

Commissioning ceremony of Pakistan Navy's first Hangor-class attack submarine held in China

Naqvi condemns Afghan Taliban attack targeting civilians in SW

Abbasi conducts hands-on railway track inspection from Golra Railway Station to Rawalpindi

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# PM launches Rs3.2 trl program to fund building of 0.5m homes in five years

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday launched a landmark five-year, Rs3.2 trillion housing program, aimed at funding the construction of 500,000 homes nationwide, with a vision to provide affordable shelter for low-income citizens, lacking the financial means to build their own houses. The prime minister, addressing the program's launch ceremony of Wazir-e-Azam Apna Ghar Program, said that besides enabling people to own a house, the initiative will also act as a powerful economic multiplier to boost significant industrial growth and create jobs for a diverse workforce, ranging from manual laborers to engineers. "No program is quite as dear to me as this, for it holds the promise of revitalizing our

industrial and commercial sectors while paving the way for economic prosperity... This landmark program is the culmination of extensive deliberations and tireless effort, having successfully overcome a myriad of complex challenges," the prime minister told the ceremony attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Housing and Works Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, other federal ministers, banking professionals, representatives from the construction industry, and the beneficiaries of the program. He described the "Apna Ghar" initiative as a sacred obligation of any government, intended to support the needy who have long been deprived of the security of homeownership. Prime Minister Shehbaz, who earlier pushed the button to launch.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif distributes PM Apna Ghar Program cheques among the beneficiaries.

# Mojtaba Khamenei signals new Gulf chapter, calls for US exit from Hormuz

PEAK POINT



IRAN: Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said in a published written message on Thursday that a new chapter for the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz

has been taking shape since the war on Iran by the United States and Israel broke out on February 28. "Today, with two months having passed since the largest military campaign and aggression by the world's tyrants in the region and the disgraceful defeat of America in its plan, a new chapter for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is being written," he stated, according to Iran's Press TV. Iran's supreme leader said that Tehran would secure the Gulf region and eliminate what he described as "the enemy's abuses of the waterway," and spoke of the continued resistance of the Iranian people against foreign aggression. "Persian Gulf nations, long accustomed to their rulers' silence before aggressors, have witnessed in the past 60 days the resolve of Iran's naval forces and the IRGC, alongside the zeal and bravery of southern Iran's people and youth.

# Pakistan in contact with Somalia over sailors held hostage by pirates: FO

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is in contact with the Somali government over the hostage crisis involving Pakistani sailors aboard a hijacked oil tanker, the Foreign Office (FO) said on Thursday. Last week, armed pirates hijacked the oil tanker near the Somali coast and took 11 Pakistani crew members and the Indonesian captain of the vessel hostage. Addressing the weekly press briefing, FO spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said the pirates are also in touch with the ship's owner. Hijackings off Somalia have fuelled concerns about a resurgence of Indian Ocean raids by opportunistic pirates. Pirate attacks off the Somali coast peaked in 2011 — with gunmen launching attacks as far as 3,655km from the Somali coast. The incident also comes at a time of heightened regional tensions and disruptions to shipping routes, including the Strait of Hormuz. Speaking about the blockaded strait, Andrabi said it is a key transit route for maritime trade and oil shipments, reiterating support for an early restoration of normal maritime flow in the region. "The closure of the Strait of Hormuz affects the entire world," he added. He further elaborated that keeping the Strait of Hormuz open is essential for energy, trade, and the supply of goods, adding, "We hope the negotiations will succeed and the trade route will be restored." "We are in contact with the relevant parties on the matter. Regarding negotiations, both new and old proposals are on the table. We hope peace will prevail," Andrabi said, referring to efforts.

# Trump criticises Germany's Merz, tells him to stop interfering over Iran

MAHARA ZAMAN



WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump criticised German Chancellor Friedrich Merz on Thursday, saying he should focus on trying to end the Russia-Ukraine war and spend "less time on interfering" with the effort to tackle "the Iran nuclear threat". Trump has been sparring with Merz over the war in Iran in recent days. On Tuesday, he said Merz didn't know what he was talking about after the German leader said the Iranians were humiliating the US in talks to end the two-month-old war. "The chancellor of Germany should spend more time on ending the war with Russia/Ukraine (Where he has been totally ineffective!), and fixing his broken country, especially immigration and energy, and less time on interfering with those that are getting rid of the Iran nuclear threat, thereby making the world, including Germany, a safer place!" Trump said. Earlier today, Germany said it was "prepared" for a possible reduction in US troops threatened by Trump, while also stressing the importance of a "reliable transatlantic partnership".

