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## PM reaffirms commitment to eradicate polio as cases drop sharply in 2026

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed the government's resolve to completely eradicate polio from Pakistan, noting encouraging progress as only one case has been reported so far in 2026. Chairing a high-level review meeting on polio eradication at the Prime Minister's House, the prime minister appreciated the tireless efforts of anti-polio teams working across the country and reiterated that eliminating the disease remains a national priority, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. The prime minister emphasized that sustained coordination between federal and provincial authorities, frontline workers, and partner organizations would remain essential

to achieving the goal of a polio-free Pakistan.

During the briefing, the meeting was informed that only a single polio case had been reported this year from Sujawal district, compared with 74 cases in 2024 and 31 cases in 2025, reflecting a significant downward trend. No cases have been reported so far in 2026 from Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Islamabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, or Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The officials further informed the meeting that the number of polio-affected districts declined from 67 in the first quarter of 2025 to 23 in the first quarter of 2026. National household coverage during anti-polio campaigns remained consistently high at 98 percent.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on Polio eradication from the country.

## Fly Jinnah to resume domestic flights after five years, announces Khawaja Asif

PEAK POINT



ISLAMABAD: Defence and Aviation Minister Khawaja Asif has announced the resumption of domestic operations by Fly Jinnah, marking a significant development in

Pakistan's aviation sector.

In a statement shared on X, the minister revealed that after nearly five years of suspension, the airline will begin operating two daily flights between Lahore and Islamabad starting May 1, 2026.

He highlighted that the service will offer greater convenience to passengers, especially professionals such as lawyers and businesspeople, as well as patients and elderly travelers who require efficient and comfortable transport.

Khawaja Asif also noted that the move aligns with the government's austerity efforts by helping reduce fuel consumption, easing road congestion, and saving valuable time for commuters.

Reaffirming the government's broader vision, he said efforts are underway to expand air connectivity both domestically and internationally.

## 'Good news' of peace talks possible as soon as Friday, Trump tells NY Post

MAHPARA ZAMAN



NEW YORK: American media outlet The New York Post reported on Wednesday that "good news" about the second round of scheduled talks between the United States and Iran in Islamabad could be possible as soon as Friday, according to President Donald Trump and Pakistani sources.

"Sources in Islamabad touted positive mediation efforts with Tehran, renewing the possibility of more peace talks within the next '36 to 72 hours'. Asked about this possible breakthrough by The Post, Trump, in a text message, said: 'It's possible! President DJT,'" the outlet reported.

It further said that in the time since last night's extension of the ceasefire between the warring countries, Pakistan had "continued working its diplomatic channels with Iran", and the time period was based on an assessment of that work, according to a source.

"The ceasefire is holding despite heightened rhetoric, indicating positive intent on both sides," the source was quoted by the outlet as saying. "No military escalation from either side. Pakistan remains the key mediator," the person added.

Meanwhile, Axios reported, citing unnamed officials that Trump's negotiators are worried that there may not be anyone in Tehran to approve a deal with Washington.

The report said that Trump's negotiators believe a deal to end the war and address "what's left of Iran's nuclear programme".

## NZ minister slammed for 'butter chicken tsunami' comments about planned FTA with India

PEAK POINT



NEW ZEALAND: A senior New Zealand minister has sparked outrage by deriding a planned free trade deal with India as a "butter chicken tsunami".

Wellington is poised to sign a free trade agreement with India in New Delhi next week.

The New Zealand government has hailed it as a "once in a generation" deal that will give its businesses access to the world's most populated country's vast domestic market.

But its ruling coalition partner, the right-wing populist NZ First party, has pulled support over fears it will open the country's borders to thousands of Indian nationals.

The split will mean the government will need the opposition Labour Party to vote in favour when legislation goes before parliament in the coming months.

On Monday, the party's deputy leader and Minister for Regional Development, Shane Jones, said his party would "never accept" the deal.

"I don't care how much criticism we get, I am just never going to agree with a butter chicken tsunami."

