■ The canal controversy - Page 5
■ Pakistan's price crisis: A moral betrayal - Page 6
■ Pakistan's current account surge: A fleeting win?- Page 7

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ECONOMIC RATINGS UP, GROUND REALITIES UNCHANGED

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Index | CUTTING EDGE

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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, 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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Economic ratings up, ground realities unchanged

Farhan Khan

Fitch has upgraded Pakistan's long-term foreign currency issuer default rating from CCC+ to B- which means that the country has transited from the substantial credit risk to highly speculative category.

This signals an improvement in our economic health. It may be added here that Fitch had raised Pakistan's rating from CCC to CCC+ in July 2024, soon after the government secured a staff level agreement on the Extended Fund Facility programme. But both these two ratings reflected substantial credit risk with default as a distinct possibility. Moody's had also upgraded Pakistan's rating from Caa3 to Caa2 in August 2024 on the assumption that the IMF Board would approve the SLA that the rating agency defined as junk and highly speculative.

Moody's has yet to upgrade the rating this year. However, it should be noted here that national economy must remain vigilant against any backslide on the reform agenda as laid down by the IMF.

As things stand, the signs are hopeful. State Bank of Pakistan Governor Jameel Ahmed, in his recent address at the Pakistan Stock Exchange, highlighted three positive economic indicators. First, remittance inflows reached a historic high of 4 billion dollars in March which when projected for the current year would amount 38 billion dollars. The Finance Division monthly update and outlook for March noted July-February exports of 21.82 billion dollars as opposed to remittances of 23.96 billion dollars. Secondly, the Governor mentioned the low inflation rate (0.7 percent last month). Thirdly, the Governor pointed to rising investor confidence based on a survey by the SBP which in its latest monetary policy statement said: "Latest pulse surveys show improved consumer and business confidence".

But there are many areas which are still exposed to risks. One is the lacklustre performance of the large-scale manufacturing sector (LSM), with recent data suggesting that the contraction in February this year was negative 1.90 percent. The drag in LSM growth is mainly coming from a few low-weight sub-sectors, which have more than offset the positive momentum in key sub-sectors like textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and POL.

Another moot issue is whether the rise in remittance inflows is sustainable. It is relevant to mention here that in March two major factors accounted for a rise in inflows; notably, it was the holy month of Ramazan when remittances are traditionally higher than in other months and the border-crossing with Afghanistan and Iran remained closed for most of the month which stemmed the outflows for the time being.

On the other hand, inflation outlook is subject to risks emanating mainly from volatility in food prices, timing and magnitude of energy price adjustments, additional revenue measures, protectionist policies in major economies and uncertain outlook of global commodity prices. No doubt, foreign exchange reserves have gone up and the risk of default has receded. But the sustainability of both these positive indicators is subject to the country remaining on an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. About 16 billion dollars of roll-overs are a major component of the reserves, which would dry up as the three roll-over countries – China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE – have made it repeatedly clear to the government that an extension is subject to the country being on a rigid IMF programme. Again, the Fund wants the government to tax traders and the rich farmers effective January 2025 to be implemented from 1 July 2025. But this is a politically challenging task.

Fitch B- rating is considered to be equivalent to Moody's B3 rating. In other words, Moody's will have to upgrade two notches from Caa2 to Caa1 and then to B- to give a comparable rating to Pakistan. Interestingly, the third major international rating agency, Standard and Poor (S&P), has kept Pakistan rating unchanged at CCC+ since October 2022 though it issued a report on the country in July 2024 considered equivalent to Moody's Caa1 and Fitch's CCC.

But a word of caution is relevant here. Fitch upgrade is based on the assumption that Pakistan will continue to access external funding with the fulfilment of IMF conditions such as quantitative timebound structural benchmarks as well as reforms. Subsequent to the Fitch upgrade, it is important to remember that for this revaluation to be sustainable in the medium to long term the managers of the

Macroeconomic stability is a claim that is repeatedly echoed by the cabinet ministers as well as by stakeholders but the common man has not benefited from the decline in inflation due to a wage freeze in the private sector. The plight of the common man can be gauged from the fact that Pakistan is currently suffering a poverty level of 42 percent as per the World Bank figures. Macroeconomic stability in the given conditions is highly unstable until the government girds up its loins and finds an indigenous solution to its problems instead of depending on foreign loans. The long-term remedy lies in cutting current expenditure and going for industrialisation and export growth in a big way.

