

# WEEKLY Cutting Edge

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## Default fears: Perceived or real?

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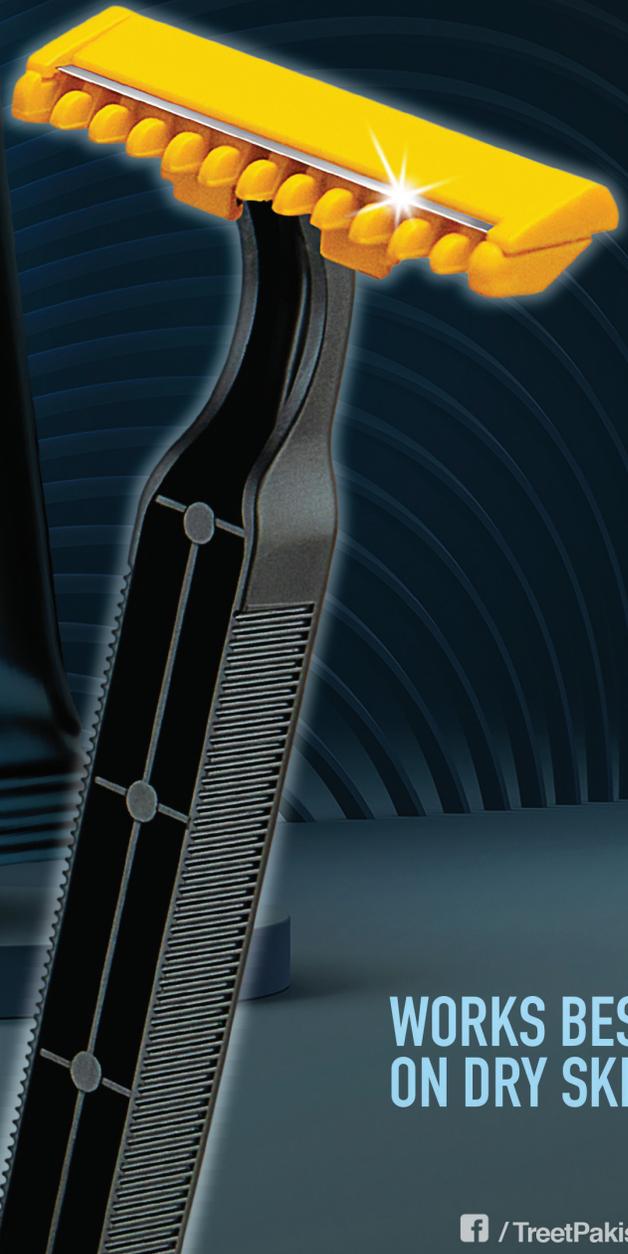


# TIDY



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WORKS BEST ON DRY SKIN



WORKS BEST  
ON DRY SKIN

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## About Us

Cutting Edge is an independent English weekly magazine being published from Lahore. Its founding editor, Dr Niloufer Mahdi, belonged to one of the top industrialist families of Pakistan — Packages Group. She was the daughter of Syed Wajid Ali and granddaughter of Syed Maratib Ali. In a short span of time it has gained popularity and built loyal readership throughout the country. With the contributions by renowned journalists and literary figures and diversity of issues/topics touched by our magazine, we can confidently claim that it has set not only new trends in local journalism, but has emerged as the most read and credible magazine for men, women, students and opinion leaders from different spheres of life. It also circulated in all Foreign Embassies, Libraries, Hospitals, 5 star Hotels and Government/ Private Departments. Its website, [weeklycuttingedge.com](http://weeklycuttingedge.com), is a premier online source for the analysis of current affairs, providing authoritative insight into, and opinion on, national and international news, business, finance, science and technology, as well as an overview of cultural trends. We have commenced its publication, with an aim to bring the best to our readers; similarly, we intend to offer the best in terms of advertising and promotional impact for our valuable advertisers. The 24-page Cutting Edge is divided among different sections, and we have proportionally divided the space in each section for carrying advertisers' message for the utmost impact.

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# Default fears: Perceived or real?

Shahid Hussain

Pakistan's perceived risk of sovereign default has increased after a worsening dollar crunch and delay in talks with the International Monetary Fund. The country's credit default swap has widened to 64.2pc from 52pc at the beginning of November, which shows waning investor confidence in Pakistan's ability to pay back its bond-holders of \$1b Sukuk which will mature next month. The situation is serious. However, default fears or rumours are not new in the country. Every new government in Pakistan blames its predecessors of bringing the country to bankruptcy. The fear has been used by successive governments for their political gains.

Though successive governments have used the threat to malign their rivals, it is not incorrect to say that Pakistan has been facing serious economic problems for many decades now. Many experts believe that Pakistan has actually defaulted because it has to seek financial assistance from other countries and international financial institutions to run its affairs. However, it has consistently been able to receive international grants, assistance and loans, which keep it afloat. But the situation has reached a point where it will be difficult for the country to continue its policies and it will have to run its affairs through its own resources.

The government has withdrawn subsidies on electricity and fuel and taken necessary steps to improve the economy but the country's default risk has still increased. Pakistan's perceived risk of default, measured by the 5-year credit default swap (CDS), worsened further and hit 75.5pc, because of uncertainty over the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) ninth review. According to data released by Arif Habib Limited, a noted brokerage house, Pakistan's 5-Year CDS increased from 5,620bps on November 14 to 7,550bps on November 15, an increase of a whopping 1,929.6bps.

Except low foreign reserves, Pakistan's other economic indicators are not so bad. The reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) increased by \$3 million on a weekly basis, clocking in \$7.96 billion as of November 11. Total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at \$13.8 billion. Net foreign reserves held by commercial banks clocked in at \$5.84 billion. "During the week ended on November 11, the SBP's reserves increased by \$3 million to \$7,959.5 million," the central bank said.

On the other hand, a downward trend in Pakistan merchandise export proceeds

continued for the second consecutive month, according to data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. The country's exports shrank by 3.77pc in October to \$2.37 billion from \$2.64b in the corresponding month last year. On a month-on-month basis, export proceeds decreased by 3.07pc.

However, the import bill in the first four months of the current fiscal year (July and October) stood at \$21.01b against \$25.08b last year, indicating a decline of 16.21pc. The import bill increased by 43.45pc to \$80.51b during 2021-22, up from \$56.12bn a year ago. As a result of the



decline in imports, the trade deficit in October fell by 42pc to \$2.26b this year from \$3.90b over the corresponding month last year. In the first four months, the trade deficit dipped by 26.59pc to \$11.46b this year from \$15.62b over the corresponding months of last year.

The current account deficit during the first four months of the current fiscal year stood at \$2.8b, narrowing by 46.82pc from \$5.3b during July-October 2021. The central bank said a continuous decline in imports helped improve the current account deficit.

The inflows of foreign currency on account of workers' remittances sent home by overseas Pakistanis hit an eight-month low at \$2.22 billion in October. The State Bank of Pakistan reported that the remittances had decreased by 9.1pc to \$2.22 billion in October in comparison with \$2.44 billion in September. This was 15.7pc low in the month under review compared with \$2.63 billion received in the same month last year. Cumulatively in the first four months (July-October) of the current fiscal year, remittances dropped by 8.6pc to \$9.90 billion compared with \$10.83 billion in the same period of the previous year.

As former Prime Minister Imran Khan

is raising the issue of default in his rallies, the government believes he is talking about it for political point scoring. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar ruled out any prospects of Pakistan defaulting on its international payments and reiterated that it was committed to making all its payments on time without any delay. In a video message, he rejected "baseless and irresponsible" statements and rumours about the country's economy, saying the government had arranged for all international payments for the next one year. "When such rumours are spread through social media and various sources, they not only

affect Pakistan's economy and economic interests, but also impact the affairs and transactions with bilateral and multilateral partners," he regretted.