## 2 Pakistani astronauts selected as candidates for China's space programme

PEAK POINT

CHINA: China has selected two Pakistani astronauts as candidates for its manned space programme, state broadcaster CCTV reported on Wednesday. Both will travel to China for training, and one will participate in a flight mission as a payload specialist and become the first foreign astronaut in China's space station, CCTV said. Meanwhile, China Daily reported on Wednesday that the astronauts were identified as Muhammad Zeeshan Ali and Khurram Daud. The report said the two had passed multiple rounds of selection procedures and will soon come to China to take part.

## Islamabad's Red Zone remains off-limits; other routes in twin cities reopen to public after days-long closure

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad's Red Zone remained sealed to the general public on Wednesday, but other routes in the twin cities, sealed earlier for the security of foreign delegations visiting the capital, were opened to the public, easing some hardship faced by the residents.

US Vice President JD Vance and his team had been expected to arrive on Wednesday morning, but the White House abruptly changed plans, with Iran's negotiating delegation also attending a decision on delaying talks.

Major roads have been closed in recent days to facilitate the arrival of foreign delegations and advance teams.

Markets were quiet,

government officials since Sunday, with access restricted to critical offi-



children attended classes online and security forces enforced strict curbs on entering the vast Red Zone. The security in the Red Zone, where government buildings and offices are located, remained high. There was a heavy deployment of law enforcement personnel and the army was patrolling the area.

Public entry to the Red Zone has remained sealed

since Sunday, with access restricted to critical offi-

cial and some staff sticking to previous orders to work from home.

However, police deployment plans made earlier in anticipation of the foreign delegations' arrival were not implemented, as official confirmation of the talks was still awaited. Meanwhile, according to a Dawn correspondent in Islamabad, the situation in most of the other areas of the cap-

ital was "normal". Out of the four bus terminals situated across the capital, only Chungi No. 26 was opened on Tuesday. In Rawalpindi, bus stand services on Peshawar Road were also restored a day earlier. On the other hand, Pirwadhai and Faizabad bus stands remained closed, and goods transport has not resumed yet.

However, a correspondent in Rawalpindi said no shortage of green groceries, dairy, and meat and poultry products had been witnessed as of Tuesday.

A Dawn correspondent in Islamabad said there had been no transportation of goods to and from the twin cities. The public sentiment seems to be mixed.

## South Korean fighter pilot fined for mid-air photos that caused crash

PEAK POINT



SOUTH KOREAN: A South Korean fighter pilot has been ordered to pay 88 million won (\$59,200) in damages over a 2021 mid-air collision he caused by trying to get photos and videos of himself flying, an official report said on Wednesday.

The pilot, whose identity was withheld, wanted to capture footage of his last sortie before reassignment, according to the report by the Board of Audit and Inspection. While travelling at 578 kilometres per hour (359 mph), he had the pilot of a second plane and another colleague take snaps of him on their phones. In search of the perfect shot, he flipped his jet and flew close to the other aircraft, resulting in a misjudgement.



# SPORTS



## Hyderabad Kingsmen defeat Multan Sultans in pulsating PSL 11 encounter



**PEAK POINT**  
KARACHI: Hyderabad Kingsmen registered their fourth consecutive victory in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 11 as they beat Multan Sultans by four wickets at Karachi's National Bank Stadium on Wednesday.

Set to chase a daunting target, the Kingsmen knocked the winning runs for the loss of six wickets and three balls to spare, courtesy of Usman's record-setting fourth century in the tournament.

The Kingsmen got off to a dismal start to their innings as they lost Maaz Sadaqat (seven) in the second over with just 13 runs on

the board. Following the early stutter, Labuschagne then knitted a one-sided 34-run partnership for the second wicket with Saim Ayub, who could muster five off 10 before falling victim to Ismail, who struck again on his next delivery, dismissing Kusal Perera for a golden duck, to reduce the Kingsmen to 48/3.

The back-to-back dismissals paved the way for Usman to walk out and bat at No.5 and although he would have been caught behind on the first delivery had Sultans appealed, he turned the game on its head with belligerent

hitting. Usman shared a 123-run partnership for the fourth wicket with captain Marnus Labuschagne, during which both batters brought up their half-centuries.