# Govt hikes petrol price by Rs6, diesel by Rs19

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The government raised on Thursday the price of petrol by Rs6.51 per litre and that of high-speed diesel (HSD) by Rs19.39. Following the increase, the price of petrol stands at Rs393.35 per litre and HSD's at Rs380.19. The Petroleum Division's press release notifying the increase said the new prices would be effective from May 1. Petrol is mostly used in private transport, small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers and has a direct bearing on the budget of the middle and lower-middle class.

# Gaza flotilla organisers say 211 activists 'kidnapped' by Israel

PEAK POINT

GAZA: Organisers of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla on Thursday said Israel's army had "kidnapped" 211 activists, including a Paris city councillor, in a raid in international waters off Greece. Helene Coron, a spokeswoman for the French contingent of Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF), told an online news conference that the operation had taken place near the Greek island of Crete, at an "unprecedented" distance from the Gaza coast. Yasmine Scola, an activist on board the flotilla, said her colleagues had been "kidnapped" by Israel. Israel's foreign ministry had earlier put the number of those detained at 175. Former Jamaat-i-



Islami senator Mushtaq Ahmad was also a part of the flotilla mission. But it was not immediately clear if he was among those taken into Israeli custody. Coron said those intercepted included Paris Communist local councillor Raphaell Primet and another 10 French nationals. "We don't have the information for the other nationalities, but the boats were mixed in terms of nationality, so there were crew members from all 48 delegations," she said. Rome, in a government statement, called for the immediate release of "all the unlawfully detained Italians". Some ships still on route The organisers of the latest flotilla of pro-Palestinian activists seeking to break Israel's blockade on Gaza announced early on Thursday that their boats had been sur-

rounded by Israeli military ships while off the coast of Crete. "At the time of publishing this statement (06:30am Paris time, 04:30 GMT), at least 22 of the flotilla's 58 boats have been stormed by Israeli forces in complete violation of international law," the GSF said in a statement. According to an AFP verification, based on tracking data from the organisers, the boats were intercepted in the Greek exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Around thirty boats from the flotilla are still en route, most now in Greek territorial waters south of Crete, according to the same source. Coron said the operation had taken place over 1,000 kilometres from the Gaza Strip.

# Lawyer seeks Imran's release on humanitarian grounds as IHC hears appeals in £190m graft reference

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Counsel for former prime minister Imran Khan on Thursday urged the Islamabad High Court (IHC) to consider his client's release on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, citing prolonged solitary confinement and an eye infection. Defence counsel Salman Safdar's request came as the IHC took up appeals filed by Imran and his spouse, Bushra Bibi, against their conviction in the £190 million corruption reference. During the hearing, Safdar requested the court to suspend the sentence, arguing that the case had remained pending for over 16 months and had already faced 17 hearings in the appeal. Chief Justice Sardar Muhammad Sarfraz Dogar questioned whether the petitioner was willing to settle the matter conclusively through a final decision on the appeal, observing that suspension of sentence could be decided without a final relief, but the appeal itself should be concluded expeditiously. Safdar maintained that despite the passage of over a year, the defence had not received any relief. He highlighted that both Imran and Bushra Bibi.



# SPORTS



## Babar rises above the noise with match-winning statement

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: For Babar Azam, the roar that echoed around the National Bank Stadium on Tuesday night was more than just an ovation for a match-winning century. It was a release — of pressure, of scrutiny, and perhaps most of all, of a phase that had tested both his game and his resolve.

Standing at the centre of Peshawar Zalmi's emphatic 70-run victory over Islamabad United in the HBL Pakistan Super League Qualifier, Babar cut a composed figure in the post-match press conference. But beneath the calm exterior was a quiet acknowledgement of the significance of the moment.

