged a strong recovery on Friday, with the KSE-100 Index closing at 173,170, up 999 points (+0.58%) after hitting an intraday low of 169,593. The benchmark touched a high of 174,148, reflecting heightened volatility throughout the session.

PSX exhibited consolidation around the 172,000 level, with wide intraday swings of approximately 4,500 points," said Ali Najib, Deputy Head of Trading at Anri Habib Ltd.

"Investors were seen responding cautiously after consecutive weeks of losses, but corporate earnings helped stabilise sentiment." The rebound came after four consecutive weeks of declines, including a

sharp drop of 6,683 points on Thursday triggered by geopolitical tensions between the United States and Iran. Concerns over rising international oil prices and uncertainty in global markets also weighed on investor sentiment earlier in the week.

On the corporate front, Indus Motor Company (INDI) reported strong results, posting a 23% year-on-year increase in 2QFY26 profit after tax of Rs5.98 billion (EPS 76.11) and declaring a quarterly dividend of Rs46 per share. Cumulatively, 1HFY26 earnings rose 28% YoY to Rs12.7 billion (EPS 161.60), marking the highest half-year profit since 2014. Other major contributors included OGDCL, MLCF, PPL, SYS, and FFC, which collectively

added 584 points to the index. Conversely, MCB, TRG, PSEL, BAFI, and FATIMA faced selling pressure, trimming 243 points from the overall gains. Trading activity remained relatively stable, with total volumes of 533.6 million shares and turnover of Rs23.7 billion. K-Electrics (KEL) led the volumes chart with 73.1 million shares traded.

In response to a question regarding Pakistan's progress in meeting terms set by the Fund, Kozaek said, "Pakistan's policy efforts under the EFF have helped stabilise the economy and rebuild confidence."

She further said that fiscal performance had been "strong", with 180,000 as immediate key support and

Policy efforts taken by Pakistan under EFF helped 'stabilise economy, rebuild confidence': IMF

NEWS DESK: Policy efforts undertaken by Pakistan under the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Extended Fund Facility (EFF) "helped stabilise the economy and rebuild confidence," the lending agency's spokesperson said on Thursday.

IMF Communications Director Julie Kozaek made the statement during a weekly press briefing.

In response to a question regarding Pakistan's progress in meeting terms set by the Fund, Kozaek said, "Pakistan's policy efforts under the EFF have helped stabilise the economy and rebuild confidence."

She further said that fiscal performance had been "strong", with 180,000 as immediate key support and

Govt to honour net-metering requests filed before Feb 8 under old rules

NEWS DESK: To salvage government credibility, Power Minister Awan's Leghari on Thursday decided to honour all applicants of net-metering solar connections till the change of regulations on Feb 8 and directed electricity distribution companies (Discoms), including K-Electric, for its implementation.

At a meeting of the Power Division's attached entities, the minister was informed that 5,165 consumers had applied for net-metered connections by the cut-off date of Feb 8 — the day the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) notified the Prosomers Regulations 2026, replacing the net-metering framework with net-billing and negatively affecting rooftop solar economies for households and industry.

All these applications entailed a net-metering capacity addition of about 250.8 megawatts.

"All net metering applications received by Feb 8 be processed under the previous regulations and facilitated by all electricity distribution companies, including K-Electric, under the net-metering framework," the power minister said.

He also issued instructions for immediate implementation to all power distribution companies. "As of Feb 8, a total of 5,165 applications had been submitted across all distribu-



tion companies, including K-Electric. These applications will collectively add 250.822MW of capacity to the national grid," an official statement said.

Sources said some of the minister's close aides opposed the move, arguing it would add to the roughly 6,900MW already installed under net-metering and could encourage litigation by future applicants against the new regulations.

However, the minister contended that net capacity addition in this category was only 250.8MW, but even if it was 1,500MW equivalent of applications, the government was legally and morally bound to honour its own regulations and commitments.

He was of the view that, within a legal framework, these applicants had accrued rights which could not be denied. However, once the new regulations are notified and in place, citi-

zens will be free to make fresh investments.

The sources said all the Discoms and K-Electric were required during the meeting to re-verify their prosomer applications received before Feb 8 and sign respective documents to relevant bodies, the prime minister intervened and restored contractual benefits for existing licensees. However, criticism persisted over the treatment of applications submitted during the period between the draft's issuance and the formal notification of the new regulations, which took effect from Feb 9.

