

# WEEKLY Cutting Edge

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ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

## Sustainability challenges persist

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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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# Sustainability challenges persist

Shahid Hussain

The April 2024 “Asian Development Outlook” by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) casts a shadow of uncertainty over Pakistan’s economic future. Highlighting significant risks, particularly stemming from political instability, the report underscores the challenges facing the sustainability of stabilization and reform efforts.

The report also highlighted potential disruptions to the supply chain stemming from escalating conflicts in the Middle East, which could further burden Pakistan’s economy. Given Pakistan’s substantial external financing needs and vulnerable external reserves, the ADB underscored the importance of continued support from multilateral and bilateral partners. However, it warned that such support might be hindered by deficiencies in policy execution.

The report stressed the significance of backing from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to bolster market confidence and facilitate access to affordable external financing. It projected a modest economic growth of 2.8 percent for Pakistan in the fiscal year 2025, contingent upon increased confidence, reduced macroeconomic disparities, progress in structural reforms, enhanced political stability, and improved external circumstances. It anticipated subdued growth for fiscal year 2024, with a potential upturn in the following year if economic reforms take hold.

Furthermore, the report predicted a 1.9 percent growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) for 2024, primarily driven by a resurgence in private sector investment linked to reform progress and the transition to a more stable government. Inflation, forecasted to persist around 25 percent for the current year due to elevated energy prices, was anticipated to alleviate in 2025. However, the ADB warned that inflation could remain high due to expected increases in energy prices under the IMF Stand-By Agreement.

It observed that while improvements in food supplies might alleviate some inflationary pressures, energy and agricultural input costs continued to drive inflation. On the supply side, post-flood agricultural recovery was expected to stimulate growth, supported by favorable weather conditions and government initiatives such as subsidized credit and inputs. This increase in agricultural output would subsequently boost manufacturing, which had

already shown signs of expansion in the first half of 2024.

The report highlighted the relaxation of import restrictions alongside economic recovery, which was anticipated to widen the current account deficit to 1.5 percent of GDP in 2024. Pakistan’s ongoing challenges included substantial new external financing needs and the rollover of existing debt, compounded by global financial constraints. Additionally, the ADB noted a significant increase in tax collection, primarily attributed to reforms in personal income tax, higher property transfer taxes, and the reintroduction of levies on bank withdrawals and bonus shares. It anticipated further revenue strengthening in the medium term through planned tax base expansions.

The report emphasizes the critical need for continued support from multilateral and bilateral partners, as well as backing from the International

old debt amidst tight global financial conditions adds further strain. The ADB underscores the importance of support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in boosting market sentiment and catalyzing affordable external financing from other sources. IMF backing for a medium-term reform agenda is seen as pivotal in enhancing Pakistan’s economic resilience.

Despite challenges, the report projects a modest economic growth of 2.8 percent for Pakistan in the fiscal year 2025. This growth is contingent upon several factors including increased confidence, reduced macroeconomic imbalances, progress on structural reforms, political stability, and improved external conditions. However, growth is expected to remain subdued in the current fiscal year, with the potential for a pickup in the following year if economic reforms take effect.

Inflation remains a concern, primarily driven by higher energy prices.

While the report anticipates some easing in inflation in the coming years, persistent inflationary pressures are expected due to increases in energy prices under the IMF Stand-By Agreement. The report highlights the role of post-flood agricultural recovery in stimulating growth, supported by government initiatives such as subsidized credit and inputs. This increase in agricultural output is expected to bolster the manufacturing sector, which has already shown signs of expansion.

Import dynamics, including the relaxation of import restrictions and economic recovery, are expected to widen the current account deficit in 2024. This widening deficit reflects strengthening domestic demand and the stabilization of the currency market, facilitating easier imports of inputs for firms.

The report notes a significant increase in tax collection, driven by reforms in personal income tax and other measures. Revenue mobilization is expected to strengthen further in the medium term through planned tax base expansions.

In conclusion, while Pakistan faces significant economic challenges, including political uncertainty and external financing needs, there are opportunities for growth and stability with continued reform efforts and support from international partners. However, careful handling of inflationary pressures and fiscal deficits remains critical for sustainable economic development.



al Monetary Fund (IMF), to bolster Pakistan’s economic resilience. While projecting modest growth in the coming fiscal year, the report also warns of persistent inflationary pressures and widening current account deficits, urging policymakers to navigate these challenges with careful consideration and robust reform measures.

The report provides a detailed assessment of Pakistan’s economic landscape, highlighting both strengths and vulnerabilities. It identifies political uncertainty as a significant risk to the sustainability of stabilization and reform efforts in Pakistan. This uncertainty undermines market confidence and hampers the effectiveness of policy implementation, thereby impacting economic stability.

Pakistan’s large external financing requirements and weak external buffers pose considerable challenges. The report emphasizes the crucial role of continued disbursements from multilateral and bilateral partners in sustaining the economy. Moreover, the rollover of

# HDI: Pakistan is ranked below Haiti & Zimbabwe

Muhammad Asim Nisar

The World Bank in its latest report, "Pakistan Development Update" released last week has said that Pakistan's economy is showing signs of recovery, but the current recovery is neither sustainable nor sufficient to reduce poverty. According to the WB report, growth remains insufficient to reduce poverty, with 40 per cent of Pakistanis now living below the poverty line. Further, macroeconomic risks remain very high amid a large debt burden and limited foreign exchange reserves.

The World Bank in its report says that poverty increased by an estimated 4.5 percentage points in the fiscal year 2023, with 10 million people just above the poverty line at risk of falling into poverty in the face of shocks, both internal and external. The poverty headcount rate is projected at 40.1 per cent for the current fiscal year 2024 compared to 39.9 per cent in 2023. The poverty headcount rate, measured at the lower-middle-income country poverty line of \$3.65/day 2017 purchasing power parity (PPP), is expected to remain around 40 per cent over fiscal year 2024-26.

The World Bank has described the deteriorating human development situation in Pakistan as a "silent, deep human capital crisis." By contrast, Pakistan's neighbours are performing better, as the country's inequality-adjusted human development index is also worsening. The country's performance on the gender inequality index and multidimensional poverty are also poor. The Bank says that in the absence of an ambitious and credible economic reform plan, confidence and investment are likely to remain muted, with real GDP projected to grow at 1.8 per cent in fiscal year 2024.

It is no secret that the economy is witnessing lower than potential growth as well as high inflationary pressures due to continued import management measures. These negative developments, combined with potential reduction in public spending on social sectors, are projected to worsen human development outcomes. These effects will be especially problematic for poorer households who are already facing depleted savings and reduced incomes.