"I can definitely say it is quite different in the sense that it was a semi-final of sorts for us," he said. "That's why it's very special for me."

"Performing in such a big match, the team needed me to stay out there as long as possible, and I think that's exactly what was required."

It was an innings that seemed to encapsulate both his past struggles and his renewed clarity. The century — his fourth in PSL history — not only propelled Zalmi into their first final in five years but also took him to the summit of the batting charts this season. With 588 runs, he now equals Fakhar Zaman's record for the most runs



in a single PSL campaign, with one match still to play.

Yet, the numbers tell only part of the story.

For nearly two years leading into this tournament, Babar had endured what, by his own lofty standards, could only be described as a lean patch. Questions were raised, criticisms grew louder — particularly around his strike rate — and the burden of expectation weighed heavier with each passing innings. Rather than deflecting that scrutiny, Babar chose introspection. "Time teaches you everything," he reflected. "With time and experience, you keep

learning. These things are part of life. I've learned a lot from this phase and it has also helped me a lot. When you fall and come back stronger, it feels really good."

Central to that resurgence has been a return, not to reinvention, but to familiarity. In a cricketing landscape increasingly obsessed with power-hitting, Babar admitted that he had briefly strayed from his natural method in an attempt to evolve his game.

Now, he has recalibrated. "There is no big difference," he explained. "The only thing is that I have become more disciplined and more focused."

"Sometimes in a short period you feel that what you are doing is right, but actually it isn't. So sometimes you have to accept that you need to go back to normal. back to the basics."

That decision, he suggested, was less about external advice and more about self-realisation.

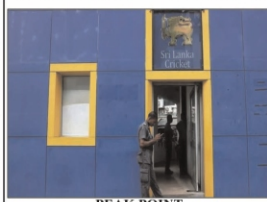
"No one else makes you realise it. You realise it yourself," he said. "You analyse yourself. You watch your videos or your old innings. That's how I prepare myself. I take motivation from that. But my belief is that your routines matter the most."

It is a philosophy that has seemingly anchored him through turbulent times. While motivation, in his words, is fleeting, routine has offered structure, a daily commitment to refinement that has gradually restored both rhythm and confidence.

"There were quite a few discussions," Babar added. "I also realised things myself. I looked at my batting, analysed what I was doing and what was going wrong, and worked on fixing it. The coaches helped a lot, and I also worked hard myself. These things go together."

The result has been a version of Babar that feels both familiar and evolved — a batter who still leans on timing and placement, but with a sharper awareness of tempo and situation. His strike rate this season, hovering above 146, reflects that subtle shift.

## Sri Lanka govt 'temporarily' takes over cricket board



PEAK POINT

SRI LANKA: Sri Lanka's government took control of the island's cricket board on Wednesday and appointed a nine-member interim administration to carry out "structural reforms".

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is the country's wealthiest sporting body, but it has been plagued by allegations of corruption and mismanagement.

World governing body, the International Cricket Council (ICC), suspended Sri Lanka for two months in 2023-2024, citing political interference in the running of the national board.

All administrative functions of Sri Lanka Cricket will be temporarily brought under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, effective today," the ministry said.

Shortly afterwards, the ministry appointed former investment banker and opposition politician Eran Wickramaratne to lead the board. Among the other members appointed by the government are former skipper Kumar Sangakkara and former Test players Sidath Wettimuny and Roshan Mahanama. The ministry said the interim committee will "address the current issues in cricket and implement structural reforms".

## Taptap Send, Arshad Nadeem Partner to Highlight Pakistan's Unsung Champions



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Taptap Send, the leading remittance app recognised by the State Bank of Pakistan as the #1 app for sending money to Pakistan by users and volume sent, has part-

nered with Olympic cricket continues to champion Arshad Nadeem to highlight the contributions of under-recognised athletes and overseas Pakistanis supporting their families back home. The initiative comes at a time when

lete from Pakistan to have secured an Olympic Gold Medal; previous gold medals for Pakistan were all won by the hockey team. Nadeem is among a small group of athletes who have brought global recognition to the country despite limited support.