During public hearings at Nepra, several interveners had also registered their complaints that, despite the regulator seeking only feedback, distribution companies had already stopped accepting new solar applications and were discouraging online registrations through various means.

"The emotional response was there," he

One month on, Gul Plaza awaits relief

NEWS DESK: One month after the inferno that ravaged Gul Plaza, the smoke has faded but uncertainty lingers. For shopkeepers, the anniversary is marked not by ceremonies or celebrations, but by the harsh calculations of rent due, pending school fees, suppliers waiting — and still, for most, no financial assistance has arrived.

In the immediate aftermath, promises were made; shop owners were told compensation assessments were under way and that relief would follow.

A figure of Rs500,000 was mentioned as instant support. For many, even that modest amount felt like a lifeline. Four weeks later, affecteds say they have received nothing.

Khubaib, who once ran Woodachi Interior at Gul Plaza, now stands inside a much smaller outlet at Gul Tijara Mall. Where his previous shop displayed dining tables

and sofas and centrepieces, he now arranges wall frames and decorative items in a cramped space.

"We're just managing," he said. "We were told relief would come. We're still waiting."

In the days after the tragedy, he tried to convert grief into momentum. He filmed videos, posted them online and responded to messages late into the night. There was sympathy and there were inquiries, but only a handful of orders.

"The emotional response was there," he

said. "But business doesn't run on emotion."

For Anas Sameen, who previously operated three shops in the basement selling purses and bags, the past month has felt constricting. He now works from a borrowed corner in his brother's office at Central Plaza. His storefront exists on Instagram, Facebook, Digital windows have replaced physical shelves. Yet the absence of a proper shop weighs heavily.

"We can't find a suitable place," he said. "And even if we do, we don't have the advance rent. Starting again

also investments and planning.

Bilal, whose artificial flower and decoration shop was his family's only source of income, estimates his loss at around Rs5 million. The shop was owned, not rented, built over years of saving and reinvestment. Losing it meant losing stability.

"So far, no one has provided us with any financial support," he said. "Still, we are trying by our own."

The phrase "still we are trying" echoes across conversations. It is spoken quietly, as if resilience has become a tired routine.

On the administra-

to visit Pakistan later this month to review the implementation of the \$7 billion EFF and the \$1.1bn RSF facilities.

During the almost two-week visit ending March 11, the engagements would be of greater significance as both sides would also discuss budget proposals based on performance this year and set broad contours of the upcoming budget (for the fiscal year 2026-27).

It is worth mentioning that an IMF mission led by Iva Petrova is due

to visit Pakistan later this month to review the implementation of the \$7 billion EFF and the \$1.1bn RSF facilities.

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particular those relating to provincial finances.

The programme's performance as of end-December 2025 — the period for review — has mostly been up to the mark, albeit with a revenue shortfall, which authorities believe could be reduced following a recent super tax ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court that went in the government's favour.

Upon the successful completion of the review, Pakistan will be eligible for the disbursement of about \$1bn (760 million Special Drawing Rights) under the EFF and another \$200m under the RSF by the end of April.

The EFF is a longer-term IMF loan programme designed to help countries address deep-seated economic weaknesses and medium-term balance-of-payments problems.

"This is not a delay; the work has been done very rapidly. There were over two thousand applications. We had to interview each person individually," he said.

"Someone claimed Rs12 million for burnt goods, he said, the team assessed the size of the shop, the items involved and supporting documents, including inventory papers. Bank statements were also reviewed to gauge business volume.

If a claim of Rs12 million was assessed at Rs8.5 million, it was discussed and finalised. After signatures, data was entered into the system. "We processed

two thousand such applications in just a few days," he said.

"Our teams have been working from round the clock. Even on February 17, people stayed until 10:30pm."

On the timeframe, he said payments would not be equal for everyone. "Some are set for Rs2.5 million, others for Rs30 million, depending on the individual case."



FIFA, Board of Peace to support Gaza reconstruction through football

NEWS DESK: FIFA and the Board of Peace signed a partnership agreement on Thursday to attract investment from global leaders and institutions for sustainable development in conflict-affected regions through football.

The Board of Peace, established under the United States President Donald Trump, held its first meeting focused on Gaza's reconstruction fund, aimed at rebuilding the territory once Hamas disarms.