The finance minister also ruled out that Pakistan would not be able to pay the \$1 billion sovereign bond (sukuk) in December. "This is baseless and contrary to facts, Pakistan has never defaulted on its international payments and will never come close to it," he maintained.

The government also informed the National Assembly that the country was not facing any danger of default. "There is no possibility of default. We were worried when we took over the government because at that time the IMF programme had been suspended and external finances were hard to receive. However, the situation has improved after the government took some very difficult decisions and the IMF programme was revived," State Minister Aisha Ghaus Pasha informed the National Assembly.

Ostensibly, the country is not facing any default risk, but it needs foreign financial assistance to run its affairs. The situation has continued for decades. The country will have to increase its earnings through exports to stand on its feet.

# Tolerance is the key to world peace

Nasim Ahmed

Among the many special days that are annually celebrated, by far the most important is the International Day of Tolerance. It is important because we are living in very turbulent times with fires of conflict raging in various parts of the world. Today we are living in a polarized world -- a world divided along ideological, cultural and religious lines and hurtling from one crisis to another. This drift towards disaster needs to be stopped.

Every year, the International Day of Tolerance is observed on November 16 to raise awareness about the importance of tolerance in society. The day was designated to encourage mindfulness and faith in human rights and promote equality and diversity across the world. It followed the United Nations Year for Tolerance, which was 1995, in order to observe its teachings annually.

The theme for this year is "Tolerance is respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human." To mark the day, the theme is discussed and understanding is enhanced in order to build a peaceful and harmonious society.

The day is specifically meant to educate people about the harmful consequences of an intolerant society and its adverse impact on the lives of the common people. Since there is diversity of individuals as well as nations, tolerance and acceptance of diversity alone can make for harmony and peace in the world.

The call to practice tolerance was written into the original charter of the United Nations 70 years ago. Today, in a world wracked by turbulence and change, the Charter's mandate remains a vital touchstone for civilized, peaceful coexistence among the nations of the world.

The UN defines tolerance as respect, appreciation and acceptance of the diversity of the world's cultures and ethnic identities. Human rights is the core of this thought. It supports the notion that humanity has the right to live in peace. The International Day for Tolerance conveys the message that education is a key factor in preventing intolerance across the globe. On this day, people are encouraged to educate and learn how to practice solidarity between ethnic, social and cultural groups.

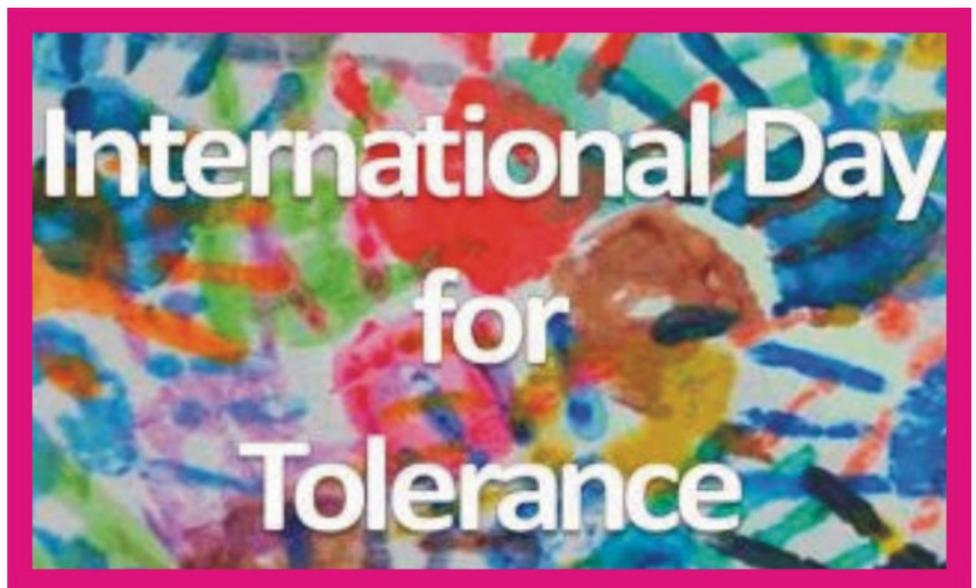
In the age of globalization, where indi-

viduals from all communities mix and interact, peace and tolerance is the need of the hour.

A society where each person is valued and respected is one that is built on the foundation of tolerance. Surely, people are more connected today but this does not mean there is more understanding. Societies are more diverse and intolerance is growing in many places. Sectarian tensions can be found at the heart of many conflicts, with the rise of violent extremism, growing human rights violations and cultural cleansing. The crisis of forced displacement in

on Tolerance on November 16, 1995. The Declaration says that tolerance is neither indulgence nor indifference. It is respect for and appreciation of the wide range of cultures, modes of expression and modes of living found in the world. The fundamental liberties and inherent rights of people can be guaranteed only by promoting a culture of tolerance. As people are naturally different, only tolerance can ensure the survival of mixed-race communities across the globe.

The significance of celebrating the day



recent years has spawned hatred and xenophobia against refugees and other homeless people.

We need to recognize that tolerance is much more than passively accepting the other. It means taking positive action and understanding the other point of view. Tolerance requires investment by states in people, and in the fulfilment of their full potential through education, inclusion and opportunities. This means building societies founded on respect for human rights, where fear, distrust and marginalization are replaced by pluralism, participation and respect for differences.

It is interesting to note here that the history of International Day for Tolerance dates back to 1996 when the UN General Assembly declared November 16 as the International Day of Tolerance by passing Resolution 51/95. This step was taken after the Member States of UNESCO adopted a Declaration of Principles

is to create awareness about tolerance and its impact on cultures and socio-economic groups. More importantly, we need to realise that tolerance must be promoted at both personal and professional levels to make the world a better place to live.

The International Day of Tolerance emphasises the need to combat the growing threat posed by elements who intend to divide nations and communities, and work towards strengthening the culture of tolerance.

On the International Day of Tolerance, let us pledge to tread a path defined by dialogue, social cohesion and mutual understanding. States should legislate for equality and basic human rights for the promotion of tolerance and non-violence. Education is an important tool to pave the path for the desired goal of peace and economic and social advancement of all peoples everywhere.

# Rising climate losses

Muhammad Hassan

Pakistan has been facing crisis after crisis, mostly of its own making. The country failed to improve its economy and the result is lack of basic necessities for its people. The situation has become really difficult to handle after worst effects of climate change. In fact, it has emerged as the most serious issue of the country, which threatens lives, livelihoods and all segments and sectors of the country.

It is a pity that Pakistan has not contributed to the climate change problem in the world but it is facing its worst fallout. Pakistan's annual economic output could see a cut of 18pc to 20pc by 2050 due to climate change risks, according to a recent report by the World Bank. "The combined risks from the intensification of climate change and environmental degradation, unless addressed, will further aggravate Pakistan's economic fragility; and could ultimately reduce annual GDP by 18pc to 20pc per year by 2050, based on the optimistic and pessimistic scenarios," the report said.

It is feared that between 6.5pc and 9pc of GDP will likely be lost due to climate change (in the optimistic and pessimistic scenarios, respectively) as increased floods and heatwaves reduce agriculture and livestock yields, destroy infrastructure, sap labor productivity, and undermine health. Besides, water shortages in agriculture could reduce GDP by more than 4.6pc, and air pollution could impose a loss of 6.5pc of GDP per year. It highlighted that the use of water for non-agricultural purposes was likely to significantly increase with climate change. "Under a high-growth (4.9pc per year) and high-warming (3°C by 2047) scenario, water demand is projected to increase by almost 60 percent, with the highest rates of the increase coming from the domestic and industrial sectors."