All this will not be without its impact on society as a whole. Chronic inflation in the absence of substantial growth, along with policy

uncertainty, could cause social discontent and have negative impacts on the existing welfare schemes for the people. Such a situation will call for increased targeted transfers in cash and kind in order to protect the poorest from future shocks and risks.

Another piece of bad news is from the latest Human Development Report 2023-24 which paints a gloomy picture of Pakistan's economic performance. The UNDP's human development index measures achievement in three aspects of human development: a long and healthy life, access to education, and a reasonable standard of living. Globally, there has been recovery in the human development index to pre-COVID levels, but Pakistan remains a

federal government is in a debt trap and does not have any resources left to spend on human development. After paying for the provincial shares under the National Finance Commission award, the remaining money is not sufficient to pay the interest cost on the debt. This will lead to a catastrophic situation. The human development index will worsen and food insecurity will increase. Further, as Pakistan has entered a new IMF programme with very tough conditions, there will be more taxes and higher utility charges which will make life more difficult for the common people.

Mismanagement of available economic resources is a big issue. Besides massive corruption and leakage, there is bad planning and



laggard. Pakistan performed poorly and is now standing with the world's poorest nations. According to the report, Pakistan has become a low human development nation, falling behind some of the poorest countries in Africa. With a low human development rating of 164, Pakistan has fallen behind extremely poor countries like Haiti and Zimbabwe who are ranked higher than Pakistan. It may be added here that the countries standing between 119 to 160 are categorised as medium human development nations. Pakistan is in the bottom group with a low ranking of 164.

What is more alarming, in the given circumstances there is little hope of things getting better in the coming days. According to some well-known economic experts, the

inefficient use of allocated resources. Pakistan is in the midst of a severe debt crisis driven by external debt repayments. Its growing human development crisis is evident from the indicators of literacy, education, health, poverty, and other aspects of human welfare.

Experts say that there is no way out of the situation except for the government to tighten its belt, cut back on unnecessary expenditures and withdraw the open-ended subsidies allowed to the civil and military bureaucracy in the form of free petrol, free gas, free electricity and other hidden facilities. So far it is the poor people who have borne the brunt of economic reforms in the past two years. It is high time the elites made sacrifices in the larger national interest.

# World health day: a grim reminder

Nasim Ahmed

World Health Day was observed all over the world, including Pakistan, last week. World Health Day is a global health awareness day that has been celebrated every year on April 7 since 1950, under the leadership of World Health Organization and other related UN bodies. The day marks the founding of the World Health Organisation in 1948 when the constitution of the WHO came into force, and 26 of the 61 governments that had earlier signed it ratified it. Pakistan was among these countries. Today, 194 countries are its members.

Every year, World Health Day has a special theme. This year's theme is: My health, my right. The reason for selecting this theme is that the WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All has found that at least 140 countries recognise health as a human right in their constitutions. But most countries have not passed relevant laws nor implemented them to ensure that their people have legal access to health services. The stark truth is that in today's world about 4.5 billion people — more than half the world's population — are not fully covered by essential health services.

In his message on the occasion, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif pledged to ensure healthcare facilities for all Pakistanis as soon as possible. He said the government's focus is on improving primary, secondary and tertiary health care, medical education, preventive health care and improved governance. He also vowed to upgrade health facilities, launch mobile health clinics for enhanced access, re-energize immunization and improve mental health services.

Despite these pledges, the existing health care services in the country are ramshackle and woefully inadequate for the people's needs. A majority of people cannot afford treatment at private hospitals, while most of the government-run health facilities lack basic facilities, equipment and tools to meet the needs of incoming patients. Healthcare has been a provincial subject since the 18th amendment in 2010 and provincial governments but the situation has not qualitatively changed.

Pakistan faces a range of health problems. Diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, dengue fever, hepatitis, and typhoid continue to be significant health challenges. Poor sanitation,

lack of clean water, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure contribute to the spread of these diseases.

Malnutrition remains a serious issue in Pakistan, particularly among children and pregnant women. Both undernutrition and overnutrition are prevalent, leading to stunting, wasting, and various health complications. High maternal and infant mortality rates persist in Pakistan, partly due to inadequate access to healthcare services, lack of skilled birth attendants, and cultural barriers to seeking medical care.

Non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, and respiratory illnesses are on the rise in Paki-



stan. Lifestyle factors including poor diet, lack of physical activity, smoking, and pollution contribute to the increasing burden of NCDs. Disparities in healthcare access and quality exist between urban and rural areas. Many rural communities lack access to basic healthcare facilities, resulting in delayed or inadequate treatment for illnesses. Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure is fragile and faces challenges such as insufficient healthcare facilities, shortage of medical equipment and supplies, and inadequately trained healthcare professionals. Pollution, both air and water, is a growing concern in the urban centers. Poor air quality contributes to respiratory diseases, while contaminated water sources lead to water-borne illnesses.

Addressing these health problems requires concerted efforts from the government,

healthcare professionals, NGOs, and communities to improve healthcare infrastructure, increase access to healthcare services, promote health education and awareness, and implement effective public health interventions.

The concept of healthcare is multidimensional. It goes far beyond the narrow provision of medical relief to sick citizens. Preventive measures are equally important but this aspect has not received the attention it deserves. Lack of adequate funds is a serious hurdle to instituting a strong national level health care service.

Pakistan has been a member of the WHO since its inception. Being a member it subscribes to the constitution of the organisation. The WHO defines health in terms of physical,

mental and social well-being. It also establishes it as a fundamental human right without any discrimination of race, religion, political belief and economic or social condition.

Pakistan has also ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which was adopted in 1966. Being a signatory to international covenants is, however, not sufficient. We have to translate our international legal obligations into national laws and enforce them strictly

This World Health Day comes as a grim reminder that we have not given the health sector the importance it deserves in the national scheme of things. We need to appreciate that only a healthy nation can realise its potential and progress and survive in a highly competitive world.

# Silver lining?

Husnain Shahid

The economic landscape of the Asia-Pacific region is marked by the imperative for sustainable development amid evolving challenges and opportunities.

As highlighted in the 2024 survey conducted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), governments in the region face the dual challenge of financing essential public investments while navigating complex macroeconomic dynamics. This survey underscores the significance of robust taxation systems, efficient public spending, and strategic borrowing to address the pressing needs of sustainable development.