Through this collaboration, Taptap Send aims to broaden the national conversation around representation in sports, while also drawing attention to the role of millions of Pakistanis living abroad whose financial contributions remain a critical pillar of the economy. Saim Chaudhary,



RAWALPINDI: Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Information & Broadcasting, Barrister Danyal Chaudhry, awarding trophies to the winning team of the CM Punjab Inter-District Kabaddi Championship 2026.

## Pakistani runners, diaspora set to make mark at London Marathon 2026

PEAK POINT

KARACHI: A strong contingent of Pakistani runners, both from within the country and across the diaspora, is set to feature in the 46th edition of the London Marathon on Sunday, one of the world's most prestigious long-distance races and part of the elite Abbott World Marathon Majors circuit. More than 50,000 runners from across the globe are expected to participate in the iconic 42.195km run, which winds through central London, passing historic landmarks and drawing massive roadside crowds. Widely regarded as one of the most vibrant and inclusive marathons, the London Marathon is also a global leader in charity fundraising, having raised over £1 billion since its inception. This year, 18 Pakistani runners, including athletes based in Pakistan and expatriates from the United

Kingdom, United States, Denmark, Norway, Austria, and the UAE, will take part, reflecting the growing footprint of Pakistani endurance runners on the global stage. The group includes 16 male and two female participants,

Having previously competed here, Lodhi described the experience as unmatched.

"Representing Pakistan on such a prestigious international platform is a tremendous honour," she said. "London is an incredible city,



with three Six Star finishers among them — a distinction awarded to those who complete all six World Marathon Majors. Among Pakistani participants, one name is UAE-based Sarah Lodhi, the winner of the Karachi Marathon 2025, who returns to London for her 12th career marathon.

and this marathon stands out as one of the most vibrant and lively among the world's major races. I feel truly humbled and grateful for this opportunity." Karachi's Amin Mukaty enters the race in peak condition after an intense training block, covering 180 kilometres over the past two weeks.

## Pakistan street child football team to depart for World Cup on tomorrow



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: A new chapter of hope and opportunity is set to unfold as Pakistan's street child football team prepares to depart for Mexico on Saturday to participate in the upcoming Street Child Football World Cup.

This will be international attention Pakistan's fourth to the challenges faced by street children, with the team receiving support from Muslim Hands and the Prime Minister's Youth Programme. The initiative aims to empower marginalised youth through sports while drawing goal is to connect

children with sports at national, regional, and global levels, while ensuring their fundamental rights — the right to dream, to play, to education, and to identity," he said.

The Prime Minister's Youth Programme, in collaboration with Muslim Hands, is backing the team not only for participation in the tournament but also to highlight issues related to child protection, access to education and equal opportunities for disadvantaged youth in Pakistan.

# Pakistan, Sri Lanka forge stronger cultural ties through Gandhara heritage and Buddhist legacy

## PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Sri Lanka agreed to strengthen bilateral relations in cultural cooperation, heritage preservation, and religious tourism during a high-level meeting held on Thursday.

The meeting between Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Rear Admiral (Rtd) Fred Senewiratne, and Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, focused on promoting the Gandhara Civilization and Buddhist

heritage as key areas of collaboration.

Pakistan, Sri Lanka forge stronger cultural ties through Gandhara heritage and Buddhist legacy

The Sri Lankan High Commissioner was accompanied by Most Venerable Thebo, a distinguished Buddhist monk from Sri Lanka. Welcoming the delegation, the Federal Minister said that Pakistan has opened its doors to Sri Lankan brothers and sisters, particularly the Buddhist community, to visit Pakistan and explore its



rich Buddhist heritage.

He emphasized that Pakistan remains committed to facilitating religious and cultural tourism, especially for countries with historical

and spiritual ties to Gandhara Civilization. Rear Admiral (Rtd) Fred Senewiratne appreciated the gesture and stated that it would be his pleasure to further strengthen

bilateral relations during his tenure, while creating more opportunities for Buddhist communities and cultural collaboration between the two countries. Minister Khichi remarked that Sri Lanka holds great importance for Pakistan as a time-tested and valued friend, stressing the need to enhance people-to-people contacts as a means of deepening mutual understanding and strengthening long-term cooperation. Most Venerable Thebo expressed gratitude to Pakistan for preserving the

heritage of Buddha and acknowledged the country's efforts in safeguarding Gandhara heritage sites. The Minister assured the delegation that Pakistan would continue to expand its efforts in this regard and welcomed suggestions from the Sri Lankan side to further improve protection and rehabilitation protocols for heritage sites. During the meeting, both sides discussed the establishment of a Gandhara Corner in Islamabad aimed at preserving and showcasing Gandhara artifacts.