The canal controversy

Nasim Ahmed

The construction of new canals to irrigate the Cholistan desert has soured relations between the PPP and PML-N on the one hand and the Sindh government and the Centre on the other. There have been widespread protests across Sindh against the controversial canal project on the Indus. The protests have turned into a mass movement, bringing together diverse political forces. The issue has put the PPP, which has ruled the province for the last 15 years, in a difficult position.

Critics say that the canal project would turn a large part of the province into barren land, and the PPP being a part of the ruling coalition at the centre, cannot escape the blame for the upcoming disaster. Had drought-like conditions in Sindh not made the Indus water levels a matter of life or death for its inhabitants, the issue may not have been so serious. But already Sindh suffers from a shortage of water for irrigation.

The distribution of water from the Indus has always been a sensitive issue for Sindh. The latest controversy over the new canals has turned the situation in the province more explosive. Thousands of people, including the youth and women, are joining in the protests along with Sindhi nationalist groups across the province. Many mainstream political parties and members of civil society have also come out to oppose the canal project that they believe would damage the agricultural economy of Sindh.

It appears that the PPP did not initially oppose the canals due to its political interests. However, when public anger began building up to fever pitch, it realised it could not ignore the issue any longer. It is obvious that the interests of the people of Sindh were not taken into account when the decision regarding the canal projects was taken at the highest level.

Following the protests, the provincial administration in Sindh has openly opposed the federal government's project. But the PPP's position is considered dubious. It is alleged that President Asif Zardari had assented to the project last year. The army chief and Punjab chief minister later inaugurated a GPI project in the southern Punjab region of Cholistan that is to be irrigated by the new canals on the Indus.

The main concern is that the canals would reduce the flow of water to Sindh. But such a sensitive issue was never discussed and approved by the Council of Common Interests. It is also relevant to add here that the PPP did not demand a CCI meeting earlier when the canal plan was starting to take shape, and only woke up to the disturbing issue after the opposition took to the streets. But the Sindh government denies the allegation of failing to raise the issue with the federal government.

On the technical level, hydrologists, water resources experts and environmentalists have opposed the plan to build canals on the Indus River and suggested alternative solutions to ensure that Pakistan's agriculture sector gets modernised without trampling on provincial rights and harming the natural flow of Indus and its ecology. They say that the amount of sand and mud is quite a lot in the Indus and, therefore, the canals water would require desilting on a large scale. There are also other technical problems in the canals project like land levelling and residual silt which make the entire plan unfeasible. Experts suggest an alternative solution based on a study conducted by some Pakistani and American experts, according to which instead of canals, the river bank filtration system with "horizontal collector wells" should be used to transport water to Cholistan. Similarly, the Sutlej River has a huge quantity of reserve water under its bed which is enough to irrigate entire Cholistan. Incidentally, the Sutlej is the nearest river to the Cholistan region. Moreover, it is said that the scheme would cost half the money compared to the expenses of canals and the duration would also be very less.

PPP leaders have now announced that the party will adopt constitutional and democratic methods to fight Sindh's case. There is an urgent need to resolve the dispute over the canal project sooner than later as the prevailing public unrest in the province can take a turn for the worse, adding to the woes the federal government faces in Balochistan and KP. There is a growing demand that the canal project, which is a life and death issue for Sindh, be shelved. Sindh's concerns about the project are not unfounded. The major responsibility lies with the federal government to address the grievances of the people of Sindh and take necessary remedial measures.

Fortunately, there is an existing constitutional mechanism for resolving water disputes among the provinces. The Sindh government has accused the federal government of having failed to fully implement the Water Apportionment Accord of 1991. In the larger perspective, the unilateral decision to build the canals in the Punjab without referring the matter to CCI was unwise and in violation of the Constitution. It is not yet too late to mend matters. The canal issue and all its pros and cons should be thoroughly discussed and the project be relaunched after necessary corrections and modifications.