The economic survey has forecasted an acceleration in Pakistan's economic growth for both the current year and the following year, with projected real GDP growth rates of two percent and 2.3 percent, respectively. Additionally, it anticipates a reduction in inflation in Pakistan from 26 percent in 2024 to 12.2 percent in 2025.

The survey also highlighted the challenges faced by Pakistan's economy. Political unrest and a massive flood have adversely affected business and consumer sentiment, as well as agricultural production. Despite these challenges, the survey noted that an agreement with the International Monetary Fund in mid-2023, along with further assistance from China, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, has helped Pakistan regain some macroeconomic stability during 2023. However, fiscal adjustments are still underway to restore stability, including measures such as the removal of subsidies for the power sector.

Furthermore, the survey observed that despite relatively low tax levels, tax gaps in Pakistan are moderate, particularly when measured as a share of current tax revenues rather than a share of GDP. This suggests that better tax policies and administration alone may not be sufficient to address the significant development financing gaps in low-tax countries. The survey recommends broader improvements in socioeconomic development and public governance, along with tax revenue enhancement on a larger scale.

Highlighting the urgent need for affordable and long-term financing for developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the survey suggests that governments are facing difficult choices between servicing debt in a high-interest rate environment and investing in crucial sectors like education, health, and social protection. To address this challenge, the survey

proposes new perspectives and approaches, such as prioritizing development financing needs over political interests, enhancing lending capacities of multilateral development banks through fresh capital injections, and encouraging credit rating agencies to adopt a long-term perspective that recognizes the positive fiscal impact of public investments.

While Pakistan and other developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region face significant economic challenges, there are opportunities for progress through strategic policy interventions and international cooperation. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the proposed recommendations, these countries can work towards achieving sustainable economic development and improving the well-being of their citizens.

The survey also advocated for bolstering public revenue collection, noting that this measure would not only help narrow the 'tax



gap' but also mitigate fiscal risks and reduce borrowing costs. Additionally, the survey highlighted the potential of implementing policies aimed at increasing society's willingness to pay taxes, which remains largely untapped. Similarly, it emphasized the necessity for more developed capital markets to mobilize significant domestic savings in the region and facilitate the provision of long-term capital for investments in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, quoted in the report, lamented the challenges faced by governments of developing countries across Asia and the Pacific, characterizing them as victims of an unjust, outdated, and dysfunctional global financial architecture. He expressed concern about widening income inequality in the region, citing declining real national minimum wages in several countries, which further exacerbates the difficulties faced by lower-income groups in coping with weak job opportunities and high food prices.

UN-ESCAP Executive Secretary Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana stressed the importance of dispelling the misconception that higher public debt levels inevitably lead to higher debt

distress. She underscored the benefits of strategically deploying public debt to invest in the SDGs, highlighting its potential to contribute to lowering public debt as a percentage of gross domestic product over the long term.

The survey revealed a pickup in average economic growth in the developing Asia-Pacific region, rising from 3.5 percent in 2022 to 4.8 percent in 2023, although this rebound was concentrated in a few large countries. However, it projected relatively steady GDP growth in the region, albeit below the pre-pandemic trend, at 4.4 percent in both 2024 and 2025.

Furthermore, the survey identified uncertain inflation and interest rate trends, escalating geopolitical tensions, and trade fragmentation as examples of economic headwinds faced by the region's economies. These challenges underscore the importance of implementing strategic policy measures and fostering international cooperation to address them and promote sustainable economic development in the Asia-Pacific region.

While a robust and equitable taxation system and efficient public spending should continue to serve as the foundation for funding essential public investments, governments will inevitably need to borrow to meet the substantial investment requirements for sustainable development. In the Asia-Pacific region, the proportion of external public debt owed to official creditors has decreased from 54 percent in 2010 to 35 percent in 2022. Consequently, private creditors, particularly bondholders, have emerged as the primary creditors for countries in the region, as indicated by the survey.

The survey contended that strengthening tax revenue collection and bolstering domestic savings are especially vital. The developing Asia-Pacific region has made significant strides in mobilizing tax revenue, with the average tax-to-GDP ratio rising from 13 percent in 2001 to 17.8 percent in 2011 before moderating to 15.7 percent in 2021 amid the pandemic, according to the survey's findings.

In conclusion, the 2024 survey underscores the critical importance of strengthening tax revenue collection, boosting domestic savings, and leveraging private investments to advance sustainable development goals in the Asia-Pacific region. By aligning macroeconomic policies with long-term development objectives and fostering international cooperation, governments can navigate the challenges posed by evolving economic dynamics while advancing inclusive and resilient growth. Through concerted efforts and strategic investments, the region can embark on a path towards sustainable and equitable development, ensuring prosperity for present and future generations.

# Grim outlook

Muhammad Ali

The repercussions of the combination of low growth and high inflation are becoming increasingly evident day by day. Following warnings from various international financial institutions regarding deteriorating human development indices, the World Bank has now also issued a cautionary statement, indicating that "over 10 million additional individuals in Pakistan are at risk of falling into poverty."

This outcome is a direct consequence of stubborn inflation rates ranging between 25-30 percent coupled with a sluggish growth rate of 1.8 percent. International institutions are highlighting these issues, which the State Bank, Federal Bureau of Statistics (FBS), and the finance ministry should have been addressing vocally for quite some time.

The World Bank's biannual Pakistan Development Outlook predicts that the country will miss all major macro-economic targets this year. Unfortunately, this is hardly surprising, given the historical trend of finance managers consistently failing to meet budget targets.

Unless a miracle occurs, Pakistan is likely to fall short of its primary budget target yet again, resulting in a deficit for the third consecutive year despite the IMF's insistence on achieving a surplus.

The implications of this shortfall in negotiations for an Extended Fund Facility (EFF) following the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) remain to be seen. However, it is expected that it will lead to even more stringent "upfront conditions" from the IMF, as experienced by client countries like Pakistan, to swiftly comply.

Even the most conservative estimates place the current poverty rate at around 40 percent. With the World Bank warning of an additional 10 million individuals at risk of slipping below the poverty line, prospects for improvement appear bleak.

The government lacks fiscal flexibility to implement any substantial pro-poor subsidy programs, as long as it remains dependent on an active IMF program to manage debt obligations and mitigate the risk of default. Furthermore, the heavily skewed taxation system, which disproportionately burdens the poor through indirect taxes while exempting the elite, poses a significant obstacle to meeting IMF bench-

marks. Consequently, the next Development Outlook from the World Bank may present an even grimmer picture of Pakistan's poverty trends.