The disarmament of Hamas militants and accompanying withdrawal of Israeli troops, the size of the reconstruction fund and the flow of humanitarian aid to the war-torn population are expected to pose significant challenges



The FIFA collaboration plan includes building 50 mini-pitches near schools and residential areas in Gaza, five full-size pitches across multiple districts, a state-of-the-art FIFA academy and a new 20,000-seat national stadium, FIFA said. Trump said FIFA will raise \$75 million

for soccer-related projects in Gaza.

"Today, FIFA and the Board of Peace have signed a landmark partnership agreement that will foster investment into football for the purpose of helping the recovery process in post conflict areas," FIFA President Gianni Infantino said in a statement.

"Together with the support of the Board of Peace, FIFA will drive this partnership which is built to deliver impact at every stage."

The programme will also emphasise job creation, youth participation, organised leagues for boys and girls, community engagement and the stimulation of local commercial activities, FIFA said.

Ning claims China's first speed skating gold at Winter Olympics

NEWS DESK: China's Ning Zhong-yan claimed gold in the men's 1,500 meters speed skating at the Milano Cortina Winter Olympics on Thursday, setting an Olympic record and delivering his country's first speed skating medal of the Games.

Ning clocked 1:41.98 to edge out American Jordan Stolz, who took silver, and Dutchman Kjeld Nuis, who secured bronze.

The result denied Stolz a third gold after his earlier victories in the 500m and 1,000m. In Nordic combined, Norway's Andreas Skoglund and Jens Luraana Breknes won the team sprint gold in chaotic conditions marked by heavy snow and multiple crashes. They edged Finland by a ski's length in a dramatic finish, with Austria claiming bronze. Olofsson completed a remarkable hat-trick of golds at these Games.

Germany's Vinzenz Geiger crashed late, taking Japan's Ryota Yamamoto down and ending both teams' medal hopes.

Austria's Stefan Rettenegger also fell near the end, opening the door for the Norway-



Finland duel.

"It was a dream to win an individual gold and also the team gold. But to take three golds, that's way more than I could ever dream of," Olofsson said. Switzerland captured bronze in women's ice hockey with a 2-1 overtime win over Sweden at Santigulia Arena. Alina Muller scored the winner with 50 seconds left in the extra session, echoing her game-winning goal against Sweden for bronze in 2014.

Mira Jungacker put Sweden ahead in the second period, but Sinja Leemann equalised for Switzerland shortly after. The Swiss, outshot 31-

17 in regulation, showed resilience in overtime. In the debut of ski mountaineering (Skimo), Spain's Oriol Cardona Coll won the men's sprint gold, ending a 54-year wait for a Spanish Winter Olympics gold since Francisco Fernandez Ochoa's alpine victory in 1972.

He dominated the final in a snowstorm, beating neutral athlete Nikita Filippov (competing without flag or anthem due to sanctions) and France's Thibault Anselmet.

Switzerland's Marianne Fat-t-on took the women's sprint gold, upsetting four-time world champion Emily Harrop of France, who settled for silver. Ana Alonso Rodriguez earned Spain's first medal of the Games with bronze in the women's event.

The sprint format featured intense head-to-head battles: a steep climb with skins, a backpuck up stairs carrying skis, transitions, and a slalom descent. Transitions proved decisive, with Harrop losing time on ski changes.

The feeling is amazing. I've been dreaming about winning the race a lot of times and finally the dream has come true," Cardona Coll said. It means a lot for us as a country.

Hockey turmoil deepens after PHF chief steps down

NEWS DESK: Amid a deepening crisis in Pakistan hockey, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday accepted the resignation of Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) President Tariq Hussain Bugti and appointed Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) Federal Secretary Mohy-uddin Ahmed Wani as ad-hoc president of the federation.

The premier also accepted the resignations of PHF Secretary Rana Mujahid and Treasurer Shahbaz Khan Pervez Bhandara. Their replacements had not been announced until late Thursday night.

The developments came amid controversy over the national team's tour of Australia for the FIH Pro League, where

accommodation arrangements could not be secured on time, forcing players to spend several hours on the road.

The team's overall performance in the Pro League also came under criticism. In addition, PHF elections had been facing delays.

Mr Bugti had been appointed by interim prime minister Anwaar Haq Kakar to hold elections but did not complete the process during his tenure.