Climate warming will account for up to 15pc of this increase in demand. This heightened demand will result in unintended consequences that deprive downstream areas of water rights. The competition among sectors will necessitate inter-sectoral tradeoffs that will likely be made at the expense of water for agriculture. "It is projected that, in the next three decades, about 10pc of all irrigation water will need to be repurposed to meet non-agricultural demand." Freeing up 10pc of irrigation water without compromising food security

will be a complex challenge that would require substantial policy reforms to incentivize water conservation and increase water use efficiency in the agricultural sector and a shift away from water-thirsty crops as well as better environmental management, the report warns.

The projected costs of a forced reallocation of water out of agriculture, to meet non-agriculture demands, without such steps, could reduce GDP in 2047 by 4.6pc. The losses projected were the costs of forced reallocation of water to serve other urgent needs, including allocations for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and urgent environmental flows to sustain critical ecosystem services. Damage induced by climate-related extreme events will



likely have economy-wide impacts on growth, fiscal space, employment, and poverty. Global warming and extreme events affect economic activity through multiple transmission channels: impacts on lives, infrastructure and assets, and on livelihoods, which can result in lost economic growth, worsening poverty, and longer-term threats to human capital and productivity. Existing macro models can help assess the expected scale of such events.

The report added that household poverty was expected to decline over time, but even a 9pc decline in GDP by 2050 was enough to stall poverty reduction, with disproportionate impacts on rural households. By 2030, the urban poverty rate is expected to be half that of rural areas and by 2050, urban poverty is projected to decline further to 10pc, while rural poverty will remain in the 25pc to 28pc range.

Economic losses from drought, floods and landslides have rocketed in Asia. In 2021 alone, weather and water-related hazards caused total damage of US\$ 35.6 billion, affecting nearly 50 million people, according to a new report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

The State of the Climate in Asia 2021

report highlighted how climate change impacts are wreaking an ever-increasing human, financial and environmental toll, worsening food insecurity and poverty and holding back sustainable development. The report also painted a gloomy scenario for future water stress.

High Mountain Asia, including the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, contains the largest volume of ice outside of the polar region, with approximately an area of 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of glacier coverage. The rate of glacier retreat is accelerating and many glaciers suffered from intense mass losses as the result of exceptionally warm and dry conditions in 2021. These so-called water towers of the world are vital for freshwater supplies for the most densely populated part of the planet and so glacier retreat has major implications for future generations.

The report, which was produced jointly with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), was presented during the UN climate change negotiations, COP27, in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. It shows how, compared to the average in the past 20 years, economic losses are on the rise for most types of disasters. Economic damage from drought has increased by 63pc from flood has increased by 23pc, and from landslides has increased by

147pc compared to the 2001-2020 average.

In 2021, there were a total of more than 100 natural hazard events in Asia, of which 80pc were flood and storm events. These resulted in almost 4,000 fatalities, about 80pc caused by flooding. Overall, 48.3 million people were directly affected by these hazards, causing total economic damage of US\$ 35.6 billion. While floods caused the highest fatalities and economic damage, drought in the region affected the highest number of people, according to the report. Sand and dust storms were also a major problem. In 2021, flooding caused the highest economic losses in China (US\$ 18.4 billion), followed by India (US\$ 3.2 billion), and Thailand (US\$ 0.6 billion). Storms also caused significant economic damage, especially in India (US\$ 4.4 billion), China (US\$ 3.0 billion), and Japan (US\$ 2 billion).

It is encouraging that the UN climate summit agreed to set up a "loss and damage" fund to support poor countries. It is good news for Pakistan. However, it will take years to metalise the plan. In the meanwhile, the country will have to make efforts to contain natural disasters and save people from their bad effects.

# Between shortages and high prices

Muhammad Zain

Pakistan faces a serious food crisis after recent rains and floods, which have damaged vegetables and other crops in all provinces. Prices of food have already skyrocketed and it is feared that the next few months will be even tougher for the common people.

All vegetables are already selling at over Rs200/kg and their prices would increase further in the days to come as major vegetable-producing areas have been submerged by floodwaters. Rural Sindh and South Punjab, which provide vegetables to the whole country, have lost their crops to floods. A shortage of meat is also feared in the country after a large number of cattle have been killed in Balochistan and Sindh. According to an estimate, 80pc of cotton, 70pc of rice, 80pc of onions, tomatoes and chilies, and 80pc of dates were washed away in Sindh.

The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI) based weekly inflation for the week ended on November 17 for the combined consumption group witnessed an increase of 0.62pc as compared to the previous week. The SPI for the week under review in the group was recorded at 216.82 points against 216.48 points registered in the previous week, according to the latest data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS).

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week witnessed an increase of 28.67pc. The SPI for the lowest consumption group up to Rs 17,732 witnessed a 0.96pc increase and went up to 227.19 points from the last week's 225.03 points. The SPI for the consumption groups from Rs 17,732-22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175 witnessed an increase of 0.88pc, 0.72pc, 0.65pc and 0.50pc respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 23 (45.10pc) items increased, 13 (25.49pc) items decreased and 15 (29.41pc) items remained stable.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the average inflation rate in Pakistan will peak to nearly 20pc by the end of the current fiscal year on the back of currency depreciation and higher commodity prices. Earlier, it had forecast the rate at 7.8pc for the year.

It is feared that flash floods would also impact Pakistan's economic outlook. According to the Ministry of Finance, the floods have

reduced the potential output of both main and minor Kharif crops, thereby tampering with the positive outlook of the agriculture sector. "Initially ignored by the government, the floods have become the third serious challenge after global and domestic uncertainties that are still surrounding the economic outlook," it noted.

Pakistan's Climate Change Division has warned that the sea level along the coast may rise by two to three feet by 2100, threatening the existence of cities like Thatta, Badin and Karachi. The country has lost 1.8 million acres of arable land to sea intrusion because of rise in sea levels in the wake of climate change. In a presentation, the Climate Change Division said the persistence of high intensity heat waves had increased to 41 days in a year and the country would face absolute water scarcity by 2025 while food insecurity would rise from 40pc to 60pc by 2050. The major reason is the increased frequency of low agricultural productivity in the backdrop of extreme climatic events. Pakistan has ranked amongst the most polluted countries and faces the highest projected annual economic loss to GDP (9.1pc) in Asia. It is also suffering a loss of 27,000 acres of forest cover every year. It has a high population growth rate of 2.1pc and there will be a three-fold increase in the climate-induced migration from 0.7 million to 2 million by 2050. In the global context, Pakistan is at the frontline of climate risks, encountering disasters at multiple levels, and is at the eighth place amongst the most affected countries.

Pakistan may face absolute water scarcity by 2025 and a rise in food insecurity following increased frequency of low agricultural productivity due to extreme climatic events. Pakistan has faced 152 extreme events due to climate change over the last two decades and has seen a shift in rainfall patterns, intensity and frequency.

According to a recent study by McKinsey, "A reflection on global food security challenges amid the war in Ukraine and the early impact of climate change," the war in Ukraine, climate change and the pandemic have caused logistical constraints that could cause a grain deficit of up to 60 million tons by the end of 2023. The price of grain has increased in 2020, when the pandemic affected global logistic chains. Since then, drought-induced harvests have increased prices even more. With the ongoing war in Ukraine, there

is a risk of a food crisis, which may become the most serious so far in the 21st century.

The world's grain mostly comes from six growing regions, including Ukraine and Russia, which together produce roughly 28pc of wheat and 15pc of corn exported globally. A decrease in exports can have far-reaching consequences, especially in countries with low resources and production capacity. "The grain deficit could reach up to 60 million tons by the end of 2023 – this corresponds to the annual nutritional intake of up to 250 million people, or 3pc of the global population. This year's logistical problems have resulted in up to 18 million to 22 million fewer metric tons of grain being exported from Ukraine and Russia. If the war continues, exports may shrink even further in 2023," it warned.