There is little indication of significant improvement in economic growth, especially with utility prices on the rise once again. Meanwhile, poverty alleviation efforts seem stagnant, leaving the government in the role of a passive observer as the poverty crisis worsens.

Pakistan finds itself in a familiar phase of the debt cycle, where fiscal constraints spill over into various sectors, exacerbating issues such as poverty, unemployment, and social discontent. This is reflected in the country's recent drop to the bottom of the UN Human Development Index, as highlighted in the 2023-24 report—a development that, while not surprising, remains deeply concerning.

The Human Development Index (HDI) evaluates progress in three key areas: longevity,



education accessibility, and living standards. While Pakistan's decline to a position below countries like Haiti and Zimbabwe underscores the dire state of affairs, it's only part of the grim reality.

The government is financially crippled, unable to address this collapse, and prospects for improvement remain distant. Following provincial allocations under the NFC award, the government lacks sufficient funds even to cover debt interest payments, exacerbating the situation.

It's imperative that the elite now bear their share of the burden. The persistent reliance on middle and lower-income groups for tax revenue has exacerbated Pakistan's human development regression.

However, there's little evidence of a shift in mindset at the top. Despite discussions

about taxing affluent individuals with political connections who evade contributing to the treasury, the perceived response from the prime minister has been to protect their interests.

As Pakistan prepares for another IMF program, it must ensure that harsh conditions aren't disproportionately imposed on the working class. Continued reliance on regressive indirect taxes, which disproportionately burden the poor, risks sparking violent protests.

Make no mistake: this path leads inevitably to the next phase of the debt cycle. While the global HDI has rebounded to pre-Covid levels, Pakistan's trajectory has reversed, raising ominous concerns.

These warning signs have historically been disregarded by successive Pakistani governments, perpetuating the suffering of the populace. Many endure a quality of life only marginally better than that of war-torn regions.

Once again, the government finds itself financially strapped. Any relief must come from the IMF in the form of relaxed subsidy arrangements, contingent upon the generation of additional fiscal space—an endeavor hindered until decisive action is taken to tax the affluent.

The Human Development Index (HDI) paints a bleak picture of Pakistan's current state, with the nation falling below countries like Haiti and Zimbabwe. This decline reflects not only a deteriorating quality of life but also

systemic issues that demand immediate attention. The government's financial constraints, exacerbated by persistent reliance on regressive taxation, threaten to deepen the crisis. Urgent action is needed to address these challenges and pave the way for a brighter future.

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture, grappling with a human development crisis that demands urgent intervention. The government's inability to address this collapse, coupled with persistent socioeconomic inequalities, underscores the pressing need for change. As the nation fights its financial challenges, it must prioritize reforms that promote fairness, equity, and inclusivity. Only through concerted efforts to address systemic shortcomings can Pakistan hope to reverse its downward trajectory and build a more prosperous and equitable society for all its citizens.



# After the Shangla attack

Raza Khan

The recent attack on Chinese engineers in Shangla district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killing five of them and their Pakistani bus driver, was a well-calculated move by terrorists to torpedo Islamabad-Beijing relations as the incident also exposed the capacity of Pakistan providing security to Chinese technical personnel in the country.

Interestingly, both Pakistan and Chinese leadership have expressed the resolve that their extensive ties would remain intact and incidents like that in Shangla could not sow the seeds of ill-will between the two countries. However, rhetoric apart, the terrorist attack definitely has negatively affected relations between Pakistan and China. Chinese engineers and technical personnel have been under attack for a long time in Pakistan and the attacks have not dried up despite promises and guarantees from Islamabad. So the Chinese leadership must be quite perturbed about attacks on its technical personnel in Pakistan and it must have conveyed its concern to Pakistan through diplomatic channels. This is indeed the right way to manage the issue.

It is important to note that no terrorist group has accepted responsibility for the attack. However, Pakistani authorities have blamed the strike on the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Now it is quite important why no group including the suspected TTP has owned the attack. Otherwise, claiming such an important terrorist attack would have increased the profile of the owning group. Terrorist attacks and its media coverage, according to experts, serve as 'oxygen' for terrorist groups. But despite that, why no terrorist group accepted responsibility for the Shangla attack on Chinese engineers is indeed thought-provoking. There are several reasons for the perpetrator to do so. Firstly, the terrorist who conducted the attack wanted to create confusion regarding the perpetrator. Keeping in view the magnitude of the attack the group wanted to evade the heavy response from Pakistani security forces. In other words, the terrorist group which made the attack wanted to conduct it and also remained incognito. This would definitely make the task of investigating agencies very difficult. Secondly, if it is hypothesized that the TTP conducted the strike, then this is understandable on its part not to own the attack. Because the TTP is mainly based in Afghan-Taliban controlled Afghanistan and if the former had claimed responsibility it would definitely have affected

Kabul relations with Beijing. At the moment China is the only country in the world which has extended quasi-diplomatic recognition to the Afghan Taliban administration by sending an envoy to Kabul and also accepting a Taliban representative in Beijing.

Moreover, if the TTP had accepted responsibility for the attack there would have been more pressure on the Afghan Taliban regime to take to task the TTP. Pakistan has since long been asking the Afghan Taliban to rein in the Pakistani Taliban and give up logistic and other support to Pakistani terrorists in Afghanistan. However, the Afghan Taliban remained hesitant to take action against the TTP for several reasons. Above all, the Afghan



Taliban consider the Pakistani Taliban or the TTP as brothers-in-arms who have been instrumental in their victory over Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in 2021. Now when Pakistan has formally blamed the TTP for the attack and it is quite plausible that the TTP may have conducted the strike, then what action China may demand from Kabul against the TTP?

It remains to be seen now to what extent the Afghan Taliban could go to give up support to the Pakistani Taliban on the demand of China. On the one hand, China has invested a lot in Afghanistan particularly its mineral development as well as infrastructure development. Therefore, Afghanistan and the Afghan Taliban owe a lot to Beijing. So it is hoped that the Afghan Taliban would try to decisively rein in the Pakistani Taliban and control their escapades. If this is done, then Pakistan would be a great beneficiary. But on the other hand, the Afghan Taliban are fundamentally a radical militia or non-state actor and therefore, it has not been behaving like a state actor. Moreover, support to fellow terrorist organizations like the TTP is something natural for the Afghan Taliban. So it would be very difficult for the Afghan Taliban to give up support to the TTP for keeping good relations with China.