Pakistan's price crisis: A moral betrayal

Muhammad Ali

The skyrocketing 133 percent gap between wholesale and retail prices for staples like potatoes and onions in Pakistan isn't just a glitch in the system—it's a moral travesty that lays bare the failures of provincial governance.

This isn't about market fluctuations or supply chain woes; it's about rampant profiteering flourishing under the noses of officials who seem indifferent to the plight of ordinary citizens. While families struggle to afford basic necessities, the apathy of those tasked with regulating prices—evidenced by chief secretaries in Punjab and Balochistan barely engaging with monitoring tools—fuels a crisis that squeezes the poorest the hardest. This is more than inflation; it's exploitation, enabled by a system that has lost sight of its duty to the people.

The staggering 133 percent gap between wholesale and retail prices for essential goods in Pakistan isn't just a statistic—it's a gut punch to millions of households and a glaring failure of provincial leadership. This isn't about market quirks or supply chain hiccups. It's about a system where profiteering runs rampant, enabled by officials who seem to have forgotten their job is to serve the public.

Meanwhile, the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), tracked by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, showed a slight dip of 0.69 percent for the week ending April 17, with the SPI at 314.92 points compared to 317.12 the previous week. Year-on-year, it's down 2.72 percent. But these marginal improvements mask a deeper, uglier truth: retail prices for staples like potatoes and onions are skyrocketing far beyond their wholesale costs.

Take Quetta, where potatoes retail at 133 percent above wholesale. In Lahore, onions carry a 60 percent markup, and in Karachi, it's a jaw-dropping 106 percent. These aren't minor markups chalked up to transport or labor—they point to either blatant price gouging or a complete breakdown in oversight.

The National Price Monitoring Committee's recent meeting laid bare the dysfunction. In Punjab and Balochistan, the officials tasked with keeping prices in check are barely showing up. Punjab's Chief Secretary checked the price monitoring dashboard three times in a month. Balochistan's? Not once. Meanwhile, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Chief Secretary logged in 88 times. The contrast is stark—one province at least tries, while others shrug.

Food inflation has been crushing Pakistani families for years, yet provincial governments act like it's a new problem. The 18th Amendment handed them the reins to enforce fair pricing, but instead, they've left consumers at the mercy of middlemen and markets. The federal government isn't blameless, but the real failure lies with provinces that can't—or won't—step up.

This isn't just about numbers. It's about people scraping by, forced to pay obscene prices for basic food while those in charge look the other way. If this doesn't scream for accountability, what does?

The obscene gap between wholesale and retail prices in Pakistan—stretching as wide as 133 percent for essentials like potatoes—isn't just a failure of governance; it's a betrayal of the people. To let this exploitation fester is to turn a blind eye to the struggles of ordinary citizens, who are forced to bear the cost of unchecked greed while officials dawdle.

This isn't about a lack of data or dashboards. It's about a lack of conscience. Provincial leaders, from chief secretaries to district commissioners, must be dragged into the spotlight and made to answer for their inaction. Are local price controllers clueless or complicit? Either way, they're failing. The National Price Monitoring Committee's recent findings—showing Punjab's Chief Secretary barely glancing at the monitoring system three times in a month, and Balochistan's not bothering at all—reveal a shameful apathy. Meanwhile, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's 88 logins show what basic effort looks like. Why the disparity?

Words like "inflation" don't capture reality. This is price gouging, plain and simple, hitting the poorest the hardest. A potato in Quetta retailing at 133 percent above wholesale, or onions in Karachi marked up 106 percent, isn't a market glitch—it's a racket enabled by absent regulation. Provincial governments, empowered by the 18th Amendment, have the authority to act but lack the will.

Enough with half-measures. Pakistan needs real-time price tracking that doesn't just flag disparities but triggers swift, public penalties. Routine market inspections, hefty fines for profiteers, and naming repeat offenders are the bare minimum. If a government can't ensure a fair price for a sack of onions, it has no business claiming it cares about its people.