# IBCC moves toward visitor free services under vision 2030

## NADEEM TANOLI

ISLAMABAD: The Inter Boards Coordination Commission has announced major reforms in attestation, equivalence, examination assessment and foreign board regulation, with Executive Director Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah saying IBCC is moving toward a fully digital and "visitor free" service model under its Vision 2030. Speaking at the launch of the IBCC Annual Report 2025 at the IBCC Secretariat in Islamabad, Dr. Mallah said the commission has launched its fifth consecutive annual report to present its yearly performance before the public and stakeholders. He said public facilitation remains the main focus of IBCC, especially for students seeking attestation,

equivalence and verification services. According to Dr. Mallah, the attestation system for matric and intermediate certificates has now been shifted online. Earlier, students had to carry manually sealed verification envelopes from boards, which created space for agents and manipulation. He said the new digital verification system has removed this middle layer, as verification now takes place directly between the concerned board and IBCC through software. The IBCC chief said equivalence services have also improved significantly, especially for foreign qualifications such as O-Level, A-Level and other international school systems. He said IBCC handles around 1,300 to 1,400 foreign qualifications and nearly 70% of equivalence applications are



now being received online. In normal cases, certificates are issued within three days, while urgent applications may be processed within one day. Dr. Mallah said IBCC has also brought foreign boards under a regulatory framework through an Act of Parliament. He said major foreign boards have entered the registration process, and Cambridge has also moved toward submitting its application. He said the objective is to bring foreign boards under compliance and regulatory oversight. A major part of the briefing focused on exam reforms. Dr. Mallah said

Pakistan's biggest examination problem remains rote learning, where students memorize textbooks instead of developing concepts, critical thinking and problem solving skills. To address this, IBCC has introduced a Model Assessment Framework and minimum standards for paper setting and checking. He said IBCC is supporting boards across Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Islamabad in technology based question papers, assessment and e-marking. He added that training sessions have been held for chairpersons, IT staff and teachers,

while item banks are being planned so that boards can generate papers through standardized question databases. On paper leaks, Dr. Mallah said it is unfortunate that the problem, earlier associated mainly with local boards, has now also surfaced in foreign board examinations. He said IBCC has written to foreign boards seeking their official version, but no action can be taken until their formal response is received. Responding to a question about foreign boards and money going abroad, he said seven foreign boards are operating in Pakistan, including Cambridge. He said one major reason families choose foreign boards is that Pakistan's Grade 12 qualification is not fully recognized abroad, forcing many students to take a foundation year if they

seek admission in countries such as the UK. Dr. Mallah said IBCC is working to improve the credibility of Pakistani boards through better assessment, digital systems and teacher training. He said technology integration, QR coded documents and international standard processes have increased institutional trust, while IBCC's ISO certification has also been renewed. The IBCC chief said the commission's long term goal is to reduce student hardship by coordinating with boards, HEC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that students do not have to visit multiple offices for document verification. Under Vision 2030, he said IBCC wants students to complete their work from home without physical visits.

# Opinion & Editorial

## The shifting sands of Asia

### Khurram Husain

HERE is a specific kind of quiet that settles over a capital city when its ruling elite begins to realise that the ground beneath their feet is moving. In Canberra and Melbourne, among the scholars and officials who manage the delicate machinery of the Australian state's foreign policy, that quiet is palpable. There is the hushed intensity of a room where the old maps no longer match the terrain.

I am currently here meeting those tasked with studying and navigating these waters, and the sense one gets is unmistakable: Asia is undergoing a crucial transition. For decades, the regional order was built on two sturdy pillars: American security protection and American economic dynamism. Today, both pillars are trembling. The region is waking up to a world where it can no longer outsource its security to Washington or rely solely on the American consumer to drive its growth. Instead, it is being forced to find its own security architecture and cultivate its own sources of economic dynamism.