This is particularly forecasted because

the Afghan Taliban is not a monolithic entity and there are different factions within the group. Some of these factions are against China and Pakistan and they do not want to let go support to the TTP for their hatred towards Pakistan and probably towards China due to the latter's mistreatment of its Uyghur Muslim population. Thus, it is to be watched what course the Afghan Taliban regime follows. Is it ready to give up vital support from Pakistan and China for the sake of keeping close ties with a militant-terrorist group like the TTP?

Now come to the timing of the Shangla attack on the Chinese technical personnel. The timing of the attack is very important because it has come at a time when a new government

in Pakistan just took power. Moreover, the timing is important because relations between the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan have reached a deadlock over the question of Pakistani Taliban hideouts in Afghanistan and support from the Afghan Taliban administration. Thus it is quite obvious that the terrorists wanted to take advantage of the political instability and chaos in Pakistan. Because the February 8 elections in Pakistan and their outcome have become extremely controversial and it is well-known that the current

government of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has come to power through gross rigging and manipulation by the powers-that-be and therefore, lacks legitimacy. This is a very conducive situation for terrorist groups to strike back. It is also important to note that the Shangla attack was made at a time when China is complaining of Pakistan's sluggish progress on the Chinese-funded China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). So the terrorist group, by not accepting responsibility for the attack, wanted to create confusion about the commitment of Islamabad towards the CPEC.

It is important to note that on the day of the Shangla attack, the separatist Baloch ethnic militant group, Baloch Liberation Army, attempted to storm the Pakistan strategic naval base in Turbat district of Balochistan province. Balochistan is the province wherefrom the CPEC starts from Pakistan's strategic Gwadar seaport, located very close to the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. The BLA is said to be supported by India which considers Chinese control of the Gwadar seaport having military aims to counter Indian interests. Thus, it seems that Baloch militant organizations and the TTP have established solid coordination to carry out attacks. The biggest impact of this coordination would be on Chinese nationals and interests in Pakistan.

# Non-state actors in Pakistan's education sector

Rasheed Ali

In Pakistan, the state's failure to fulfill its responsibilities in the education sector has created an opportunity for non-state actors to step in and play a significant role. While Article 25-A of the Constitution mandates the provision of free and compulsory education, both the federal and provincial governments have struggled to meet this obligation. As a result, private educational institutions, including for-profit and non-profit schools, community-owned schools, and religious/faith-based schools, have emerged as key players in the country's education landscape.

Similar to the healthcare and other sectors, Pakistan has also failed in fulfilling its responsibilities in the field of education. Article 25-A of the Constitution of Pakistan states that the state should provide free and compulsory education. The definition of the state, as outlined in Article 7 of the Constitution, includes the Federal Government, Provincial Governments, Provincial Assemblies, and other authorities empowered to impose taxes or levies.

Unfortunately, both the federal and provincial governments have not fulfilled their responsibility of providing free and compulsory education to all children between the ages of five and sixteen, as determined by law. Consequently, non-state actors, such as for-profit schools, non-profit schools operated by NGOs or foundations, publicly-funded schools managed by private boards, community-owned schools, and religious/faith-based schools, have filled this void.

In November 2022, the Idara-e-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) presented a research report commissioned by the Global Education Monitoring Report. The report focused on the role and presence of private educational institutions in Pakistan, as part of the "Regional Report on non-state actors in education in South Asia."

The report highlights that private schools, which represent 38% of educational institutions and 44% of enrolments in Pakistan, have expanded their role beyond formal education. Private educational institutions have become vital and innovative pillars of the country's education sector. The prevalence of private schools is higher in urbanized provinces like Punjab and Sindh compared to less urbanized areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) play a significant role in supporting the state in

imparting education to its citizens. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, which provide specialized technical and vocational education, consist of both public (30%) and private (70%) sectors in Pakistan, according to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2017-18. The non-state sector caters to the majority (56%) of the 0.315 million enrolled students in TVET.

Non-formal basic education (NFBE) schools offer early education, and students graduating from these schools can usually transfer to formal education at a certain grade level. Approximately 1.24 million students are enrolled in NFBE institutions, which employ 30,653 teachers.

Deeni Madaris, privately funded Islamic religious institutes, are also part of the non-state education providers. With 31,115 Deeni Madaris operating in Pakistan, it is challeng-



ing to determine their exact number due to the lack of registration mechanisms. Madrasas account for less than 1% of all enrollments in Pakistan, with 2.362 million male students (58%) and 1.737 million female students (42%).

The report also compares the provision of education and facilities between public and private educational institutions. Data collected from both sectors reveals that the non-state sector generally performs better in providing basic facilities at their institutes. In terms of reading skills in the local language, such as Urdu or Pashto/Sindhi, both government and non-state schools show similar high levels of proficiency. However, the non-state sector demonstrates greater proficiency in reading English. Additionally, the non-state sector has a larger proportion of students capable of conducting division operations, indicating better arithmetic skills.

Multigrade teaching is prevalent, with one out of five children in non-state schools and one out of two children in government schools experiencing multigrade teaching at

the Class 2 level.

The report acknowledges that government school teachers have better qualifications compared to their non-state sector counterparts. Over the past decades, the market share of non-state educational institutions has grown rapidly. Private schooling has tripled within a decade, expanding its market share from elite and urban regions to low and low-middle class and rural settings. According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2017-18, the non-state sector operates 38% of schools, 40% of universities, 56% of TVET institutes, 27% of teacher training institutes, and 10% of degree colleges.

Non-state education providers are often preferred by individuals across the country, regardless of whether they reside in rural or urban areas. Private institutes tend to be more result-oriented, have stronger management teams, and offer more locally relevant approaches compared to state-run institutions.

The report acknowledges the state's efforts to regulate the non-state sector, primarily through registration requirements. However, in practice, regulation mainly occurs during registration and renewal processes, making it difficult to implement stricter regulations due to the sector's size and the provinces' capacities.

Corruption is a significant concern, as officials responsible for regulating education institutes can be bribed for favorable outcomes during their visits. Tension between regulators and non-state institutes further exacerbates the challenges faced by private schools.

The rise of non-state actors in Pakistan's education sector, particularly private educational institutions, has brought about both challenges and opportunities. While the state has struggled to provide free and compulsory education as mandated by the Constitution, private schools have filled this void and expanded their role beyond formal education. They have demonstrated innovation, flexibility, and a results-oriented approach that appeals to many individuals across the country, regardless of their urban or rural location. However, the regulation of these non-state institutions remains a complex task, and efforts to ensure quality education and address issues such as corruption and tension between regulators and private schools are ongoing. Moving forward, a balanced and collaborative approach between the state and non-state actors is essential to ensure inclusive and quality education for all children in Pakistan.