Similarly, in his tenure, Mr Bugti-led PHF was accused of inaction over alleged corruption, pointed out by the Auditor General of Pakistan. There are more than 100 audit paras related to the PHF, and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has been probing the matter for

over a year. Speaking after his appointment, Mr Wani said the governance mechanism of the PHF would be improved. "In the next six weeks, we will prepare a business plan for the PHF and take steps to run this federation on professional grounds," he said.

He added that IPC would form a working group with all sports boards and education bodies to focus on grassroots development and that international trainers and coaches would also be engaged.

"There is no shortage of resources, but the PHF is facing financial management issues," he said. "We will work on this," he said, adding that he would ensure free, fair and transparent elections.

"Hockey, being the national game, is close to our hearts and we will take every possible step to bring positive change," he said.

National captain "banned" Earlier on Thursday, before the prime minister's decision, Mr Bugti announced his resignation, but not before imposing a two-year ban on national captain Ammad Shakeel Butt, citing findings of a committee regarding alleged misconduct.

"I received a message from a certain quarter and I am resigning from the post as it is not a big issue. Had the prime minister asked me six months earlier, I would have left," Mr Bugti said, appealing to the prime minister and Field Marshal Asim Munir to constitute an independent committee to probe the entire episode.

He said he was ready to face any punishment if found responsible.

However, shortly after Mr Bugti's resignation, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi met the hockey players, including Ammad Butt and Hanan Shahid.

In a message on X, Mr Naqvi said, "I am not becoming Hockey Federation President but we will assist players till this turmoil ends."



Bodo/Glimt stun Inter Milan, Gordon hits four in Newcastle Champions League romp



NEWS DESK: Norway's Bodo/Glimt stunned Inter Milan in the Champions League on Wednesday, beating the Italian side 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 af-

ter some impressive results 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 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: Gordon's clinical finish gave Newcastle a third-minute lead at the Tofiq Bahramov Republican Stadium, and Malick Thiaw headed in for 2-0 after just eight minutes.

Former Everton winger Gordon then converted a penalty awarded for a handball just after the half-hour mark, and pounced on poor defending a minute later to complete his first professional hat-trick.

He then added a penalty for his fourth and his team's fifth in a first-half stoppage time, with Jacob Murphy getting the visitors' sixth in the second half after Elvin Jafarguliyev had pulled one back.

Next week's return at St James' Park should now be a mere formality, with a last-16 tie to come against Barcelona or Chelsea.

"It's a tribute to the team today. We were really good in the first half. That's as good as we have played in a long time. It means a lot. Eddie Howe said,

Zimbabwe surprise as T20 World Cup Super Eights begin without Australia

NEWS DESK: Pakistan and New Zealand will clash in Colombo on Saturday as the second "Super Eights" phase of the T20 World Cup kicks off without former champions Australia, who shockingly failed to make it out of their group.

Instead, surprise packages Zimbabwe, who did not even qualify in 2024, topped Group B after a stunning unbeaten campaign where they not only beat

Australia but also co-hosts Sri Lanka.

An injury-depleted Australia endured a chaotic campaign and failed to make the second phase of the T20 World Cup for the first time since 2009.

Australia's acerbic media did not hold back in their criticism, citing selection "stuffs-ups" and "shambolic" preparations, including a 3-0 pre-tournament series loss in Pakistan, for the embarrassment.

Australia coach Andrew McDonald admitted his players were "devastated" but any inquest into the failure would only begin "when we exit the shores here".

India, the world number one-ranked T20 side, are hot favourite to retain their crown on home soil.

However, in the second round, they face a tough rematch of the 2024 final against an in-form South Africa in Ahmedabad at a packed

130,000-capacity Narendra Modi stadium on Sunday.

Both teams came through the first round phase with four wins from four.

India is on a 12-match unbeaten run at the T20 World Cup, stretching back to their defeat in the semi-final against eventual winners England in 2022.

No team has won back-to-back T20 World Cups or lifted the trophy on home soil, and India has the hopes of hundreds of millions of cricket-obsessed fans on their shoulders.

But India has not been consistent and has a problem at the top of the order with their number one-ranked batter, Abhishek Sharma, recording three consecutive ducks.

Their batting has looked shaky and India were 77-6 against the United States before coming through to win.

Also in Super Eights Group B are Zimbabwe and the West Indies, who meet in Mumbai on Monday, with all that group's games being hosted in India.