Fertilizer shortages and higher prices for fertilizer are also expected to reduce yields in countries that depend heavily on fertilizer imports, such as Brazil. This will likely further decrease the volume of grain on the world market. Availability is also limited by some countries' efforts to protect their domestic markets by placing restrictions on trade. Historically, supply shocks within the food system have led to inflation, lower fiscal strength, and malnutrition – and in some cases, to periods of political instability and violence. For example, the food crisis in 2010–2011 contributed to the Arab Spring. The pandemic has left countries less economically resilient in the face of price hikes. Even a slight disruption in supply could substantially disturb global food prices and societies' abilities to cope with them. More than 1.4 billion people live in countries that are highly vulnerable to increasing food prices and may be hit hard by price increases. Countries including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen rely heavily on grain imports, have limited stocks, and have low purchasing power. "According to our research, the worst outcomes could be avoided, for example, by unblocking and de-risking Black Sea logistic routes, reducing trade restrictions, utilizing existing grain reserves, and providing financial aid to the most impacted areas and populations," it added.

The situation in Pakistan suggests inflation and prices will further increase in the days to come. However, the government can mitigate people's sufferings by importing food from neighbouring countries.

# Deforestation has aggravated climate change

Muhammad Asim Nisar

Of the many climate-related challenges, an alarming rise in deforestation is one of the gravest issues faced by the country today. Pakistan loses 27,000 hectares of natural forest area annually.

Deforestation has increased rapidly in Pakistan in the last two decades, almost doubling. In 1990, four percent of the land area of Pakistan was covered with forests, and in 2010 only 2.2 percent of the land was found to be covered with forests. According to some recent studies, Pakistan has the highest rate of deforestation in Asia.

It is human actions that lead to the depletion of forests.

The first main cause of deforestation is mindless industrialisation. The industries need to fulfil the increasing demands of consumers for various kinds of goods. Industries require fuel to run their heavy machinery and for this purpose, wood is the easily available option. The second cause of deforestation is urbanization. Due to the sprawling growth of population, forest lands are cleared to be included in the cities, thus decreasing the forest area. Thirty-two percent of the population of Pakistan lives in urban areas and if the current growth rate of urbanisation continues, Pakistan's urban population will surpass its rural population by 2030.

Other causes are clearing of land and logging. Forests are cut down for the construction of dams and barrages to supply water. In addition to this, trees are being cut down to provide wood for timber, furniture building materials, charcoal and other wood-based products. There is a wide gap between the production and consumption of wood. In 2017, the projected consumption of wood was estimated to be 52.6 million cubic meters. We are depleting our forests at a much faster rate than we are producing them.

Road construction also results in deforestation. Existing forests are cut to build roads

to inaccessible areas such as Kohistan and other northern areas of Pakistan. Further, lack of knowledge regarding farming is destroying the land as only some parts of forests are suitable for agriculture. But unaware of cultivation needs and techniques, farmers continue to move farther into the rainforest in search of new land.

These are some of the causes of deforestation which lead to destructive impacts on the environment and society as a whole.

Deforestation is causing increasing loss of biodiversity. Seventy percent of the world's animals and plants have their habitat in forests

temperature continues to increase at this rate, higher temperatures would lead to the melting of glaciers. This in turn would trigger a rise in the sea levels resulting in the submersion of the coastal areas. Deforestation also causes soil erosion which leads to silt entering the lakes, streams and other water sources.

Creeping deforestation is causing severe damage to the environment. Everything in nature is interconnected and interdependent. If the ecological balance is disturbed, the very existence of humans on earth would be in danger. We depend on the environment for the air we breathe, for the food we eat and for the

water we drink. No human would be able to exist without these bounties of nature. It is about time we realised the importance of the preservation of forests and the ecological system and take corrective action to reverse the deforestation process.

Corrective action is needed both at government and individual levels. Measures to arrest deforestation are not only the government's responsibility. We humans rely on nature for our basic needs and have equal responsibility



in the matter. We can help restore forests by restoring the damaged ecosystem through plantation of trees on lands where forests have been cut down. We need to encourage people to live in an environmental-friendly way that includes minimizing urbanization and restricting industries that cut down forests. We should instead support the industries that operate in ways that have the minimal damage on the environment.

The KP government in 2014 launched "the Billion Tree Tsunami" project which aimed to restore the degraded and deforested land. Under this initiative, over 350,000 hectares of forests were planted in an effort to combat climate change. Pakistan cannot let its environment be destroyed for short-term gains. We must plan ahead and find environmentally sustainable solutions to the challenge of climate change.

The average temperature of Earth has risen rapidly since the last century. If the

which are being destroyed on a daily basis. Forests play a very crucial role in warding off the adverse effect of climate change. Forests act as carbon sinks by soaking up the carbon dioxide that would otherwise be free in the atmosphere and thus they contribute to eliminating the ongoing unstable changes in climate patterns. By cutting down the trees, carbon dioxide is released in the atmosphere causing environmental damages leading to global warming.

Deforestation adds more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than the sum total of cars and trucks on the world's roads. According to the World Carfree Network, cars and trucks account for about 14 percent of global carbon emissions, while scientists attribute upwards of 15 percent to deforestation.

# Pakistan political system fully exposed

Raza Khan

Since early this year there have been a chain of events in Pakistan which have fully exposed its political system, dynamics and shortcomings.

It started with the staging of protests and long marches against the then government of Prime Minister Imran Khan by the then opposition groups, like the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F). It was followed by the tabling of a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan in the National Assembly. As the opposition parties, including the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), did not have the required number of votes in the National Assembly to see the no-confidence motion succeed, a desperate and breakneck competition started by the opposition to woo and then purchase the loyalty of PTI's Members of Parliament (MPs) and its coalition partners.

Then the entire world saw how the PPP-controlled Sindh provincial official secretariat in the federal capital, Sindh House, became a hub of business of selling and purchasing political loyalties. Many PTI MPs turned coat and the media openly reported it. However, no one took notice within state institutions.

Then the countdown began for the voting day for the no-confidence motion. The preceding days and weeks were nerve-wrecking for entire Pakistan. Sensing he was losing ground as unseen forces were also with the opposition parties, Imran Khan started blaming that his government was being ousted through a US-orchestrated conspiracy being executed by the opposition parties and unseen forces in Pakistan. In this regard, he cited US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu's threat to Pakistani ambassador Asad Majeed in March in which he demanded Pakistan's 'state institutions' to help dislodge the PTI government. The reason which Imran Khan then and has been giving for the US turning against his government is his undertaking a tour of Russia against the will of Washington. Imran Khan argued that he had visited Russia because Pakistan needed cheap oil and gas from Moscow in the face of a whopping increase in the prices of these items in the international market. However, before the day of voting, Imran Khan advised President Dr. Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly and call fresh elections. It was very

strange on part of Imran Khan because it was totally unconstitutional that a prime minister dissolves the assembly when a no-confidence motion has been tabled.

Although Dr. Alvi dissolved the National Assembly it was inadvisable. Ultimately, the Supreme Court as guardian of the Constitution took up the plea against the dissolution and ordered restoration of the assembly and directed the Speaker to hold counting on the no-confidence motion. However, the manner in which the court asked the National Assembly Speaker to hold a no-confidence vote with very stringent conditions also came under severe criticism. It was said that the Supreme Court had stepped into the domain of the parliament as directing the Speaker left huge question marks on the supremacy of the parliament.



Nevertheless, the court order prevailed and the vote of no-confidence was held on April 8, resulting in its success.

However, the vote was earlier declared "unconstitutional" by the then Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri in a very strange manner. The situation brought the parliament and Supreme Court face to face. The vote of no-confidence against Imran Khan may have been successful but it left big question marks on the future of parliamentary supremacy in Pakistan. There is no doubt that in Pakistan's Constitution there is a provision of judicial review under which the Supreme Court has the powers to review any law passed by the parliament to ascertain its constitutionality both itself and in case someone petitions it. However, the Constitution prevents anybody from stepping into the procedural business of parliament.