Experienced pacer Peter Siddle eventually broke the partnership in the 16th over by dismissing compatriot Labuschagne, who made 61 off 41 deliveries with the help of nine fours.

Meanwhile, Usman continued his onslaught and brought up his well-deserved century on the final delivery of the 17th over bowled by Mohammad Wasim Jr. Siddle, however, caused a

major stir in Kingsmen's pursuit by dismissing Glenn Maxwell (two) and centurion Usman in the pulsating 18th over.

Usman remained the top-scorer for the Kingsmen with a quick-fire 101 off just 47 deliveries, studded with 10 sixes and five fours.

Following Usman's dismissal, Kingsmen required a further 26 off 12 deliveries and Hassan Khan's blazing 24-run cameo steered them over the line with three balls to spare.

For Sultans, Siddle and Ismail took three wickets each, while the rest went wicketless.

## PCB investigates all-rounder Mohammad Nawaz for alleged recreational drug use



**PEAK POINT**  
LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday began an investigation into the alleged use of recreational drugs by spin-all-rounder Mohammad Nawaz.

A spokesperson for the cricket board said that after completing an investigation, it would inform the International Cricket Council (ICC) about the player's medical history.

He added that until then, Nawaz would continue to represent Multan Sultans in the ongoing HBL Pakistan Super League.

Meanwhile, ESPNcricinfo reported a PCB spokesperson as saying that the results of this process would be communicated to the ICC on Wednesday. It also alleged that the player had tested positive for recreational drug use.

"ESPNcricinfo has learned that the positive result comes from testing during the T20 World Cup earlier this year," the report added.

It further added that Nawaz's deal to join Surrey for the T20 Blast — set to run from May 26 to July 18 — in England had fallen through as a result.

The report added that Surrey and ICC declined to comment on the matter.

## PSL 11: Mendis, Farhan steer Peshawar Zalmi to dominant win against Karachi Kings



**PEAK POINT**  
LAHORE: Kusal Mendis and Farhan Yousaf's fifties, backed by Ali Raza's four-wicket haul, powered Peshawar Zalmi to a commanding victory over Karachi Kings as the former continue their flawless run in the Pakistan Super

League (PSL) 11. Chasing 183, Zalmi reached the target in 18.5 overs for the loss of just three wickets, powered by blistering knocks from Mendis and Farhan.

The chase began confidently as openers James Vince and skipper Babar Azam provided a solid founda-

tion, scoring freely and setting the tone with a fluent partnership. Mendis found solid support from Ali provided the breakthrough, removing Vince for 16 off 10 balls, which included two fours and a six, ending the 37-run opening stand.

Zalmi then lost their second wicket inside the powerplay as Abbas Afridi dismissed Babar Azam, who made 25 off 19 deliveries with four boundaries and a six, leaving the side at 45-2 in 5.2 overs. Farhan anchored the innings in fine style, continuing to score at a strong pace as he brought up his fourth PSL half-century. Peshawar slipped to 95-3 when Aaron Hardie was dismissed

cheaply for five off six and setting the tone balls by Khushdil Shah. Mendis found solid support from Ali provided the breakthrough, removing Vince for 16 off 10 balls, which included two fours and a six, ending the 37-run opening stand.

Zalmi then lost their second wicket inside the powerplay as Abbas Afridi dismissed Babar Azam, who made 25 off 19 deliveries with four boundaries and a six, leaving the side at 45-2 in 5.2 overs.

Farhan remained unbeaten on 54 off 35 balls, hitting four fours and three sixes, while Mendis topped scored with a century, including five fours and four sixes.

Hardie was dismissed cheaply for five off six and setting the tone balls by Khushdil Shah. Mendis found solid support from Ali provided the breakthrough, removing Vince for 16 off 10 balls, which included two fours and a six, ending the 37-run opening stand.

Zalmi then lost their second wicket inside the powerplay as Abbas Afridi dismissed Babar Azam, who made 25 off 19 deliveries with four boundaries and a six, leaving the side at 45-2 in 5.2 overs.