Pakistan's patience with Afghanistan wearing thin

NEWS DESK: The Foreign Office on Thursday said Pakistan reserves the right to target terrorist sanctuaries in Afghanistan to protect the lives of civilians and law enforcement personnel amid a spike in cross-border tensions following a deadly attack in Bajaur.

"Pakistan very legitimately demands that Afghan territory should not be used for terrorism inside Pakistan. So, as long as this demand is not met, whilst exercising patience, all options would obviously remain on the table," FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said at the weekly media briefing.

There has been a resurgence in terrorism in Pakistan since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul in 2021. Islamabad has repeatedly urged the Taliban administration to dismantle terrorist sanctuaries on Afghan soil, particularly those linked to the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Officials say those appeals have gone unheeded.

Attacks in Pakistan that were planned and directed from Afghanistan led to border clashes between the two sides last year.

CM reviews governance road map progress



NEWS DESK: Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi presided over a high-level meeting to review service delivery progress across provincial departments under the Good Governance Roadmap.

The session focused on completed targets, ongoing initiatives, and accelerated implementation to align public services with citizens' expectations.

During the meeting, relevant officials provided detailed briefings on advancements achieved so far.

Addressing the participants, CM Afridi emphasized that enhancing service delivery to precisely match public needs and aspirations remains the provincial government's core and ultimate mission.

He made it clear that no negligence or delay in implementing the Good Governance Roadmap would be tolerated. The Chief Minister directed officials to adopt innovative and effective strategies to promptly complete any lagging matters.

He issued firm instructions that all mid-term actions outlined in the roadmap must be fully accomplished by June this year without fail. The Chief Minister

also stressed the need to make the upcoming spring tree plantation campaign the largest and most organized in the province's history.

He directed timely completion of all arrangements and ensured massive participation from government employees, students, and civil society. Special emphasis was placed on promoting the planting of fruit-bearing trees in government offices and official residences.

The meeting also discussed the Rs1,000 billion Roshan Qabail Package for the merged districts. CM Afridi instructed that the package's preparation and final con-tours be completed this month in a practical and implementable form to fast-track development activities in these areas.

He further ordered all provincial departments to immediately begin preparations for the next fiscal year's budget.

To ensure timely approval and execution of development projects, the Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) was directed to hold weekly meetings.

In the health sector, the Chief Minister directed that the recruitment process for contract doctors in govern-

ment hospitals be completed by March 5.

He also ordered immediate steps to introduce mammography services at DHQs in southern districts and regional DHOs in other areas.

CM Afridi prioritized the repair and reactivation of dysfunctional tube wells across the province on an urgent basis to quickly resolve public hardships related to water supply.

In education, he stressed raising teacher attendance in government schools from the current 90 per cent to 100 per cent, directing authorities to establish an effective monitoring system for this purpose.

Reviewing law and order and infrastructure matters, the Chief Minister instructed to accelerate construction work on the Karamar and Hangu-Sarozai roads.

He also ordered strengthened security on the Karamar and Hangu-Sarozai roads to ensure the campaign proceeds without interruption.

Highlighting the importance of development projects, the Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP) was directed to hold weekly meetings.

In the health sector, the Chief Minister directed that the recruitment process for contract doctors in govern-

Two more suspects included in PTI's foreign funding case

NEWS DESK: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on Friday decided to revise the charge sheet in the foreign funding case against PTI founder Imran Khan and others after two new suspects were added to the probe.

The Islamabad Banking Court on Friday heard the case, summoning two new individuals: PTI Chief Finance Officer Siraj Ahmed and private bank employee Faisal Qazi for questioning.

Judge Abdul Ghafoor Kakar presided over the hearing, with Special Prosecutor Wasiq Malik representing the prosecution.

The partial charge sheet has already been submitted," Malik told the court.

"With the inclusion of two new suspects, we will submit a complete charge sheet instead of a supplementary one," Judge Kakar asked how much time would be needed to complete the charge sheet, Malik said.

"If the court grants 10 to 15 days, we will submit the full charge sheet."

The court directed that the full charge sheet against Imran Khan and others be submitted by March 5.

Interim bail for Siraj Ahmed and Faisal Qazi was granted until that date.

The next hearing in the PTI foreign funding case is scheduled for March 5.