Although the government of Imran Khan and the PTI was voted out, the manner political loyalties were bought and sold and the way unseen forces called the shots fully exposed the loopholes of the parliamentary political system of Pakistan. It transpired that in the parlia-

mentary political system, crossing the floor and becoming turncoats is institutionalized. This created serious political instability in Pakistan. Then Shehbaz Sharif became the chief executive with the support of 13 political parties, and the majority of only two votes. Such a weak government, which could fall any time save unseen forces forcibly keep it intact, has proved costly for Pakistan. There has been unprecedented inflation in the country which has touched a whopping 28 percent. Poverty has increased to never-seen levels in the country.

Amid all this, former Prime Minister Imran Khan has been demanding the formation of a judicial commission to investigate the 'regime change' bid by the US in Pakistan. However, his demands have so far fallen on deaf ears and, therefore, his allegations cannot be proven or rejected. This is another big exposition of the Pakistani political system that regimes can be changed but there is no remedy to investigate and prevent it in the future. This situation has also raised serious question marks on the sovereignty of the state.

The manner in which civil liberties and media freedom have been trampled upon in Pakistan in the last six months has reminded everyone that the existing political system is no guarantee to ensure fundamental rights of well-known Pakistanis let alone the common citizens. During this period, journalists have been silenced, TV channels put off air, social media activists rounded up, politicians abducted by state agencies and then tortured in custody, obnoxious videos of PTI leaders posted on the Internet.

The culmination point of full exposition of the weakness rather irrelevance of the existing parliamentary political system is an assassination attack on deposed but protesting former Prime Minister Imran Khan during his long march on November 3. The add insult to injury, the PTI has not been able to lodge the First Information Report (FIR) despite having its government in Punjab where the assassination bid was made, because of the criminal abetting of provincial police officials. When a former prime minister and head of the largest political party having its government in two of the four provinces could not lodge a police case as he has named Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah and a senior intelligence officer, then it was the last straw on the back of the parliamentary political system of Pakistan. The country needs a new social contract to avoid crisis and instability.

# Time to reform the police

Faheem Amir

A state which does not protect its people, especially children and women, is doomed to fail. Unfortunately, the state of Pakistan has utterly failed to protect its citizens, including innocent children. There are many criminals and rascals who are assaulting and killing innocent children without any fear of punishment, while the government has failed to arrest them.

On October 7, 2020, the body of a two-year-old Zainab, daughter of Akhtar Munir of the Sheikh Killay Qilla area, was found in the fields in the Jabba Koroon area in the limits of the Daudzai police station in Peshawar. The postmortem report confirmed that the girl had been tortured and abused before being stabbed to death.

The incident was similar to the 2018 Zainab Amin rape case. In the case, 8-year-old Zainab Amin was assaulted and killed brutally in Kasur. The Zainab case shocked the entire country and created a country-wide reaction and outcry. Despite the huge outcry and reaction of the Zainab case in Kasur, Pakistan is still not a safe place for children and women. Hundreds of such incidents happen every month. Some cases

get national attention through the media, including social media. There are many cases which go unnoticed. After every tragic incident, the government promises to bring about reforms in the police and judicial system for appeasing the angry people. But, practically, it does nothing.

In Manshehra, a 10-year-old child was allegedly molested more than 100 times by a madrasa teacher and his companions. On September 9, a woman was assaulted in front of her three kids at gunpoint on the Lahore-Sialkot motorway.

In the Zainab case, Imran Ali, the convict in the case, was hanged. The court also handed down the death sentence to Shahzad in the Chunian case. In spite of the sentences, there is no letup in crime against innocent and helpless children.

The End of Childhood Index ranks Pa-

kistan at number 149 out of 174 countries. The Global Gender Gap Report says, "Pakistan is the world's third worst country to be a woman in, ahead of only Iraq and Yemen." According to the Human Rights Watch, "a woman is assaulted every two hours in Pakistan. The country has 2,937 rape cases filed in 2018 and 3,500 cases of rape and abuse were reported in 2019." According to a Pakistani NGO, "As of June 2020, some 497 child abuse cases have been reported in the newspapers. A majority of the cases, almost 57 percent, were reported in the Punjab. Of the rest, 32 percent were reported in Sindh, and 6 percent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. More than 35 child abuse cases were reported in Islamabad during the time, another

dark web. He also faced trial in Italy for child abuse before being deported from the country. In spite of the horrible facts, Sohail Ayaz could not be stopped from his spree. Kasur's Hussain Khanwala village's abuse scandal that emerged in 2015 is another example which proves that powerful people cannot be touched and punished in Pakistan. The police took into custody hundreds of video clips showing a gang forcing dozens of young boys and girls to perform indecent acts and filming them. The gang also used the videos to blackmail the families of the victims and extorted millions in cash and jewellery from them. In spite of the facts, no action was taken against the accused.

The police system should be improved and reformed to stop the incidents. Tariq Khosa, a former IG Police, suggested nine principles of Sir Robert Peel to improve the police system: The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder. The ability of the police to perform their duties depends on the public approval of police actions. Police must secure the willing cooperation of the public in voluntary observance of the law to be able to secure and maintain the respect of the public. The degree of cooperation of the public that can be secured diminishes proportionally to the ne-

cessity of the use of physical force. Police seek and preserve public favour not by catering to public opinion, but by demonstrating impartial service to the law. Police can use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient. Police should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. Police should direct their action strictly towards their functions, and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary. The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it. The media and civil society should also highlight the issue and create awareness among the people to check the incidents.



22 reported in Balochistan, 10 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and one in Gilgit-Baltistan. At least 173 children were gang-raped, whereas there were 227 reports of attempted assault. While 38 children were killed after they had been abused."

The figures show clearly that the state is not able to protect children and women. There are many reasons for the inability of the government. Two examples can be cited to prove that the government and the police are protecting the culprits. The police arrested Sohail Ayaz, a consultant for the KP Governance and Policy Project, for allegedly abusing 30 children in 2019. The suspect was affiliated with an international child pornography racket. He was deported from the UK after being convicted of child abuse. He was also considered the ringleader of an international

# Animals too have rights, really?

Dr Fatima Khan

The scene appeared to be a kind of amusement for most of nearly half-a-dozen people, who had gathered near a donkey-cart with the poor animal suspended in the air. The unfortunate creature was swept off his hooves as his master had overloaded the cart in his hunger for earning more from the supply order. Near Tibba Badar Sher Chowk of Bahawalpur city, the labourer-cum owner of the cart was making futile attempts to bring down the donkey without offloading some of the material from the cart.

Though a painful sight for Sania Waheed, an A-Levels student at an Islamabad institute and currently visiting her maternal grandparents in Bahawalpur, the onlookers were taking it as a normal occurrence. In a video talk with the writer, Sania regrets that most people don't show any sympathy towards domesticated animals being mistreated by their owners, or stray animals in some trouble. She wonders what kind of human beings and Muslims we are if we don't follow the commands of the Creator about all creatures around us.

Allama Abbas Shirazi says Allah Almighty has clearly commanded the faithful to take care of all creatures, including animals, as those are very much part of the ecology of each and every region of the earth. The Holy Qur'an says: "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings, but they are communities like you..."

Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) loved animals and he called upon all Muslims to treat animals with kindness and sympathy. Allama Shirazi quotes a Hadith, which says: "A good deed done to an animal is as meritorious as a good deed done to a human being, while an act of cruelty to an animal is as bad as an act of cruelty to a human being."

There are many stories and sayings of the Holy Prophet that demonstrate his concern for the welfare of animals. "Once someone travelling with the Holy Prophet took some eggs from a nest, causing the mother bird great grief. The Prophet (PBUH) saw this and told the man to return the eggs.