# Pakistan's climate crossroads

Dr. Zaheer Ahmad Babar

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$8,040.3 million as of April 5, 2024. On the other hand, a study conducted by international climate experts, and published by Carbon Brief, said that the last flooding in the country caused an estimated \$30bn in financial losses, with further economic disruption, expected in the months to come. Carbon Brief is a UK-based website covering the latest developments in climate science, climate policy and energy policy.

Keeping in view both facts, a crucial question arises: Shouldn't Pakistan plan effectively today to cope with the future challenges posed by global warming to save its coming generations? What's global warming? Its simple answer is: 'Global warming is the long-term warming of the planet's overall temperature.

Though this warming trend has been going on for a long time, its pace has significantly increased in the last hundred years due to the burning of fossil fuels.

As the human population has increased, so has the volume of fossil fuels burnt. Though Pakistan contributes less than 1% of the world's greenhouse gases blamed for causing global warming, yet its 200 million people are among the world's most vulnerable victims of the growing consequences of climate change. Around 1.7m houses and 18,000 schools were destroyed,

while more than 1,460 health facilities were impacted. Meanwhile, almost 800,000 livestock were killed and 2m hectares of crops and orchards were affected – with around \$2.3bn of food crops destroyed.

According to the 2018 Global Climate Risk Index, released by the public policy group Germanwatch, Pakistan is among 10 countries affected most by climate change. The Carbon Brief study said the record-breaking monsoon rainfall that led to severe flooding in the country was "likely increased" by climate change. Over June-August 2022, Pakistan received nearly 190% more rain than its 30-year average, affecting more than 33 million people, destroying 1.7m homes, and leading to nearly 1,400 deaths. The study authors concluded that a five-day period of rainfall that hit the southern provinces of Sindh and Balochistan in late August is now

about 75% more intense than it would have been had the climate not warmed by 1.2C.

Dr Urwa Elahi, Pakistan Businesses Forum's (PBF's) additional secretary general for the case studies and research unit, believes a multi-pronged approach must be devised to tackle the devastations and overcome the exposed fault-lines for the future. In a talk with the writer, she cited the findings of a World Bank report, titled 'Country Climate and Development', issued in November 2022, suggesting that at least US\$16.3 billion were required for the post-floods rehabilitation and reconstruction process. And that did not include the much-needed new investments required to support Pakistan's adaptation to climate change and build resilience to protect the country from future climate shocks.

Quoting the study findings, she said



that as a direct consequence of the floods, the national poverty rate was projected to increase by 3.7 to 4%, pushing an additional 8.4 to 9.1 million people below the poverty line. Dr. Urwa warns that climate change and its consequences have placed Pakistan at a crossroads. The country faces the challenge of encompassing the third biggest ice mass in the world and simultaneously, confronting temperatures that are surging sharply as a result of global warming.

And what should be done in Pakistan to deal with global warming, Amber Ajani, a master's in environmental science from the American University, has some suggestions. She urges Pakistani authorities to undertake reforestation and afforestation programmes on mountain slopes on an urgent basis. Northern areas have suffered severe deforestation due to a lack of access to electricity and natural gas.

The communities and the general public need to be engaged in mass plantation drives across the country.

The 'Project Lead for Climate Stories Pakistan' stresses building dams in Thar to store rainwater. The authorities concerned must devise and implement a waste management strategy for mountainous areas. Since mountain communities have nowhere to dispose of their waste, they end up either throwing it in the rivers, burning the waste in open air (which contributes to black carbon deposition on glaciers and accelerates their melting) or burying it underground (which resurfaces in the event of a natural disaster and adds to existing risks). Proper waste disposal systems and awareness (especially for tourists) can help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and disaster risk.

Amber Ajani, a UN Fellow, National Geographic Explorer and a Fulbright alumna, calls for banning diesel vehicles in the mountains. An increasing number of tourists visiting the scenic mountains in the north opt for using diesel (the most inefficient fuel) in their four-wheelers. The particulate matter emitted by the incomplete burning of fuels at such high altitudes directly contributes to the rapid melting of glaciers, thereby accelerating climate change and worsening the health of people.

She stresses switching to renewable energy sources. "We have massive potential for solar energy in Thar and hydropower in the north, which can provide clean, cost-effective and uninterrupted energy," she explains.

She demands the authorities concerned acknowledge that Pakistan faces diverse climate challenges in different geographical and cultural contexts. For example, the climate impacts in Chitral will be vastly different from the impacts faced by Sindh. Therefore, there is a need to ideate solutions, keeping in mind the context and diversity.

And lastly, she urges making climate change a priority in the development and political agenda. She says that climate change is influencing every area of human and economic development, and it should be taken into account at every level.

# How Gaza is changing US campuses

David Palumbo-Liu

For more than five months now, students across the United States have been rallying in support of Palestinians as they face genocide at the hands of the Israeli army. It is increasingly clear that more and more young Americans view advocacy for Palestine in the same way as Angela Davis does, as “a moral litmus test for the world”.

Mobilisation is no easy task – students supporting Palestinian liberation have been stabbed, shot, run over and sprayed with chemicals used by the Israeli occupation forces. They have been suspended, arrested and disciplined. They have had to rely on their own labour and the limited funds they have been able to raise for their protest actions.

By contrast, pro-Israel students have well-established donor networks, campus Hillels, and the ear of mainstream media to amplify their complaints that pro-Palestinian activism is anti-Semitic.

College administrations, worried about donor money, have also bent over backwards to please powerful individuals and groups, who have denounced pro-Palestinian activism and have not hesitated to discipline students on their behalf.

Vastly out-resourced and under-protected, advocates for Palestine have become savvy and creative, building alliances with communities that cut across

racess, classes and religions and employing a broad range of tactics and strategies. Their actions range from long-term plans to spontaneous eruptions, and everything in between.

Some organising has already borne some fruit. In the University of California system, there have been some notable successes. At the University of California Davis, pro-Palestinian campaigning resulted in a historic student government vote on February 15 to heed the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) call. As a result, the student body will refrain from spending any of its \$20m budget on any company on the BDS list.

On the same day, the Graduate Student Association at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) called for divestment from Israel. On February 20, the UCLA student government voted unanimously to demand that the

university divest student fees from “apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide”.