The time for excuses ended long ago. Provincial administrations must either step up—cracking down on price manipulation with urgency—or face the consequences for abandoning the citizens they're meant to serve. Anything less is a moral disgrace.

The time for half-hearted measures and empty promises has long passed. Provincial governments must act with relentless urgency, implementing real-time price tracking that doesn't just highlight disparities but triggers immediate, transparent penalties. Routine market inspections, severe fines for profiteers, and publicly shaming repeat offenders are the bare minimum to restore trust. If those in power can't ensure a fair price for a bag of onions or a sack of potatoes, they forfeit any claim to care about Pakistan's economic hardship. The people deserve better than a system that abandons them to greed. Provincial administrations must rise to their responsibility—or face the rightful wrath of a nation betrayed by their inaction.

Pakistan's current account surge: A fleeting win?

Husnain Shahid

A record-breaking $1.2 billion current account surplus, fueled by a sharp rise in workers' remittances last month, has sparked cautious optimism about the country's external stability.

This milestone, the highest since 2012, has lifted the State Bank's foreign exchange reserves forecast and bolstered hopes of a fiscal year-end surplus. Yet, the broader balance-of-payments remains in the red for the fifth straight month, weighed down by weak foreign investment and heavy debt repayments. While the surplus offers a moment of relief, its reliance on temporary factors like import curbs and a remittances spike raises questions about its staying power.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has raised serious concerns about the potential fallout from new trade tariffs on Pakistani goods, recently flagged by US President Donald Trump. Though these tariffs are currently on hold, the think tank warns that their enforcement could deal a heavy blow to Pakistan's export-driven economy, threatening jobs and growth. In a detailed policy brief, "Navigating the Threat of US Tariff Hikes on Pakistan's Exports," it projects that a proposed 29% tariff, stacked on top of the existing 8.6% Most Favoured Nation rate, could push duties as high as 37.6%. This steep increase might slash Pakistan's exports to the US by 20-25%, costing the country $1.1-$1.4 billion each year. The textile industry, a cornerstone of Pakistan's $5.3 billion export market to the US in 2024, faces the brunt, with higher costs likely to erode its edge against rivals like India and Bangladesh.

The ripple effects could be dire. Major players might scale back production, jeopardizing over half a million jobs. Beyond textiles, sectors like leather, rice, and sports goods could also take a hit, adding to economic strain. Yet, PIDE sees a silver lining—a chance for Pakistan to rethink its trade playbook. The institute urges swift diplomatic efforts to underscore the shared downsides of these tariffs and safeguard ties with the US. One idea is for Pakistan to lower duties on US goods like machinery or petroleum, creating leverage for talks. Incorporating more American cotton into Pakistani textile production could also strengthen supply chains and possibly unlock tariff relief.

The think tank emphasizes the need to branch out. Tapping into markets like the EU, China, ASEAN, Africa, and the Middle East could open doors for Pakistan's IT, halal food, processed goods, and sports equipment sectors. At home, cutting energy and logistics costs, streamlining red tape, and sparking innovation are critical to staying competitive. Globally, the proposed US tariffs may breach the World Trade Organization's 3.4% tariff cap, potentially breaking trade rules. While challenging these tariffs at the WTO is an option, Pakistan's limited resources could make this tough.

As Pakistani mills rely on American cotton to supply US markets, disrupting this cycle, PIDE argues, would hurt both nations. With proactive diplomacy, bold reforms, and a pivot to new markets, Pakistan could not only weather this storm but come out stronger on the global stage.

Meanwhile, a remarkable surge in workers' remittances propelled Pakistan's current account to a historic monthly surplus of $1.2 billion, eclipsing the previous peak of just under $1 billion from 2012. However, the broader balance-of-payments picture darkened for the fifth consecutive month this year, dragged down by sluggish foreign official and private capital inflows against a backdrop of hefty debt repayments. Still, the July-March period holds a positive balance, with a cumulative surplus of nearly $2 billion, fueling optimism that the fiscal year could end with a current account surplus. Buoyed by this, the State Bank of Pakistan has raised its foreign exchange reserves forecast from $13 billion to $14 billion by June, banking on expected foreign inflows following the release of the second IMF loan tranche.