When the Holy Prophet was asked if Allah rewarded acts of charity to animals, he replied: "Yes, there is a reward for acts of charity to every beast alive." Also, the Holy Prophet said, "Whoever kills a sparrow or anything bigger than that without a just cause, Allah will

hold him accountable on the Day of Judgment." The Prophet (PBUH) explained that a killing would be for a just cause if it was for food.

In the light of the Quran and Sunnah, true Muslims believe that treating animals cruelly, making them overwork or overloaded, neglecting animals, hunting animals for sport, cutting the mane or tail of a horse, animal fighting as a sport, etc. are not permitted in Islam, and doing such acts would invite the wrath of Allah Almighty.

Rights of all animals, both domesticated or wild, have been protected under the Constitution of Pakistan. Agha Intizar Ali Imran, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, says cruelty shown towards animals is an offence according to the law of the land. "A breach of the anti-cruelty provisions in Sections 3 to 5 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (1890) is punishable with fines and imprisonment. A breach of any parts of the Punjab Animals Slaughter Control Act (1963) is punishable with fines and imprisonment. Ani-



mals may also be forfeited to the government," the senior lawyer quotes from law books.

Agha Imran says a case about an elephant kept in Islamabad zoo made headlines in the national and international press almost two years back. The Islamabad High Court had held that "animals have natural rights and are entitled to protection under the Pakistani Constitution". The case before the court was threefold, involving an elephant held in solitary confinement at a zoo, a rescued bear, who had been forced to 'dance' and perform tricks, and the killing of stray dogs. Despite at times anthropocentric framing, the ruling unequivocally recognized that animals have legal rights, recalls the senior lawyer.

Agha Intizar Ali Imran says people can call 1819 to report animal abuse also. The

law says an animal ethics committee will be established and abusers would have to face penalties for violations of the law. Shooting and poisoning of animals is also banned under the Pakistan law, he adds.

According to World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) statistics, Pakistan is home to at least 177 mammal and 660 bird species, making it part of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. Unfortunately, conservation and rehabilitation efforts are few and far in between. Pakistan has been graded an overall 'E' on the World Animal Protection Index with an 'F' in government accountability and 'G' in animal protection, which ranks the country lower than its neighbour India and higher than only a few countries where even the human rights situation is abysmal.

The Supreme Court lawyer says animals kept in zoos and wild animals owned privately are both examples of animals in captivity. Although Articles 3 and 5 of the PCTAA apply to these situations, such wildlife is considered

the responsibility of provincial governments, and there is no national policy on zoos.

The lawyer regrets that the animals are not even regulated under most provincial wildlife ordinances. As far as wild animals held privately are concerned, the Northern Areas Wildlife Preservation Act 1975 prohibits wild animals from being kept as pets without the permission of the Chief Wildlife Warden for either scientific purposes or as part of a 'recognized' zoo.

As for pet or companion animals, though Articles 3 and 5 of the PCTAA may again apply, there are no express provisions related to them specifically. Interestingly, despite Article 429 of the Pakistan

Penal Code 1860, which makes it a criminal offence to kill, poison, maim or render useless any animal of value above Rs50, there still exist innumerable instances of inhumane acts, such as the culling of stray animals, particularly dogs.

The lawyer says that although the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1890 may be a good base for animal rights, which acknowledges that animals feel pain and suffering, the sentence has not been explicitly recognised in any form of legislation.

*The writer is a physician by profession. She has worked as an intern at the Capital Health (New Jersey) & the Mount Sinai St. Luke's Hospital (New York). Rights and gender issues are the areas of special interest to her. She can be reached at: fatima23393@hotmail.com*

# Trump, the loser, is back

Marwan Bishara

Former US President Donald Trump's announcement that he will run in the 2024 presidential polls, only a week after his fiasco in the United States midterm elections, smacks of desperation and hypocrisy. But it will have key implications for his party and country.

The long, "low energy" announcement was full of lies, half-truths and distortions about his record and that of President Joe Biden, especially on climate change, energy reserves and America's standing in the world. While it is true that Trump did not embark on big new wars, an accomplishment for an American president, international security, peace and stability suffered because of his abrupt hyper-nationalism.

In typically Trumpian fashion, it was all vanity and venom. The former president took credit for Republicans likely taking back the House of Representatives following last week's elections, albeit with the slimmest of majorities.

The midterms elections were a referendum on Biden's management of the economy, as much as on Trump's menace to democracy. What historically and politically could have been an easy win for Republicans, especially with high inflation and Biden's low approval ratings, turned out to be a disappointing outcome for them.

Once again, Trump, the de facto party leader, proved more of a liability than an asset. In 2016, candidate Trump promised that if he became president, the country would enjoy so much winning that people would get tired of it. Instead, President Trump led his party and country from one failure to another, until they got sick of losing.

In 2018, Republicans lost the House. In 2020, they lost the Senate and the White House too. And last week, many of Trump's handpicked candidates lost the midterm elections and delivered a great deal of humiliation to their party, which, instead of a predicted "red wave", had to settle for a ripple. The party failed to retake the Senate, and might even end up with fewer numbers than in the outgoing chamber.

The crushing defeat suffered by Trump's candidates is a testimony to America's rejection of his unsubstantiated claims that the 2020 elections were rigged, merely because he lost. In the process, tornado Trump ravaged the country's international reputation and shook the foundations of its democracy. And if that was not enough, he cheered as his supporters came to Washington to block the Congressional certification of the 2020 presi-

dential elections.

Now, following the midterms, it is clear that Trump the sore loser is a certified serial loser, too. And still, there appears to be no end to the nightmare. The defeated, delusional and twice-impeached former president, who is facing many legal woes, has pledged to go on – despite growing opposition within the Republican party, as more and more of its leaders speak out against him. Referring to the last three election setbacks for the party, Maryland's Republican Governor Larry Hogan emphasised the need for Trump to step aside, using a popular baseball metaphor, "three strikes and you're out".

Indeed, like baseball, US elections are competitive, expensive and long zero-sum games, producing net winners and losers, who

his minions had won the recent midterms elections, US democracy may have not been able to recover for some time — if at all. Thankfully, the country has pulled back from the edge, not once but twice, denying populist Trump the opportunity to demolish their liberal democracy.

In fact, it is easy to see the feeling of *schadenfreude* among many of his detractors within the Republican Party: elated by his defeat, they might have been hoping for good riddance before he causes even more damage to the conservative movement.

But Trump's determination to run again for president may well take the Republican Party to the brink. Enjoying the strong and unwavering loyalty of some 40 percent of Republican voters, Trump is sure to present the GOP



are expected to accept the outcome.

Not any more, alas. Not since Trump appeared on the field. Lacking all sportsmanship in life as in politics, Trump has rejected the most basic of rules of democracy and its basic pillars, such as a free media and an independent judiciary. Since he entered politics in 2015, Trump first changed the rules of the game to suit his interests, and soon enough changed the game altogether.

Instead of baseball, Trump switched to tougher, more confrontational and violent American football tactics, where he has been mounting aggressive offensives, fierce defence, and brutal sackings. Indeed, Trump has embraced less democratic, more combative and confrontational means in campaigning and governing.

If he had won the 2020 elections, or if

with an "after me, the flood"-type ultimatum: Nominate me or risk devastation.

Although it is too early to tell, Trump may in fact get his way against a number of less committed and less-known candidates. And if an ageing President Biden insists on running again at the age of 82, well, Trump may have a real chance of bulldozing him come 2024.

The ramifications of a vengeful Trump returning to the White House for the country and the world may be too hard to fathom at this stage. But some things are clear: It would be a victory for the anti-democratic insurrectionist ultra-right faction that stormed Congress on January 6, 2021. It would be a victory for racism and hate.