The realisation is not unique to this part of the world. Last year, a similar trip to Europe yielded almost identical observations. In Brussels, the conversation was dominated by the 'Great Retreat' — the fear that the Atlantic alliance is fraying and that Europe must finally

learn to speak the language of power on its own. Now, standing on the other side of the globe, the echoes are hauntingly familiar. Whether in the North Atlantic or the Indo-Pacific, the era of the "unconditional umbrella" is drawing to a close.

The catalyst for this upheaval, of course, is a burgeoning China. Beijing's shadow now looms over every conversation here, presenting Asia with a stark and unprecedented set of challenges and opportunities. For many, China is the indispensable economic partner; for almost all, it is the primary strategic concern. All countries in the region — from the middle powers like Australia to the emerging giants of Southeast Asia — are struggling to find an arrangement that allows them to both confront the risks of Chinese assertiveness and capture the rewards of its economic engine.

Scholars and officials are intensely curious about Pakistan's role in the current global firestorm. In this shifting landscape, older arrangements like the Quad — comprising the US, Japan, India, and Australia — remain steadfast anchors. They represent the 'old guard' of the rules-based order, providing a sense of continuity and a collective front. Yet, even as these anchors hold, we are seeing the emergence of nimble groupings. These 'minilateral' and ad hoc security pacts suggest that the new chal-

lenges coming up in the world are rendering the traditional, broad-based arrangements outdated.

Interestingly, amidst these high-level strategic debates, a recurring theme has emerged in almost every meeting I have attended. Scholars and officials here are intensely curious about Pakistan's role in the current global firestorm. Specifically, everyone asks about Pakistan's ongoing diplomacy regarding the war on Iran. The fact that Islamabad has positioned itself as an indefatigable mediator — hosting the 'Islamabad Talks' and securing critical ceasefire extensions from the Trump administration — has caught the world by surprise. This has resulted in Pakistan commanding huge, almost academic curiosity. There is a palpable desire among the policymaking community to understand what they can learn from our specific experience. In a world where most nations feel forced to choose a side, Pakistan's ability to remain 'all-weather friends' with Beijing while also becoming a key diplomatic interlocutor for a mercurial Trump administration is seen as a masterclass in high-wire balancing. They are looking to our history of navigating great power competition to see if there is a template for their own survival. Two questions, in particular, keep popping up with remarkable frequency.

Courtesy Dawn

## The problems beyond science

### Muhammad Hamid Zaman

THE idea of science-based policy in a society is a relatively simple one. Let rigorous science generate evidence for what works and what does not, and then incorporate those findings in a policy to benefit society. Of course, it is much easier said than done. Scientific findings can be murky and different studies can contradict each other. Research funded by for-profit entities can be biased and steer researchers in a direction that are good for the companies, but not necessarily the public. Thinking only about the good of the majority may mean minority groups that are vulnerable or historically marginalised may continue to suffer. Lately, pushback through misinformation on issues ranging from vaccines to climate change has further undermined the foundational ideas of science-based policy.

And then there is something else. A complete disregard for scientific findings and predictions, which are not disputed on merit or ethics, but simply because there is no interest in pursuing them. In 2019, when an HIV outbreak in rural Sindh made international headlines, many in the public health sector of the country had warned that this was unlikely to be an anomaly. In fact, infectious disease researchers had been warning about micro epidemics in other parts of the country, including southern Punjab. In 2024, when a cluster of patients were infected with HIV at the dialysis unit at Nishtar Hospital in Multan due to criminal negligence, public health practitioners had warned once again about other likely outbreaks. We now know that they were right. Another outbreak, this time in Taunsa, has affected several hundred children who were given the disease by those who were entrusted to treat them. The BBC report that uncovered the awful tragedy in Taunsa is difficult to watch. Those children, whose lives have been permanently altered, are not some distant people; they are our own children.

