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Harnessing AI without destroying core foundations of academic integrity Bahria University carrying forward proud mission of nation-building, preparing youth for future challenges

An exclusive interview with the Rector Bahria University, Vice Admiral Engr. Abid Hameed HI(M)

Interview Panel
Zubair Qureshi
Asif Sheikh
Faiza Zafar

Pictures
Sh Muhammad Arif

Pakistan Observer: As a professional military man, what inspired you to devote your career to higher education?

RECTOR: I firmly believe education transforms individuals, institutions and nations. Even though engineering taught me analytical thinking, innovation and the ability to solve complex problems, I realized that the greatest legacy is not the technologies we build but the people we empower to build them. That understanding naturally drew me towards academia.

PO: You took charge of the BU at a time when the university was celebrating its 25th year. Where do you see Bahria University in the coming decade?

RECTOR: This is indeed a defining moment for BU as well as higher education globally as AI is transforming every sphere of human life. We have to transform BU as a student centric university. As pedagogies transform from classical teaching to activity-based learning and flipped classrooms, we also have to adapt changes. Looking ahead, our priority is to make Bahria University more accessible, innovative and future-ready.

PO: Among various programmes which one is close to your heart and is there any new one initiated under your headship?

RECTOR: There are many programmes that interest me, and I cannot single out just one of them. As a future-focused university, we are placing greater emphasis on emerging disciplines that will define the next generation of industries, including

Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity, virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), quantum computing, and data-driven technologies. In line with this vision, Bahria University has recently introduced a range of cutting-edge academic programmes, including PhD in Artificial Intelligence, BS Computational Mathematics with AI, BS Business Analytics, MS Environmental Policy Management, and specialized postgraduate diplomas in Artificial General Intelligence, Data Engineering and Predictive Analytics, Generative AI, DevOps, Integrated Circuit Design, Electrical Power Systems, and Applied Geospatial Technologies. These programmes are designed to equip students with the advanced knowledge and practical skills needed to excel in rapidly evolving world.

Another significant milestone is the launch of our Open and

Distance Learning (ODL) Programme, beginning with the online BS English degree,

students academically, professionally and personally so that every

again, I must say accessibility remains one of our strongest

general discussion, what qualities impress you most in students?

RECTOR: I always prefer to see curiosity, integrity, resilience and the willingness to keep learning as the topmost qualities and hallmarks of students. Better communication skills are also a leading requirement of competitive graduates. Knowledge is essential, but mindset matters even more. The students who inspire me are those who ask difficult questions, challenge assumptions and embrace failure as part of learning.

My advice to young people is simple: stay curious, adapt to change and never stop learning. Success will increasingly depend not merely on what you know but on how effectively you apply that knowledge to benefit society.

PO: Students' mental health has become a growing concern. How is Bahria University addressing it?

RECTOR: No doubt, students' well-being is fundamental to academic success. We have established Umeed-e-Nau (well-being centres) across all our campuses, offering counselling services, stress management programmes and peer support. Mental health awareness workshops, recreational activities and initiatives promoting work-life balance have become integral components of not only our student support system but of our faculty and staff as well. Individuals perform best when they feel emotionally secure, respected and heard.

PO: What kind of Pakistan do you hope today's Bahria graduates will help shape in next two decades?

RECTOR: Twenty years from now, I hope our graduates help shape a Pakistan where the knowledge economy is firmly established. I want to see university research shaping public policy, innovation centres



which will gradually expand to other disciplines. This initiative is futuristic and will enable working professionals, lifelong learners and students living in remote areas to receive quality education regardless of geographical limitations.

PO: Why in your opinion is entrepreneurship becoming central to university education?

RECTOR: The future belongs to people who can identify opportunities, solve problems and create value. Universities must prepare graduates not only to seek employment but also to create jobs. Through the Bahria Innovation Centre and our expanding industry partnerships, students have the opportunity to transform innovative ideas into successful businesses.

Establishment of Pakistan's first Maritime Science and Technology Park reflect this vision. Entrepreneurial thinking should not remain confined to business schools - it should become part of every discipline.

PO: Students today demand practical exposure. How is Bahria University responding to this basic need?

RECTOR: Students rightly expect much more than classroom learning. We are expanding experiential education through internships, industrial collaboration, research projects, innovation challenges and community engagement programmes. Our partnerships with industry and public-sector organizations expose students to real workplace environments. Through BIC and our broader research ecosystem, students are encouraged to convert ideas into practical solutions. Equally important is mentorship. We want every faculty member to guide

Bahria graduate enters society with confidence, practical skills and leadership qualities.

PO: How is AI reshaping Bahria University and changing conventional classroom environment?

RECTOR: Artificial Intelligence represents one of the biggest transformations in modern education. At Bahria

commitments, Bahria University has provided approximately 1.84 billion PKR in financial assistance to thousands of deserving students till now. Alongside scholarships, we offer flexible payment plans, work-study opportunities and need-based assistance to ensure financial constraints do



University, we see AI as an enabler and a tremendous opportunity. Through our Centre of Excellence in AI and the newly launched AI-focused academic programmes, we are expanding research, skill development and collaboration with industry.

AI is also improving personalized learning, accelerating research across engineering, healthcare, maritime sciences and data sciences, while also enhancing administrative efficiency. However, technology alone will never replace human creativity, ethical judgement and leadership. Our objective is to produce graduates who do not merely use AI - they lead innovation through it.

PO: As inflation is skyrocketing and it is not easy to keep expenses under control how does BU keep quality education affordable?

RECTOR: Yes, it is a challenge indeed but

not prevent talented students from pursuing quality higher education. Education must remain inclusive because talent exists in every segment of society.

PO: Now coming to

PROFILE

Rector of Bahria University, Vice Admiral Engr. Abid Hameed HI(M) combines in him remarkable qualities of military discipline, engineering excellence and educational vision. Commissioned into the Pakistan Navy in 1988, he



has built an illustrious career spanning over 37 years comprising Engineering, Management, Strategic Leadership and Higher Education. A graduate of Pakistan Navy Engineering College (PNEC), Pakistan Navy War College and National Defence University, Engr. Abid Hameed has also earned a Master's degree in Advanced Metallurgy from the University of Sheffield, UK. Before assuming the Bahria University's top office last year in December, his services in academic domain included teaching, Head of the Mechanical Engineering Department and Dean at PNEC, an accredited college of the NUST. As Bahria University has recently entered its third decade of excellence, Engr. Abid Hameed is at the helm of its affairs making it among the leading higher education institutions and becoming a future-ready university driven by research, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence and inclusive education.

With seven campuses, over 24,000 students, more than 150 academic programmes and a growing international footprint, Bahria University is playing a remarkable role not only in producing highly skilled graduates but also in generating knowledge, addressing societal challenges and contributing to Pakistan's national development. During an exclusive interaction with Pakistan Observer, the Rector spoke candidly about his vision for the University's future, research priorities, artificial intelligence, student welfare, entrepreneurship, mental health and the role universities must play in nation-building.

producing globally competitive startups and quality higher education reaching every corner of the country - from Punjab to Gilgit-Baltistan to Balochistan, and beyond. More importantly, I hope they help build a society where critical thinking is valued and ethical leadership is rewarded. That transformation cannot be achieved through government policies alone. It begins with one educated mind at a time. That is why Bahria University's mission extends far beyond classrooms. It is a mission of nation-building. Every lecture, every laboratory and every graduate represent an investment in Pakistan's future, and I consider it both an honour and a responsibility to lead that journey at this university.



Rector BU, Vice Admiral Abid Hameed and senior officials of the university in a group photo with Pakistan Observer's interviewing panel.

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