## 'Pure joy' for Matarazzo after Copa del Rey triumph



## Pakistan's Mikael, Abubakar, Ahtesham reach ITF J60 Tennis leg-



**PEAK POINT**  
LAHORE: Pakistan's tennis trio Mikael Ali Baig, Abubakar Talha and Ahtesham Humayun advanced to the quarterfinals of the Treet ITF Pakistan Syed Dilawar Abbas Memorial Junior Tennis Championship (J-60, Leg-3) at the PTF Tennis Complex, Islamabad. In the boys' singles pre-quarterfinals, Pakistan enjoyed a productive outing with multiple players pro-

gressing to the next round. Mikael Ali Baig delivered a dominant performance, brushing aside compatriot Abdaar Ali in straight sets 6-1, 6-0, while Abubakar Talha cruised past Inam Qadir with remarkable ease 6-0, 6-1. Ahtesham Humayun also impressed with a composed win over Hong Kong's Ho Wan Yeung 6-3, 6-3 while Hamza Roman added to the home success by overcoming China's Ruoyu Hua in

a competitive two-set encounter 6-4, 7-5. However, it was a mixed day overall for the hosts. Promising youngster Amir Mazari fell to Russia's Arzen Bukin, while Muhammad Afzal was outclassed by Sri Lanka's Ganuka Fernando. Despite these setbacks, Pakistan's strong presence in the last eighth reflects the growing depth in the country's junior tennis circuit.

## National karate player Arzoo Haider succumbs to injuries



**PEAK POINT**  
ISLAMABAD: National karate player Arzoo Haider Ali, who was injured after falling from a scooter last week, died at a

hospital with severe head injuries on Saturday. She was on her way to participate in a karate championship at Ayub Sports Complex when she met with a traffic accident.

She had represented Balochistan in several competitions and won gold and silver medals at the National Games. Earlier this week, Balochistan Sports Secretary Durra Baloch, on the instructions of Balochistan Chief Minister Mir

Sarfraz Bugti, had visited the hospital to inquire about the national karate player. During the visit, the secretary met the player's family and assured them of full support for medical treatment. He had emphasised that the provincial government's Sports Department was extending all possible assistance and maintaining close contact with the family to ensure Arzoo received the best care.



# EARTH DAY 2026: Zero-Waste pathways stressed to cut methane, plastic emissions in climate plans

**PEAK POINT**  
ISLAMABAD: Experts at a consultation called for practical measures to reduce waste-sector emissions, tackle plastic pollution, and strengthen Pakistan's climate commitments under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The consultation, titled: Earth Day 2026: Waste Sector Emissions, Plastics, and NDC Pathways in Pakistan, was organized by Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in collaboration with Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) Working

Group here on Wednesday. The experts said Pakistan's waste sector offers significant opportunities for climate mitigation through methane reduction targets, improved monitoring systems, circular plastic economy initiatives, city-level waste management reforms, and stronger integration of SMEs and informal waste workers. The consultation aimed to generate actionable policy recommendations to address methane emissions, promote zero-waste pathways, and integrate circular economy solutions into Pakistan's climate

planning framework. Ambily Adityan, Programme Officer for Zero Waste Cities, GAIA said that the waste sector, particularly landfills, is the third-largest source of methane emissions globally, and methane is more than 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide in the short-term. She said reducing methane emissions from organic waste represents one of the fastest and most cost-effective climate mitigation strategies. More than 45 countries have already endorsed the COP29 declaration on reducing methane emissions from organ-

ic waste, she said, adding that significant new financial resources are now being directed towards methane action in the waste sector as countries prepare enhanced climate plans ahead of COP30. Highlighting that plastic contributes to greenhouse gas emissions across its lifecycle from fossil fuel extraction and refining to manufacturing and disposal, Ambily warned that by 2050, plastics alone could account for over one-third of remaining global carbon emissions if current trends continue. She emphasized that reuse systems could

eliminate up to 75 per cent of plastic packaging emissions, while composting and improved landfill management could reduce methane emissions by as much as 95 per cent. Highlighting GAIA's global achievements, she said hundreds of cities are committed to adopted zero-waste strategies, several countries have adopted policies to reduce single-use plastics, and international financial institutions, including the World Bank, have scaled back support for waste-to-energy incineration projects. She stressed that waste-to-energy

incineration is not a climate solution but a carbon-intensive and toxic option that can worsen environmental and public health outcomes. Zainab Naeem, Head of Ecological Sustainability and Circular Economy at SDPI, said SDPI had initiated consultations to adopted position papers aimed at guiding national climate planning and strengthening the waste component in Pakistan's updated NDC framework. She noted that although changes in government priorities had influenced the vision for revised NDCs.