Courtesy Tribune



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## Fake degrees proliferate

ANOTHER chapter has been added to Pakistan's rich history of academic fraud, with 1,200 lawyers being sent notices by the Punjab Bar Council regarding the authentication of their degrees. In all likelihood, only a small fraction of the lawyers would actually have suspicious qualifications, as the most common problem in such disputes is simply the unwillingness of some people to jump through hoops to have their qualifications verified. To its credit, the Higher Education Commission has taken several steps to improve the process, including initiating a blockchain-based attestation system that will automatically integrate graduate records from institutions. Under this framework, degrees will be added to the HEC blockchain upon graduation, granting students immediate digital access while enabling employers, government bodies and embassies to verify credentials with a single click. The HEC must move decisively to expand its programme from the current 25 participating universities to making it compulsory for all degree-awarding institutions, public and private. If the system is to truly serve its purpose, every degree issued in Pakistan must be automatically deposited into the database the moment graduation requirements are met.

## Commissioning ceremony of Pakistan Navy's first Hangor-class attack submarine held in China



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The commissioning ceremony of the first Hangor-class attack submarine, PNS Hangor, was held in China's Sanya city, with President Asif Ali Zardari and the naval chief attending the event.

President Zardari, who is on a visit to China, participated as the chief guest, while Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf was also present, according to a press

release by the Pakistan Navy.

President Zardari described the commissioning of Hangor as a historic milestone in the navy's modernisation, affirming Pakistan's resolve to maintain a "robust, balanced and credible defence posture".

He affirmed that Pakistan is fully capable of defending its sovereignty, protecting its maritime interests and ensuring the security of its economic lifelines. "The advanced submarine strengthens Pakistan's

maritime defence, protects economic lifelines and reflects strategic partnership with China," a statement by the Presidency said.

The submarine class, named after the PNS Hangor, is a diesel-electric attack submarine with air-independent propulsion (AIP) technology, which allows it to travel over greater distances before resurfacing.

Meanwhile, Admiral Ashraf highlighted that disruptions at critical maritime choke points increasingly threaten global trade and energy security. He noted that maintaining a "stable, rule-based maritime order demands technologically advanced naval forces". The naval chief observed that Hangor-class submarines — armed with state-of-the-art weapons, advanced sensors and AIP technology — "will be key in preserving maritime order and stability in the region". "These submarines will play a pivotal role in deterring aggression and ensuring security."

## Aurangzeb reaffirms commitment to fostering collaborative environment with business community

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering a collaborative and consultative environment with the business community to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The ministers held a meeting with Atif Ikram Sheikh, President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), and Zahid Hussain, Chairman, Policy Advisory Board, (FPCCI), to discuss key issues related to the business environment, financial sector dynamics, and ongoing reform initiatives.

At the outset of the meeting, the Finance Minister appreciated the continued engagement of the business community and acknowledged the constructive role of FPCCI in providing policy input and facilitating dialogue between the government and the private sector.

He emphasized the importance of sustained consultation to ensure that reforms remain responsive to industry needs and support long-term economic stability.

The Finance Minister underscored the importance of a predictable and transparent regulatory environment, noting that policy continuity and institutional strengthening are essential for building investor confidence and addressing the needs of the business community.

He highlighted ongoing efforts to advance end-to-end digitalization, improve compliance systems, and enhance transparency across revenue administration.

In this context, he also noted progress towards operationalizing an independent Tax Policy Office under the Finance Division, formally separating tax policy formulation from the Federal Board of Revenue.

He further emphasized that this institutional reform is aimed at strengthening policy formulation, enhancing transparency.

## Naqvi condemns Afghan Taliban attack targeting civilians in SW

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the incident in which the Afghan Taliban targeted civilian populations in the Angoor Adda area of South Waziristan, terming it an inhumane and unacceptable act.

Naqvi said that the collusion between the Afghan Taliban and the "fitna-e-khawari" to target innocent women and children was an extremely barbaric and cruel act. He added that by attacking civilian areas, the Afghan Taliban had blatantly violated the Charter of Human Rights and trampled on globally accepted humanitarian principles. "Targeting civilian populations is a grave breach of international humanitarian laws," the interior minister stated, emphasizing that such attacks on innocent citizens can never be tolerated under any circumstances.

Naqvi further said that Pakistan's security forces were giving a strong and fitting response to the Afghan Taliban's unprovoked.