On February 29, the Associated Students of UC Riverside also passed a resolution to fully divest from companies complicit in Israel’s genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. On March 6, the Associated Students of UC San Diego also voted in favour of a divestment bill. Elsewhere, results have been mixed. At Stanford University, where I teach, students managed to maintain an around-the-clock sit-in for 120 days, demanding the university denounce Israeli apartheid and genocide, support Palestinian students, identify anti-Palestinian biases in teaching and research, and implement divestment initiatives.

When the university abruptly demanded that the sit-in be dismantled, more than 500 students rallied to defend it with many staying overnight, daring the university to arrest them. While some administrators privately expressed



some degree of sympathy, no concrete concessions have been made, so students have continued to demonstrate and disrupt campus life, and are mounting a campus-wide divestment campaign.

Although the Stanford administration has yet to make any meaningful changes, student organisers are quite aware of their achievements. “Obviously, it was a protest at the end of the day, but we also created a space for discourse. And it’s ironic because the university has been desperate to create a space like that, it has been desperate to create this kind of conversation – this was admitted to us by various administrators, including the president himself. What the sit-in did was do what the university had been trying to do,” Farah, a Stanford student organiser, told me in a recent interview for my podcast Speaking out of Place.

What both long-term campaigns and organic, eruptive takeovers have managed to do is to radically change campus environments. Besides the passionate and highly vocal exchanges between people with different views that we have seen at marches and demonstrations, deliberate and methodical divestment campaigns and protracted sit-ins have sustained conversations, debates and discussions over months.

Each of these actions involves bringing in guest speakers (often prominent Palestinian activists, artists and poets) that fill in gaps in education that US universities have been happy to leave unfilled. Students are therefore both learning from a broader spectrum of sources and are themselves serving to educate others.

In the months since October 7, the entire landscape of the US university has changed with regard to Palestine. Some have started to draw parallels with the antiwar student

movement during the Vietnam War era. A report by a UC San Diego student newspaper about a pro-Palestine rally where more than 2,000 showed up said: “A turnout of this degree is unprecedented, even by the anti-Vietnam War student demonstrations in the 1960s and 70s.”

As someone who was a student at the University of California at Berkeley during the Vietnam War, and a participant in those demonstrations as well as in today’s rallies for Palestinian liberation, I am struck by some clear similarities.

First, in both cases, student protests challenged the mainstream media’s depiction of the

wars and the official positions of their university administrations. Protest action has served to educate the public and expose the roles institutions of higher education play in national and global power dynamics. University administrators were confronted with their complicity in the wars and their purposeful obstruction of certain kinds of knowledge and learning and could not hide behind “sins of omission”.

Second, these protests aligned the struggles for Vietnamese liberation and Palestinian liberation with both domestic and international struggles and featured broad multiracial and multiethnic coalitions that link together the local, national and international. These connections have meant that even those at geographically isolated, and smaller institutions do not feel detached or alone, but part of something much bigger.

# Sorry, but Iran is not the aggressor here

Belén Fernández

On April 13, Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel in retaliation for a deadly Israeli strike on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, that took place on April 1.

The vast majority of the projectiles were intercepted by Israel's air defence system, with assistance from the ever-helpful United States military, and damage was minimal. Having completed its retaliation, Iran has now declared that the matter can "be deemed concluded" – although Israel is not usually one to let anyone else have the last word.

In the meantime, the barrage of criticism of Tehran's "aggression" has continued unabated in the West. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak condemned "in the strongest terms the Iranian regime's reckless attack against Israel", which he insisted had once again shown that Iran was "intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard". The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs lamented that "Iran's long term aggressive behavior is preventing the Middle East region to live in peace and security".

For his part, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau whined about Iran's "disregard for peace and stability in the region", and regurgitated that old, tired slogan about "Israel's right to defend itself". Germany's Ambassador to Israel Steffen Seibert took to social media to proclaim German solidarity "with all Israelis tonight whom Iran is terrorising with this unprecedented and ruthless attack".

Lastly, US President Joe Biden, who was forced to cut his beach weekend short due to the developments, announced: "Our commitment to Israel's security against threats from Iran and its proxies is ironclad."

The Iranian attack, mind you, occurred a little over six months into Israel's ongoing pulverisation of the Gaza Strip, which has killed nearly 34,000 Palestinians, including some 13,800 children. And yet given the thousands of missing persons presumed to be buried under the rubble, even these terrifying numbers are no doubt grave underestimates.

More than 76,000 people have been wounded, as the Israeli military has busied itself flattening entire neighbourhoods and blowing up schools, hospitals, and other basic infrastructure, all the while condemning the territory's inhabitants to famine and starvation.

Indeed, genocide is nothing if not "long term aggressive behaviour" – to borrow the Czech Foreign Ministry's words. If the whole business weren't so unprecedentedly heinous, it would be almost laughable to claim that Iran is the one "intent on sowing chaos" and disregarding "peace and stability in the region".

But because Israel's outsize role as a prized US partner in crime entitles it to a total subversion of logic, genocidaires become victims

the all-out genocide kicked off.

So much for "peace and stability". But one should never underestimate the imperial utility of the good old Iranian menace in justifying whatever US policy needs justifying. Recall Tehran's inclusion on the original "axis of evil" shortlist, courtesy of former US President George W Bush, who in his 2002 State of the Union address denounced Iran for "aggressively" pursuing weapons of mass destruction and



and unmitigated Israeli aggression becomes "self-defence". And never mind the April 1 Israeli attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus; that was just preemptive retaliation, right?

In light of the unceasing slaughter in Gaza, though, the Western response to the intercepted Iranian missiles and drones is sickeningly cynical. Sunak's pathetic claim that "no one wants to see more bloodshed" fails to account for the reality that, as long as it's Palestinian blood, it's all totally fine.

Unfortunately, the Iranian spectacle may provide the Biden administration with exactly what it needs to shift the focus away from Gaza – and specifically US complicity in genocide. After all, it would be a sad day for the arms industry if the US had to stop sending so many weapons to such an active client.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the US was responsible for a full 69 percent of arms imports by the Israeli military between 2019 and 2023, when

"export[ing] terror".

Armed with said "axis", the US proceeded to engage in nothing less than mass destruction and terror throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Fast-forward 22 years to the present era of destruction, and the Iranian bogeyman is as handy as ever. Following this weekend's attack, perhaps everyone's favourite refrain "But do you condemn Hamas?" can be updated to: "But do you condemn Iran?"