## NCA Overpayment of Rs. 88.62 Million Found Due to Price Adjustment Irregularities

**NADEEM TANOLI**  
ISLAMABAD: An audit report has exposed a series of irregularities in the payment of price adjustments for construction work at the National College of Arts (NCA), Lahore, resulting in an overpayment of Rs. 88.62 million. The audit, which reviewed the 2024-25 financials, scrutinized the contractor payments made under the head of the "Construction of Graduate Block," revealing that management paid inflated rates for work done at escalated prices without proper verification. According to the audit find-

ings, the management paid a total of Rs. 391.665 million to the contractor for price adjustments, but a closer review uncovered multiple discrepancies. The first payment, made in April 2022, was for work completed before that date, and subsequent payments followed similarly inflated rates despite the work being delayed beyond the initially agreed timelines. The audit revealed that the contractor, by delaying claims, managed to secure higher payments at escalated rates, contrary to the terms of the contract. Key irregularities identified

included the failure of the Site Supervisor to maintain a daily record of the work progress, which is required under the measurement book guidelines. Furthermore, the audit highlighted that payments were made based on the price bulletins from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics that did not align with the actual dates of work execution. For instance, the first payment was based on rates applicable in April 2022, even though work began in October 2021 and finished by February 2022. The audit raised concerns over payments made for work com-

pleted months earlier, with the contractor submitting claims at higher rates despite delayed submissions. In the 2nd Running Bill, the contractor's claim for work done in October 2022 was paid at escalated rates, although the work was supposed to be completed earlier. Similarly, in the 3rd Running Bill, despite work being completed in January and February 2023, the contractor's claim for March 2023 rates was paid. Despite the management's assertion that payments were in line with the price adjustment provisions of the Pakistan Engineering

Council (PEC), the audit challenged this claim, asserting that the management misinterpreted the contract terms. According to the audit, the contractor should have been paid at the rates prevailing 28 days before the actual work, not 28 days before the submission of claims. This misinterpretation led to a financial loss of Rs. 88.62 million, the audit emphasized. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), led by Chairman Syed Naveed Qamar, has directed the management of NCA to provide supporting documentation and detailed calculations for

the price adjustments. The committee has also called for further scrutiny to ensure that the overpayments are recovered from the contractor and returned to the government treasury. The Development Advisory Committee (DAC), in its meetings on January 15-16, 2025, and March 3, 2026, instructed NCA's management to seek clarification from the competent forum regarding the payment mechanism and share the findings with the audit team. As of the latest update, the management has yet to provide the necessary documentation for a thorough review.

# Opinion & Editorial


  
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## Lingering threat of polio

The recently concluded nationwide anti-polio campaign is being called a resounding success by those directly involved in the vaccination drive. The National Emergency Operations Center reports that over 44.7 million children under five received the vaccine, a figure just shy of the 45 million target, representing over 99% coverage. A polio expert calls the result "an achievement", noting that previous campaigns routinely missed 800,000 to 1 million children, roughly three times as many as this year's 300,000. Assuming the figures are accurate, this is certainly good news, but casting it as a triumph may be a bit more complicated. While 300,000 children represent a tiny fraction of the target number, it is still a very high raw number: If only 1% of 1% of the 300,000 children who missed vaccination were to get polio, it would be 30 children - almost exactly the number of new cases detected in all of last year. The unvaccinated children are thus not a marginal gap. In fact, it is why polio eradication efforts keep failing in the last mile. It is also notable that family travel, outright refusals and security constraints are still being blamed, despite all of these problems having workarounds. For example, the government could set up vaccination counters at bus-stops and airports, while continuing to use awareness campaigns to encourage people to seek out vaccinations, rather than waiting at home for vaccinators to come knocking.