At first glance, the current account surplus paints a picture of external stability. The rupee faces less strain, reserves are climbing, and debt obligations are being met on time—a welcome breather. But this calm is fragile, resting on shaky pillars: a tightly managed trade deficit through unofficial import restrictions, softer global oil prices amid U.S.-led tariff battles, and, crucially, an unexpected remittances boom. In today's volatile global landscape, even a minor jolt could unravel this delicate balance.

True, lasting stability hinges on a robust financial account. Long-term foreign direct investment (FDI), steady official inflows, and strong export growth are the bedrock of a resilient balance-of-payments position and sustainable reserve buildup. If these streams remain weak, it signals deeper structural flaws in the economy. While the remittances-driven surplus is a lifeline, it's a missed opportunity if policymakers don't seize this moment to steer the economy toward a more enduring foundation. Without bold reforms to boost exports and attract investment, Pakistan risks squandering this window to fortify its economic future.

Pakistan's current account surplus is a rare bright spot, easing pressure on the rupee and boosting reserves. But its foundations—remittances, controlled imports, and low oil prices—are too shaky to promise lasting stability. Without robust reforms to attract foreign investment, expand exports, and fix structural weaknesses, this windfall risks being a missed chance. Policymakers must act swiftly to transform this fleeting reprieve into a springboard for a stronger, more resilient economy.

Fitch upgrade: A fragile step forward amid elite-driven challenges

Shahid Hussain

Fitch's recent upgrade of Pakistan's long-term foreign currency issuer default rating from CCC+ to B- offers a cautious nod to the country's economic trajectory, shifting its status from "substantial credit risk" to "highly speculative."

This move reflects confidence in Pakistan's ability to secure external funding by adhering to the IMF's rigorous, politically sensitive conditions. However, Fitch tempers its optimism with concerns about a weaker-than-expected electoral mandate for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's coalition and Pakistan's spotty track record of IMF compliance across administrations. While the upgrade signals potential for accessing affordable loans and issuing debt instruments, Pakistan's economic challenges are deeply tied to an elite class that continues to dominate budgetary resources, raising questions about the sustainability of this progress.

This B- rating suggests material default risks persist, but there's now a sliver of breathing room, though the capacity to keep up payments could falter if economic or business conditions worsen. Skeptics might highlight ongoing struggles, like the large-scale manufacturing sector's decline—recent data shows a 1.9% contraction in February this year—or the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) likely refusal to ease up on tough fiscal measures. These include a contentious tax on traders and agricultural taxes already passed by all four provincial assemblies, set to kick in from July 1, with full effect by January 1. Yet, this upgrade is a clear win. It could pave the way for Pakistan to secure commercial loans at more affordable rates and tap into debt instruments like Sukuk or Eurobonds.

One path forward for the government is to trim its ballooning current expenditure—a non-growth, inflationary burden that keeps climbing year after year. To taxpayers, this feels like their hard-earned money is funneled toward an elite few, reinforcing perceptions of unfair resource capture. Fitch had previously nudged Pakistan's rating from CCC to CCC+ in July 2024, shortly after the government clinched a staff-level agreement for the IMF's Extended Fund Facility. Both those ratings, however, still pointed to significant credit risk with default as a tangible threat. Meanwhile, Moody's bumped Pakistan's rating from Caa3 to Caa2 in August 2024, banking on IMF Board approval of the agreement. Moody's labeled this rating as "junk" and highly speculative, and they've yet to issue a new rating in 2025. For context, Fitch's B- aligns roughly with Moody's B3, meaning Moody's would need to climb two steps—from Caa2 to Caa1, then to B3—to match Fitch's current assessment. Standard & Poor's (S&P), the third major global rating agency, has held Pakistan steady at CCC+ since October 2022. Their July 2024 report on the country aligns with Moody's Caa1 or Fitch's CCC, showing no change in their outlook.