In August 2022, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issued its verdict in the prohibited funding case, formerly known as the foreign funding case, stating that PTI had received prohibited funding.

The ECP noted that PTI "knowingly and willfully" received \$2.12 mil-

lion from Wootton Cricket Limited, operated by businessman Arif Naqvi, and described the party as a "willing recipient" of the prohibited funds.

The commission added that PTI also received donations from Bristol Engineering Services (UAE), E-Planet Trustees (Cayman Islands), SS Marketing Manchester (UK), PTI USA LLC-6160 and PTI USA LLC-5975, which violated Pakistani laws.

PTI, however, maintained the funds were donations from Pakistanis living abroad and did not constitute illegal funding.



One arrested after 15 killed in building collapse triggered by gas explosion in Karachi's Soldier Bazaar

NEWS DESK: Police on Friday arrested a man in connection with the deaths of 15 people in a building collapse triggered by a gas explosion in Soldier Bazaar a day earlier.

Soldier Bazaar Station House Officer (SHO) Rizwan Patel confirmed that the owner-cum-builder Mohammed Ishad had been arrested after the registration of a first information report (FIR). He said the held suspect had rented out the building to the victims.

The FIR, a copy of which is available with Dawn, was registered on the complaint of sub-inspector Khalid Mehmood at the Soldier Bazaar police station under sections 322 (punishment for qatl-bis-sabab), 288 (negligent conduct with building), 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter), 427 (mischievous causing damage to the amount of fifty rupees) and 337-A (pun-



ishment of shajjah) of the Pakistan Penal Code. According to the FIR, police received information on early Thursday morning about the collapse of a building in Gul Rana Colony, in which several people were killed and injured.

Upon reaching the spot, the complainant said that one portlain of the structure had completely collapsed. He said that the building spread over 40 square yards, had been constructed using heavy-duty steel channels and nylon sheets. He further said that the building was a ground plus three-storey structure.

The sub-inspector said that a man named Shahid Rasool lived on the first floor with his family. He said that at around 3:30am, Rasool's wife lit a match to prepare Sehr, adding that the room was already full of gas due to a leakage.

This led to the explosion, which caused the whole building to collapse, he said. The complainant further said that the rescue officials recovered at least 15 dead bodies from the rubble, while 15 others were injured in the incident.

The official stated that the owner of the building had constructed the structure "illegally" in approximately 2007/2008. He said that the gas connection was also provided "illegally through pipes installed in a haphazard and unsafe manner, leading to the unfortunate incident."

According to the FIR, the suspect committed negligence by installing substandard gas lines in an "illegally" constructed building.

The complainant further said that the Bomb Disposal Unit had examined the destroyed building and submitted their report. He said that according to the unit, the gas leakage occurred because of substandard gas pipelines, which led to a gas leak and ultimately triggered an explosion when a match was lit.

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PPP's Raza Rabbani calls for placing pact with US for redeveloping Roosevelt Hotel before Parliament

NEWS DESK: PPP stalwart and former Senate chairman Raza Rabbani on Friday said that the deal inked with the United States to redevelop the Roosevelt Hotel in New York "must be placed" in Parliament.

In a press release, Rabbani said, "The strategic economic initiative, including collaboration with the US General Services Administration, regarding the operation, maintenance, renovation and redevelopment of the Roosevelt Hotel has been signed without taking the people into confidence."

Rabbani said the hotel was "prime property" in New York and move private members' bill, wherein all foreign agreements, once signed, would need ratification in Parliament.

"I had shared such a bill when in the Senate," he said.

He further highlighted that earlier, a deal with the US relating to minerals in Balochistan was "broken by international media."

"Till date, the details of this deal have not been made public," he said.



Rabbani further said that the PPP should secure maximum value for the landmark property under its privatisation strategy.

According to the finance ministry, the agreement was finalised in Washington and executed by US General Services Administration (GSA) Administrator Edward C. Forst and Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff witnessed the signing.

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

The statement noted the Roosevelt Hotel's prime location in Manhattan and the complexity of New York zoning and municipal processes, saying the "institutional coordination aims to reduce execution

risk, enhance regulatory clarity, and maximise transaction value."

"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's economic ties," the statement concluded.

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 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 marquee New York destinations such as Grand Central Terminal, Times Square, and Fifth Avenue, placing it in one of Manhattan's most valuable commercial zones.