As for things genuinely worthy of condemnation, these continue to include, well, genocide in Gaza – not to mention the brazenly hypocritical Western insistence on Israel's "right to self-defence", which ultimately amounts to genocidal apologetics.

And as leaders continue to trip over themselves in affirmation of solidarity with Israel after this "unprecedented attack", we'd all do well to remember that you reap what you sow – and that Iran is not the aggressor here.

## Self-esteem

Since people tend to be more generous during the holy month of Ramazan, a number of television channels and organisations run advertisements for collecting charity for the underprivileged, and then host programmes in which the donations, either in cash or kind, are handed to the people in full glare of media lights. This hurts the self-esteem of the people, and makes them feel uncomfortable. The assistance should be provided to the needy without taking their pictures. The governments should also not use donations for popularity and helping their political interests.

Kaleem Ahmed  
Islamabad

## Loud music

Ramazan provided much-needed relief to the people of Jamshoro because of the relative peace in the area. The culture of playing loud music during the day and till late in the night has become a nuisance. Those indulging in such activities should realise that people still pray even after Ramazan. The noise level in the area is a distraction and disturbance to one and all. There is apparently no sense of community-living in people. It is imperative for people, in general, and event organisers, in particular, to realise that they need to be mindful of the cultural and religious sensitivities of the residents living around them. Additionally, Jamshoro is home to three universities where students aspire to learn and study in a conducive environment.

Taniya Ahmed  
Jamshoro

## Ridiculous content

The entertainment industry these days tends to show things that are detrimental to our social and moral values. I am not averse to the idea of entertainment, but I am often taken aback when I see the ridiculous content being shown in the name of entertainment. A talk show, which is supposed to be fun and entertainment, actually happens to be anything but, with the host constantly crossing the line, especially with his female guests, even invading their personal space. The authorities should take notice of the show and make the host behave in a professional manner.

Salaar Khan Metlo  
Karachi

## Harassment of citizens

I am 80, retired, and consider myself to be a well-informed law-abiding citizen. Recently, I was signalled by the traffic police close to the checkpoint at the intersection of Tariq Road and Shaheed-i-Millat Road. Upon inquiry, I was told in a very uncourteous and uncouth manner that I was 'guilty' of driving a car with number plates that had not been issued by the relevant office.

I informed the policeman that on my last visit to collect the number plates, I was told that the number plates for my car were not ready even though the car has been on the roads for two years. I also showed him the vehicle registration receipt that had a stamp showing clearly that the number plates had not been issued.

This did not satisfy the officer who asked for my licence, telling me that I would be fined. He called out a couple of constables, telling them to remove my car number plates and told me to collect them from Ferozabad Police Station after paying the challan. When I asked the officer what I should do if the plates were still not available, I was told to visit the Motor Vehicle Department, and ask for a certificate stating this. Now a senior officer came to me, asked for my mobile phone number, printed a challan worth Rs820, handed it over to me, and retained my driving licence. I asked him to have the number plates removed as was ordered by the officer who had initially stopped me. But the senior officer said it was not necessary, and that the official who had stopped me should not have said such a thing. The whole episode left me a bit confused as I am not sure if the offence I was penalised for was my fault, or was this a case of harassment of citizens by the provincial government and its police.

Matin Ghani  
Karachi

## Ruet-e-Hilal Committee really needed?

Astronomy is an ancient science. As a matter of fact, it is widely acknowledged by the scientific community that thousands of years ago, astronomers accurately plotted the movement of heavenly bodies and predicted their appearance. Wooden sailing ships navigated the vast oceans and even early aircraft corroborated their rudimentary navigation instruments with the location of the heavenly bodies. A thorough knowledge of astronomy was essential for seafarers and flyers alike.

Today, with the help of modern tools, such as radio-telescopes as well as supercomputers, the appearance of our closest astronomical neighbour can easily be predicted up to the minute. Our own meteorological department is quite capable of predicting the birth of the new moon, and it even does so, but no attention is paid to such assertions by the government and the Ruet-i-Hilal Committee.

However, the number of employees and the budget of this department may well exceed the entire administration of some European countries that have very lean governments. But we are averse to the idea of using its input. As for the Ruet-i-Hilal Committee, it is an organisation that has no tangible function at all. The only occasions when people even talk about it are Eidul Fitr and Eidul Azha. And what people talk about is not always positive. This is so because there is often disharmony and

confusion in its decisions and announcements. The sooner this committee is disbanded, the better it will be for the national exchequer, and the nation will celebrate religious occasions in unison. All we need to do is to take the meteorological department's advice on the appearance of the crescent, or follow Saudi Arabia with a lapse of one day.

Asif Jah  
Karachi

## Hypocrisy of Western media

Recently, the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) based in the United Kingdom released a report that carried empirical evidence based on the largest statistical analysis of the media coverage related to the atrocities committed in Israel on Oct 7, and Israel's genocidal campaign against the Palestinian people in the first month of the current wave of barbarism that has been unleashed by the Zionist state. The CfMM report has debunked the double standards and hypocrisy of the Western media houses, which engendered Islamophobia and used utterly demonising language against the Palestinians. Its analysis of the war coverage was done under six themes: contextualisation, framing, language, claims, the undermining of Palestinian sources, and the misrepresentation of pro-Palestinian protests.

According to its research, the organisation unearthed that many news outlets opted to present news from an Israeli perspective, often with significant lapses, or rather deliberate misleading, in basic fact-checking and verification. Significantly, the report has unveiled that Palestinian symbols, such as the Palestinian flag, were overwhelmingly 'used to illustrate stories on anti-Semitism'. Similarly, it has also exposed numerous Islamophobic aspects of the coverage, such as the framing of pro-Palestinian support and protests as inherently dangerous and akin to 'a terror threat' often because of the Muslim presence among those taking part in the rallies.

Many editors, analysts and columnists, as the report further explored, repeatedly presented Islam as being 'an anti-Semitic religion', portraying it as the driving force behind the general Muslim sentiments related to Israel. Rhetorical tools were intentionally used that led to the misrepresentation of the 75-year-old Israel-Palestine conflict as a 'religious war' between Jews and Muslims, rather than a simple matter of occupation and colonisation. The Western media juggernaut has been influencing the worldview on Israel-Gaza conflict through its misinformation and disinformation factories, but Israel's genocidal campaign against Palestine has been so massive and outrageous that all hypocrisies and conspiracies are being exposed on a daily basis. And, yet, hypocrisy has prevailed over all the facts.

Zahid Ali Zohri  
Gilgit-Baltistan

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