This Fitch upgrade, while cautious, offers a glimmer of optimism for Pakistan's economic path, provided it can navigate the tightrope of fiscal discipline and external pressures. Whether Moody's and S&P will follow Fitch's lead and upgrade Pakistan's rating remains uncertain, but even if they do, Pakistan would still linger at the lower rungs of the "highly speculative" category. For now, Fitch's upgrade signals confidence in Pakistan's ability to secure external funding, hinging on the country's unwavering commitment to the IMF's stringent, politically fraught conditions. These include time-bound quantitative targets, structural benchmarks, and reforms critical not only for clinching a staff-level agreement on the second IMF review but also for sustaining the $16 billion in rollovers from three friendly nations. Since 2019, these countries have made it clear: Pakistan must stay enrolled in an active IMF program, no exceptions.

Pakistan has no choice but to push through these reforms—IMF-mandated or otherwise—with no room for retreat. Fitch's optimistic outlook rests squarely on this resolve, but the agency flagged two troubling caveats. First, it noted that the PML-N and its allies secured a weaker-than-expected mandate in the 2024 elections, despite holding a constitutional majority in the National Assembly. Second, Fitch pointed to a checkered history of IMF program compliance, with governments across the political spectrum often failing to follow through or reversing reforms.

The root of Pakistan's economic woes lies less in who holds power and more in the persistent influence of an elite class, actively courted by every administration. These elites continue to command hefty budgetary allocations year after year, draining resources that could otherwise drive sustainable growth. Without a voluntary sacrifice from these major budget beneficiaries, the gains from Fitch's upgrade may prove fleeting, casting doubt on Pakistan's ability to maintain this progress in the medium to long term.

In conclusion, Fitch's upgrade marks a tentative step toward economic stability for Pakistan, but its longevity hinges on unflinching commitment to IMF reforms and sustained external funding, including $16 billion in rollovers from friendly nations. Yet, the persistent grip of an elite class, siphoning off substantial budgetary allocations, remains a formidable barrier. Unless these influential beneficiaries relinquish their disproportionate share, the gains from this upgrade risk unraveling, leaving Pakistan's economic future precarious despite the current flicker of optimism.

Pakistan’s crisis: The need for new governance

Raza Khan

In Pakistan, people are deeply disturbed by the economic crisis and inflation, which have severely impacted the common person, as well as by the ongoing political instability and social degeneration. Despite the widespread concern, the root causes of these issues remain unclear to many. While strategic and societal factors contribute to the current economic and political turmoil, there are significant problems at the operational level—specifically in governance.

Our society is currently facing a range of conflicts and crises, with the challenges multiplying daily. Several issues are contributing to these multifaceted conflicts and crises, including but not limited to widespread poverty, the prevalence of extremist social attitudes that fuel terrorism, economic collapse, increasing cases of child sexual abuse, honor killings, and violent disputes over minor property matters. The state, its apparatus, and its institutions are failing to address these issues effectively, despite the commitment and desire of many of its officials to rise to the challenge. For example, while the state has managed to defeat religious terrorist groups like the Taliban, it has been unable to control the spread of extremism, fundamentalism, and intolerance, whether among clerics, young people, or professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

One significant reason for the state's inability to address these conflicts and crises is the outdated approach of top decision-makers and civilian bureaucrats, who are often bound by conventional idiosyncrasies and practices. The conflicts and crises mentioned above are not unique to Pakistan; many societies and states have faced or are facing similar challenges. In today's world, most states have developed mass societies with non-traditional and complex problems. These societies, which are predominantly urban and peri-urban, require institutionalized rather than personalized mechanisms for conflict resolution and need fulfillment. This necessitates a new kind of governance that is fundamentally different from the conventional systems and structures in place.

Since the 1980s, "good governance" has been a key phrase in international organizations, encompassing aspects like transparency, accountability, rule of law, consensus-building, and access to justice. However, a new concept has emerged that goes beyond good governance, known as "new governance." The term "governance" itself gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s when many hierarchical states increasingly failed to address the needs and problems of their populations, leading to a decline in public trust in the state. As a result, the focus shifted from traditional government structures to the broader concept of governance.