For too long Trump has managed to fail successfully. It is high time he fails miserably, once and for all.

# 'Just' energy transitions need more transparency, less gas

Sisilia Nurmala Dewi

Soaring energy prices in Europe brought on by Russia's war in Ukraine have given a renewed thrust to fossil fuel projects in Asia and Africa, particularly those involving gas.

Leaders attending the G20 summit that started in Indonesia today and the ongoing COP27 climate summit in Egypt are expected to push for increased investment in oil and gas exploration.

A sign of this was the failure of the G20 climate and environment ministers to produce an agreed-upon communique on climate action after they met in August. COP27 President-Designate Sameh Shoukry, who attended the meeting, warned that leaders may backslide on their climate commitments by putting the blame on geopolitical realities and the energy crisis.

Ironically, one of the mechanisms that could be used to facilitate an unwanted pivot to gas is the Just Transition Energy Partnership (JETP), an initiative with lofty aims. Indeed, the JETP is a mechanism under which rich nations are supposed to support emerging economies in moving to clean energy while being fair and transparent with affected local communities. South Africa was a recipient of Western funding under the JETP last year, and Indonesia could be announced as a beneficiary when it hosts the G20.

However, the details of the JETP deal with South Africa remain hidden, raising concerns over the opacity surrounding it. Civil society groups and human rights and climate activists are emphasising the need for transparency and justice in both the procedural aspects and substance of such agreements. In September, South African civil society groups – led by the Life After Coal campaign and the Fair Finance Coalition of South Africa – wrote to the country's Presidential Climate Finance Task Team (PCFTT) for the second time, demanding that their participation and input be taken into consideration.

It is also unclear whether assistance to South Africa will come in the form of grants or loans, their total value, and the conditions under which they will be awarded. How will the clean energy produced through this initiative be distributed? What role will the private sector play in its distribution? These are questions that the South African people – and the rest of the world – don't have answers to.

Similar concerns are being raised about Indonesia's deal at a time when the two main funder countries, Japan and the United States, are leading negotiations.

Civil society organisations are calling for increased transparency around those talks and prioritisation of the interests of workers, young people and affected communities. A move away from fossil fuels will inevitably constitute a labour transition for many communities that rely on coal jobs to sustain their livelihoods. Any such shift that does not include required training, assistance and compensation for these workers to find new jobs cannot be considered a just one.

Recently, civil society organisations in Indonesia published a list of demands on



the JETP under negotiation. These included the need for Indonesia's deal to replace the country's extractive and centralised energy production and distribution system with a more democratic one reliant on renewables. The list also emphasised the need for justice, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to be enshrined in the agreement; and for human rights, local customs and cultural traditions to be honoured and respected during the transition. So far, there has been no response.

This lack of transparency and communication with civil society undercuts the very idea of a "just" energy transition. It also raises questions about the intent of such initiatives, especially at a time when alternatives to Russian fossil fuels are in high demand.

At present, Indonesia is still planning to build at least 13.5 GW of coal-fired power plants, and gas development is also taking up an increased share of proposed so-called solutions to current energy and geopolitical volatility.

While the specificities of Indonesia's JETP deal remain to be seen, the government

has recently announced plans to increase gas production. In Bali, a local movement is opposing the construction of an LNG gas terminal on a socially and environmentally significant mangrove forest region.

The track records of Indonesia, South Africa and the G7 countries don't inspire confidence either: None of them is on schedule to meet their Paris climate change agreement goals.

We must preemptively ensure that mechanisms like the JETP, which could potentially be used as a template for climate investment in several countries, are not pushed through without careful consideration and democratic participation. In Africa, an argument being used for increasing fossil fuel production is that the continent should be allowed to economically benefit from its resources in the way that rich countries have historically. However, the current dash for gas in Africa, often driven by European investments, represents a new form of energy colonialism that would lock Africa into decades of harmful consequences at the front line of climate change.

It is true that 600 million Africans have no access to electricity and nearly 1 billion people do not have access to clean cooking. The International Energy Agency's Africa Energy Outlook report in 2022 showed that solving this requires \$25bn per year from now to 2030. Building a single liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal a year would suck up that money.

The fact is that fossil gas will not result in expanded energy access for South Africa or Indonesia. Even if fossil fuel investment went ahead today, the infrastructure would not be ready for several years and would bind Africa to decades more of unnecessary carbon emissions. Furthermore, it is likely that European nations making investments would seek to use this gas to secure their own energy needs as a priority, meaning that the African market would not see any change to the current energy security and accessibility landscape.

At a time when the impacts of climate change intensify around the world, countries and organisations are looking at the JETP deals for South Africa and Indonesia as potential models to implement elsewhere. It is vital that an undesirable precedent is not set. Instead, justice, transparency and real solutions must form the central tenets of current and future deals of this kind.

## Employees or personal assets of employers?

As a trend, employees are exploited and treated unfairly in the country, and are considered personal assets of employers. They are often treated as slaves or robots at the beck and call of their masters. It is a common practice in our part of the world that employees are contacted even after office hours and called back for some 'missing' information. They are tethered through digital communication even on weekends, holidays and vacations, without the slightest consideration for their mental and physical health. Clearly, such intrusions by the employers disrupt the employees' work-life balance. It is becoming illegal now in many countries to contact employees after office hours, with the exception of some actual and tangible emergencies. According to the United States Department of Labour, a work emergency is an unforeseen situation that threatens employees, customers or the public; disrupts or shuts down operations; or causes physical or environmental damage. But here, sadist employers with their colonial mindset deliberately keep their employees on the digital leash after office hours, on weekends and even during vacations. France, Germany and Portugal have formed laws barring businesses and offices from contacting employees after work hours. The freedom to disconnect with the office after work hours has been acknowledged as employees' fundamental right. The employers who dare trespass personal boundaries of the employees stand to incur fines as per the laws enacted in those countries. In Germany, it is strictly prohibited to dismiss employees if they fail to take phone calls after work hours. In countries like ours where the colonial past is still present, employers or bosses under the hubris of officialdom, or with superhuman powers vested by departmental hierarchy, behave like the Orwellian Big Brother, running their offices as their 'nanny states'. Just because they can. They forget the simple fact that employees under undue pressure and in a threatening atmosphere always underperform. They must pay heed to what John Stuart Mill said: "A state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished." The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a part of the US Department of Labour, in its Section 15, enjoins upon employers to safeguard the safety, health and welfare of their employees. Its guidelines say: "Health is a state of total physical, mental and social well-being, not only the absence of disease." It also defines 'stress' as something when the demands on employees exceed their capacity to cope with their responsibilities. The calls from office after duty hours and unexpected assignments disturb the work-life balance of employees who then get taut nerves, further depleting their energy, and

they end up feeling burnt-out. Various critical studies on the dynamics of the corporate system indicate that assigning input and demanding output from employees after office hours exposes the lack of planning and seriousness on the part of the management and administration sections of business firms. It is to cover up one's own absence of commitment to the goals and targets of the company. Making inroads into employees' life beyond office hours always proves counterproductive for business enterprises. Human resource professionals keep that in mind.

M. Nadeem Nadir  
Kasur

## Mistreatment at hospitals

Cases of mismanagement and mistreatment at hospitals generally go unreported. The patients and their families are either forced to remain quiet by hospital administrations, or are unaware about how and where to have a complaint registered. I recently witnessed a case of mismanagement in a reputable hospital in Karachi. A boy was rushed to the emergency department, complaining of extreme pain which looked like a case of appendicitis. However, before he could be checked by a doctor, he was shifted to a hospital ward where he was kept on pain-killers till the relevant ones could become 'available'. The boy spent a whole night in excruciating pain because the doctor became 'available' only the next morning. And, yes, it was a case of appendicitis for which he was operated upon subsequently. Just imagine, the boy could have died overnight. And, indeed, many do in different hospitals owing to negligence and delayed treatment. The authorities concerned should keep a check on hospitals and make the administrations establish a public-access desk where complaints of negligence, mismanagement and mistreatment may be registered.