## Rethinking black money

**Nadeem ul Haque**  
**Shahid Kardar**

IN Pakistan, 'black money' is frequently mentioned as a problem that must be eliminated. Politicians, officials and talk shows describe it as money that is illegal, untaxed or linked to crime. However, this way of thinking is too simple and hides the real issue. When very different kinds of money are grouped together, it leads to poor policies. These policies create confusion, unfair treatment, and slow economic growth. Because of this mindset, many people choose to hide their wealth instead of using it productively. Money remains stored in cash, gold or property instead of being invested in businesses. The government's failure to understand the differences between types of wealth is one of the reasons Pakistan struggles to grow and depends heavily on foreign aid. To fix this, we must first understand that 'black money' is not just one thing. It comes from three different sources, and each requires a different response. The first type is money earned through criminal activities. This includes drug trafficking, smuggling, illegal gambling and bribery. This money should be investigated and punished through strict enforcement. The second type is money earned legally but hidden to avoid taxes, by reporting less income on sale of goods and

services or by faking expenses to reduce taxes owed. This money is not criminal in origin, but the act of hiding it makes it illegal. It should be brought into the tax system with appropriate penalties. The third type is the most common and important. This is money that is neither criminal nor always deliberately hidden. It simply exists outside the formal system because that system is complicated, unreliable or unfair. Many people earn in cash, save informally, or hold assets in someone else's name because dealing with official systems is difficult or risky. Most of what is called 'black money' actually falls into this third category. This does not mean avoiding taxes is acceptable, but it does mean we must understand why people stay outside the system. When the government treats all wealth as suspicious, it does not make it disappear but pushes it further into hiding. Pakistan cannot grow if it continues to treat its own savings as suspicious. Another common misunderstanding is that the formal economy and the informal economy are separate. In reality, they are closely connected. Informal businesses buy from formal companies, and formal companies sell to informal ones. Money flows between them constantly. For example, in property deals, it is common to conceal part of the payment even in an otherwise legal transaction. This creates an unfair burden on

formal businesses. They must follow strict rules, pay taxes and keep records, while competing with businesses that do not face the same requirements. As a result, the system discourages compliance. When people feel their wealth is always under suspicion, they lose trust in the system. They prioritise safety over growth. Instead of investing in businesses or banks, they store wealth in cash, gold or real estate. These options are not very productive, but they feel safer. This leads to a larger economic problem. For a country to grow, savings must be turned into investment. Banks and financial systems help move money from savers to businesses. But when wealth stays outside the system, this process breaks down. Businesses cannot get loans easily, investment slows and growth suffers. Pakistan's dependence on foreign loans and aid is closely linked to this issue. A large amount of domestic wealth exists, but it is not being used effectively because it remains outside the formal system. Government policies have often made things worse. Informal channels allow money to leave the country and return as 'foreign investment' or remittances, gaining legal status at low cost. Tax amnesty schemes also send the wrong signal by suggesting that tax evasion may eventually be forgiven at a discount.

Courtesy Dawn

## Know your enemy

**Anna Hashmi**

If you know yourself and know your enemy, you will not fear the results of 100 battles. It is the most quoted military maxim in recorded history. It is also, without exception, the most ignored one. We keep fighting the hundred battles. Consider Iran. The US has been grossly misinterpreting that nation for almost 47 years. All the sanctions, all the assassinations, all the ultimatums have been based upon the same false premise, that Iran is a Western rational actor, that pressure yields results, that a country will yield when its economy is bleeding. It doesn't. It thinks in decades and not election cycles. It takes the punishment in proxies, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and militias in four countries, and never offers a clean target to retaliate. Sun Tzu called it formlessness. You cannot fight something that you cannot define. The maximum pressure doctrine by Trump is based on the assumption that the enemy will flinch. Sun Tzu knew better: a cornered enemy does not surrender. It fights to the last drop of blood. The existing nuclear brinkmanship with Tehran is not pressure at work; it is pressure that is breeding the very desperation it is said to be forestalling. Then there is Gaza. Israel was familiar with Hamas tactically: its tunnels, its weapons, its command structure, but not with its strategic thinking on October 7th: that the attack was created as much to provoke a reaction as to cause one, making Israeli military superiority a liability in the international arena. In its turn, Hamas did not fully count on the magnitude of the destruction that was to come. Two parties, each of which was sure it knew the other. Both turned out wrong. Sun Tzu would have recognised this; they were battling the foe they had imagined, not the one they had in front of them.