## Abbasi conducts hands-on railway track inspection from Golra Railway Station to Rawalpindi

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi adopted a proactive and hands-on approach by personally inspecting the railway track from Golra Railway Station to Rawalpindi Railway Station while traveling on a track trolley.

During the visit, the minister emphasized that field inspections are essential to understanding ground realities.

He said that traveling on the track trolley allowed him to closely observe the condition of the railway tracks, assess operational matters and gain firsthand insight into inspection procedures.

The Divisional Superintendent (DS) Rawalpindi accompanied the minister during the inspection and provided detailed briefings on various



operational aspects of the railway system.

Hanif Abbasi directed the concerned officials to remain more active in the field and ensure effective on-ground monitoring.

He also instructed railway authorities to further improve track maintenance, operational efficiency and passenger facilities.

At Rawalpindi Railway Station, passengers expressed pleasant surprise upon seeing the minister among them, appreciating his direct engagement.

## Strong federation key to Pakistan's stability, youth must lead with unity: Rubina Khalid

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Emphasizing that the strength of Pakistan lies in the stability of its federation, Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid Thursday urged young people to take an active role in promoting national unity and institutional stability, calling them the driving force behind the country's future progress.

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She expressed these views while addressing the oath-taking ceremony of the Federal Youth Parliament, where she attended as chief guest and administered the oath to the newly elected office



bearers.

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Addressing the ceremony Senator Rubina Khalid stated that a strong federation is the foundation of a strong Pakistan, and when the federation is stable, all its constituent units are strengthened as well. She urged the youth to play an active role in promoting national unity and institutional stability. Strong federation key to Pakistan's stability.

## Amb Sheikh meets US Congressman Brian Mast to discuss bilateral ties, regional peace

PEAK POINT

WASHINGTON: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States Rizwan Saeed Sheikh on Thursday met with Chairman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee Brian Mast to discuss matters of mutual interest and regional peace.

"Delighted to meet Rep. Brian Mast, Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee. Thanked him for his acknowledgment of Pakistan's key role in facilitating peace in the Middle East and beyond," the ambassador wrote on his X timeline. The two sides held a broad and constructive exchange of views on the regional and global situation. During the



discussion, Pakistan reiterated its commitment to promoting dialogue and continuing to play a positive role in the resolution of conflicts. Furthermore, the two sides discussed possibilities and a roadmap to further strengthen the Pakistan-US partnership, which holds historical and consequential importance in the emerging global landscape, and explored ways to enhance bilateral cooperation.

## Historic library of Bannu has been restored to its original form

ABDUL SALAM BAITAB

BANNU: The historic library of Bannu has been restored to its original form. This library was established in 1905 under the directives of Queen Victoria, with the primary objective of promoting a love for books among the people of the area and facilitating the pursuit of knowledge. Considering the limited population at that time, it was constructed close to the city center, which was then located within the city walls. The library building was designed in a very elegant and beautiful manner. At

one time, the Pakistan National Centre also operated from this library, and various literary activities used to take place here. However, over time, the building fell into a state of disrepair. Attention was first given to it by TMO Yousaf Khan after he assumed charge, but recently it has been fully restored to its original condition through the special interest and efforts of the district administration, particularly Deputy Commissioner Bannu Muhammad Faheem Khan and Assistant Commissioner Allah Nawaz Khan. Living



nations preserve their historical heritage so that it may be safeguarded for future generations. Bannu has many such historical sites that urgently require preservation. The district

administration has recognized this need and is making efforts to restore these sites to their original form. Among them is the Queen Victoria Library, now known as the Municipal

Library, which has recently been restored to its original condition. These views were expressed by Chief Inspector Wali Ayaz Khan while briefing the students of Government Postgraduate College about the library. He said that this library has had a deep connection with the educational development of Bannu, and many prominent officers currently serving in high-ranking positions have used this very library to acquire knowledge. He further stated that restoring the library to its original condition was an extremely challenging task, which

was accomplished through great effort and dedication. The library now also displays photographs related to the history of Bannu, and its laws have been adorned with decorative lighting and electric lamps. The primary purpose of the restoration was to preserve the library as a historical monument for future generations. After restoration, the library has been reopened to the general public and to those who have a passion for knowledge. On this occasion, students asked various informative questions, which were answered accordingly.