Areeba Munawer  
Karachi

## Free treatment

The situation prevailing in government hospitals is rather bleak. These hospitals are bound to provide standardised healthcare to patients free of cost, but that is not what happens in reality. The best one can hope to get in state-run health facilities is a prescription, and, if needed and available, a hospital bed. The rest, including the medicines and surgical supplies, have to be arranged by the family. This is strange because we keep hearing of millions of rupees going to state-run hospitals in every budget? Does the administrative cost consume all those millions? If so, the budget has to specify the various heads under which the money should be spent. Or, is there some element of corruption that siphons money out of the system? If that is the case, the government should sort the matter out. Why should the common man

suffer? As things stand today, most patients requiring medical attention either go to private hospitals, or free facilities run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and non-profit entities, like the Indus Hospital so they may get the care they need without any financial burden involved. This puts extra strain on these facilities, which should not happen. Provision of healthcare is the responsibility of the government, and not of the charitable organisations. Unfortunately, nothing is being done to improve the status of healthcare in government hospitals. The authorities concerned need to take action and address the huge problem.

Shaheer Ur Rehman  
Karachi

## Deplorable state of education

The deplorable state of education in the country is known to one and all. However, there are some factors that do not get as much attention as they merit. A case in point is the admission process in some higher education institutions where one has to submit the admission fee and produce a voucher to that effect before the verification of relevant documents. This is clearly illogical. Institutions like the Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in Islamabad and the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences and Technology (FUUAST) in Karachi follow such a pattern on their online portals, asking the applicants to pay the fee before having their documents scrutinised. Why cannot the universities verify the documents first and then ask for a fee from the selected candidates? Even if the intention is to discourage non-serious candidates, a minimal fee would do the job. Moreover, most such institutions have a tedious process of reclaiming the fee as it takes months and a number of useless visits to the department concerned in order to have the refund process completed. Such administrative loopholes on the part of universities add to the woes of students and their parents. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the universities concerned should look into the matter and make the admission process hassle-free.

Anwar Ahmad  
Karachi

## Awaiting flood relief

There seems to be no ease in the sufferings of the people of Ghotki, particularly of Qadirpur union council (UC) who have been awaiting relief since the recent floods devastated the entire area. Currently, there is a severe shortage of medical facilities as only a handful of medical practitioners, arranged by a private company, are available to attend to hundreds of patients in the wake of dengue and malaria outbreaks. The government should have some mercy on the people of Ghotki.

Abdul Waheed Chachar  
Ghotki

## Some harlequin frogs — presumed extinct — have been rediscovered

Freda Kreier

Across Central and South America, one group of bejeweled frogs is making a comeback. Harlequin frogs — a genus with over 100 brightly colored species — were one of the groups of amphibians hit hardest



by a skin-eating chytrid fungus that rapidly spread around the globe in the 1980s. The group is so susceptible to the disease that with the added pressures of climate change and habitat loss, around 70 percent of known harlequin frog species are now listed as extinct or critically endangered.

But in recent years, roughly one-third of harlequin frogs presumed to have gone extinct since the 1950s have been rediscovered, researchers report in the December Biological Conservation.

The news is a rare “glimmer of hope” in an otherwise bleak time for amphibians around the globe, says Kyle Jaynes, a conservation biologist at Michigan State University in Hickory Corners.

For Jaynes, the path to uncovering how many harlequin frogs have returned from the brink of extinction started when he heard about the Jambato harlequin frog (*Atelopus ignescens*). This black and orange frog was once so widespread in the Ecuadorian Andes that its common name comes from the word “jampatu,” which means “frog” in Kichwa, the Indigenous language of the area.

Then came the fungus. From 1988 to 1989, the frogs “just completely disappeared,” Jaynes says. For years, people searched for traces of the frogs. Scientists ran extensive surveys, and pastors offered rewards to their congregants for anyone that could find one.

## Half of world's young people at risk for hearing loss: study

Lisa O'Mary

As many as 1.35 billion young people worldwide are at risk of hearing loss due to “unsafe listening,” a new study shows. The study found that as many as 1 in 4 people ages 12 to 34 are exposed to dangerous noise levels via “personal listening devices,” such as high volume settings on smartphones, and nearly half of people those ages experience damaging noise levels at entertainment venues. “To our knowledge, this review is the first published article to estimate the prevalence of exposure to unsafe listening practices in adolescents and young adults and its global burden,” the authors wrote. “These estimates are needed to communicate the urgency of (prioritizing) hearing loss prevention to governments, industries and other stakeholders responsible for implementing policy.” Published this month in *BMJ Global Health*, the researchers evaluated data combined from 33 studies of “unsafe listening” among people ages 12 to 34. Unsafe listening was defined in the study as exposure to greater than 80 decibels for at least 40 hours a week. (For context, city traffic is about 80 decibels, according to a list of sounds that can cause hearing loss from the CDC.) Research has shown that both single instances and repeated exposure to high volumes can damage hearing, potentially permanently, and the effects can build up during a person's lifetime. Hearing loss is associated with poor academic performance, reduced economic mobility, and health problems, the study authors said. They encouraged more to be done to educate people on how to prevent hearing loss and for policymakers to take action.



## The pristine Winchcombe meteorite suggests that Earth's water came from asteroids

Lisa Grossman

Late in the evening of February 28, 2021, a coal-dark space rock about the size of a soccer ball fell through the sky over northern England. The rock blazed in a dazzling, eight-second-long streak of light, split into fragments and sped toward the Earth. The largest piece went splat in the driveway of Rob and Cathryn Wilcock in the small, historic town of Winchcombe.



An analysis of those fragments now shows that the meteorite came from the outer solar system, and contains water that is chemically similar to Earth's, scientists report in *Science Advances*. How Earth got its water remains one of science's enduring mysteries. The new results support the idea that asteroids brought water to the young planet. The Wilcocks were not the only ones who found pieces of the rock that fell that night. But they were the first. Bits of the Winchcombe meteorite were collected within 12 hours after they hit the ground, meaning they are relatively uncontaminated with earthly stuff, says planetary scientist Ashley King of London's Natural History Museum.

Other meteorites have been recovered after being tracked from space to the ground, but never so quickly. “It's as pristine as we're going to get from a meteorite,” King says. “Other than it landing in the museum on my desk, or other than sending a spacecraft up there, we can't really get them any quicker or more pristine.”

## Lab-grown meat gets 'green light' from FDA

Lisa O'Mary

The FDA paved the way for the first lab-grown meat product to get closer to grocery store shelves. “This is a watershed moment in the history of food,” Uma Valeti, MD, founder of UPSIDE Foods, said in a news release. “This milestone marks a major step towards a new era in meat production, and I'm thrilled that U.S. consumers will soon have the chance to eat delicious meat that's grown directly from animal cells.” The products have been referred to as “no kill,” “lab-grown,” “cultivated” and “human food made from cultured animal cells.” Animals are not killed or even harmed, the FDA says in its description of a four-step production process. The steps are: Cells from animal tissue are selected, screened, and grown, then stored for later use. Some cells are then put in sterile containers with controlled environments so they can multiply into billions and trillions of cells. Next, substances are added, such as protein growth factors, new surfaces for cell attachment, or extra nutrients, so the cells can “differentiate into various cell types and assume characteristics of muscle, fat, or connective tissue cells.” Finally, the resulting cellular material is “harvested” and “prepared using conventional food processing and packaging methods.” The FDA says these products can be made from cells of livestock, poultry, seafood, and other animals. Currently, Singapore is the only place where such products are legally sold, *The Washington Post* reported.





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