Courtesy Tribune

## UK envoy commends, supports Pakistan's role in bringing US-Iran on negotiating table



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner Jane Marriott on Wednesday praised and supported "Pakistan's facilitative role in bringing the US and Iran to the negotiating table" during a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar.

According to a statement shared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) on X, both sides discussed the evolving regional situation, while "FM Dar underscored Pakistan's ongoing efforts to facilitate engagement and emphasised the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in the peaceful resolution of disputes."

The British envoy "appreciated

and supported Pakistan's facilitative role in bringing the US and Iran to the negotiating table," the statement added. Dar also spoke with Turkish counterpart Hakan Fidan. Both leaders exchanged views on the latest regional developments and reaffirmed the importance of dialogue and diplomacy in peaceful settlement of disputes. FM Dar has received unprecedented international recognition for his diplomatic leadership, as Pakistan positioned itself at the centre of high-stakes mediation efforts during the escalating Iran-US-Israel crisis. Over the past week, senior officials and influential voices from more than ten countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, the US, China, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, and Uzbekistan, have publicly acknowledged Dar's role in facilitating ceasefire negotiations. Pakistan emerged as a central facilitator in the sensitive diplomatic track, positioning itself as an "honest broker" amid

## Pakistan moves towards one-window airport clearance with e-gates, smart scanners

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: In an apparent push to modernise border control and cut wait time for travellers, Pakistan appears to be moving towards a "one-window" airport clearance system using e-gates and smart scanners, with a joint strategy by the Ministries of Defence and Interior coming under detailed discussion on Wednesday.

The plan comes amid growing international passenger traffic and repeated complaints of congestion at major airports. In 2025, Pakistan handled 25.4 million domestic and international passengers, up 12 per cent year-on-year, according to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) data.

On Wednesday, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired a high-level meeting to address the dual challenge of facilitating outbound passengers while strengthening checks against human smuggling.

The meeting was attended by Minister of State for Interior Tahir Chaudhry, Interior Secretary Muhammad Khurram Agha, Defence Secretary Lt Gen (Retd)

Muhammad Ali, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) DG Dr Usman Anwar and other officials.

Officials agreed to ensure close coordination among all agencies at airports and to replace fragmented checks with a unified system, an official statement said.

"Unified checking on a single scanner by all institutions will save time and facilitate passengers," Naqvi was quoted as saying, adding that the government was committed to reducing congestion and waiting times through interagency coordination.

During the meeting, it was decided that joint counters and a unified checking system would be introduced. The statement also said that modern baggage and document scanners would be installed to speed up verification and improve detection.

Further, e-gates that use biometric passport scanners and facial recognition were set to be rolled out, cutting average immigration clearance from 3-5 minutes to under 45 seconds per passenger, it said.

Meanwhile, progress on e-gate installation was also reviewed in the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired a high-level meeting.

## A year on, India has failed to substantiate allegations against Pakistan over Pahalgam attack: info minister

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Information Minister Attaulah Tarar on Wednesday said that even a year on, India has failed to provide evidence for its allegations against Pakistan over the Pahalgam attack.

The April 22, 2025 attack in Pahalgam saw 26 people, mostly tourists, killed in what is being described as the deadliest armed attack in the disputed Himalayan region since the year 2000.

"To this day, India has not presented any solid evidence or proof regarding the Pahalgam incident, nor has it



offered satisfactory explanations," Tarar said in a televised statement issued on the incident's anniversary.

He recalled India's refusal to accept Pakistan's offer for a neutral and transparent investigation into the Pahalgam attack, adding that it "raises serious questions and suggests that the incident

may have been a false flag operation". "The false flag operation in Pahalgam reflects a mindset that is hollow — driven by false pride, arrogance and greed," he contended. "Let me make it very clear that this was the last false flag operation that India carried out in Pahalgam [...] It will not dare to carry out such false flag operation again," Tarar asserted.

Stating that the entire matter was "handled through empty slogans and in a very crude manner", Tarar said Pakistan had been itself a victim of terrorism and had

expressed "full sympathy" with the civilians affected in the Pahalgam attack.

The minister questioned how the first information report (FIR) of the case was registered within "10 minutes of the incident" and noted that think tanks had raised questions about there being "no proper security" at the site.

"Furthermore, without evidence, without investigation and without proper inquiry, the blame was immediately placed on Pakistan," he said, adding that "baseless and fabricated propaganda"

## Power minister takes notice of excessive tariffs in power off-take by DISCOs

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Division Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari has taken serious notice regarding the off-take of power from Small Power Producers (SPPs)/Captive Power Plants (CPPs) by the DISCOs at the tariffs exceeding the prevailing national merit order.

The matter was revealed during a stock taking of DISCOs on Wednesday, said a press release.

The minister directed to immediately discontinue the practice and bring it in consistency with the provisions of the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) Grid Code, Distribution Code and directions.

The minister also ordered an inquiry into the matter. He also directed to coordinate with ISMO for inclusion of SPPs /CPPs to



ensure least cost for the consumer in dispatch of power plants on the basis of Economic Merit Order (EMO) principles.

In compliance with Federal Minister for Power's directions the Power Division has issued instructions to all DISCOs to ensure that no off-merit procurement from SPPs shall be undertaken under any circumstances without obtaining prior explicit approval from ISMO. The off-take of electricity from SPPs shall be strictly limited to cases where such power falls within the prevailing national.

## Governor Kundi assures to resolve issues of tobacco growers, dealers

PEAK POINT

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday assured that issues faced by tobacco growers and dealers in the province would be resolved on priority basis.

The Governor said this in a meeting here at Governor's House that was attended by representatives of tobacco growers and dealers, officials of the Pakistan Tobacco Board (PTB) and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). A 30-member delegation of growers and dealers, including President of the Tobacco Dealers Association Muhammad Iftikhar, along with other representatives, participated in the session. Chairman PTB Muhammad Shahid Hussain and



Commissioner Inland Revenue Ayesha Dilshad were also present. During the meeting, growers and dealers highlighted concerns regarding tobacco production, exports, cancellation of agreements, non-determination of appropriate prices, and imposition of additional taxes by the FBR. They expressed reservations about the cancellation of long-term agreements with multinational companies and non-payment of dues.

## Rubina Khalid calls for stronger coordination to boost economic growth and women's empowerment

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid, Wednesday, emphasized that strengthened coordination and institutional linkages are crucial for achieving sustainable economic growth and advancing women's empowerment. She was addressing the Agricultural Conference 2026 held in Muzaffarabad on the invitation of Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Chaudhry Faisal Mumtaz Rathore. The conference, organized by the Department of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, was attended by Prime Minister, Faisal Rathore as chief guest, along with senior officials and a large number of experts



from the agriculture sector. Highlighting BISP's role, Senator Rubina Khalid said that closer collaboration between the programme and the AJK government would help introduce more targeted and effective initiatives for economically vulnerable women, said a news release. She noted that empowering women remains central to inclusive development. Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, in his remarks.

becomes very difficult to sell. "To this day, the world continues to ask questions and India has no answers to give," the information minister said.

"India's issue is that it presents its internal matters as external ones and its external matters as internal. A clear example of this is terrorism," Tarar said.

He added, "Terrorism is India's internal issue, yet it portrays it as an external problem. Similarly, the Kashmir issue is an international issue but India presents it as an internal one."

The minister slammed the "ugly face" of Indian media for spreading what he described as propaganda. He asserted that India's institutions have been "politicized" and suppress minorities.

Tarar highlighted that India had been found involved in transnational terrorism, including the killings of Sikh leaders abroad. "So terrorism is part of India's state policy and they continue to follow it," he added.

The minister reiterated Islamabad's allegations against New Delhi of its involvement in terrorism.