In Pakistan, policymakers, political parties, politicians, and civil servants have a limited understanding of this novel concept of "new governance," let alone its implementation. Even if some are aware of it, they struggle to adopt it due to their retrospective approach. Our ruling politicians, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, are often stuck in the past, repeatedly highlighting dubious "achievements" and accusing each other of financial corruption, rather than embracing forward-looking governance practices.

The new governance approach emphasizes the importance of systems and structures in addressing the policy demands of the people and solving societal problems. Unfortunately, this aspect of governance has been largely overlooked by our government departments. While history is important, and addressing past wrongs is essential for progress, the state's focus on traditional governance methods has left it ill-equipped to tackle the deep-rooted issues within its institutions. This focus on outdated approaches has led to a lack of capacity and, at times, a lack of sincerity among state functionaries.

The challenges facing Pakistani society—or any society in the contemporary era—are complex and require a holistic, multijurisdictional, and networked approach. For example, the issue of youth unemployment cannot be effectively addressed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs alone. It requires collaboration among various ministries, including education, social welfare, youth affairs, and foreign affairs, as well as coordination between governments at local, regional, national, and international levels, along with civil society and the private sector. This networked approach is at the core of "new governance."

However, because this new governance approach is non-hierarchical, it clashes with the traditional mindset of our ruling politicians and civil servants, who are accustomed to chain-of-command authority. As a result, they have been unable to adopt the new governance model, and the issues and problems that require abandoning conventional governance methods remain unresolved. Consequently, we are witnessing an ever-increasing multiplication of social issues and problems.

There is also a personal interest for civil servants in resisting new governance models because adopting these would require them to share their authority and power with other stakeholders, such as the private sector, non-profit organizations, and the market. This power-sharing is generally unacceptable to both ruling politicians and civilian bureaucrats. However, society desperately needs this collaboration between state functionaries, civil society, and the private sector to effectively address issues, solve problems, and meet the needs of the people.

The world is changing rapidly, and its challenges are growing at the same pace. The demands of contemporary life are significant and complex. To meet these demands and address the concerns of society, the state, along with its institutions, must embrace new governance models. If they fail to do so, they will struggle to manage the political, economic, and social instability that continues to grow.

Punjab's education paradox: Prosperity without progress

Rasheed Ali

Punjab, Pakistan's most populous and economically pivotal province, remains mired in an education crisis despite being under the governance of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) for much of the last 30 years. With the latest term beginning in February 2024 under Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif — the first woman to hold the office — the party continues to fall short in prioritising education. Despite repeated claims of reform, the province has failed to significantly boost literacy rates or bring millions of out-of-school children into classrooms.

Punjab's prominence in Pakistan is indisputable. With a population of 127.688 million, the province alone accounts for over half of the country's total population, according to the 2023 digital census. Of this, 65.448 million are males, 62.226 million females, and nearly 14,000 are transgender individuals. It is the most industrialised province, contributing substantially to the national GDP, and maintains the lowest poverty rate in the country. Politically, it dominates federal representation with 173 National Assembly seats and 23 in the Senate.

However, these demographic and economic strengths contrast starkly with Punjab's educational outcomes. The literacy rate stands at 66.3% — the highest among Pakistan's provinces, but still alarmingly low for such a well-resourced region. Gender disparity is pronounced: 74.2% of men are literate compared to just 58.4% of women. Literacy rates in districts such as Rawalpindi (83.22%) and Lahore (79.62%) offer glimmers of hope, yet rural areas, especially for women, remain underserved.

Equally troubling is the number of children who remain out of the school system altogether. Of Punjab's nearly 24 million school-aged children, only 11.97 million are enrolled — 5.89 million boys and 6.08 million girls — leaving approximately 11.73 million out of school. This is despite the presence of 48,473 schools, including 22,935 boys' schools and 25,538 girls' schools.

The human resource gap further exacerbates the crisis. While the province employs around 390,782 teachers across 52,035 schools, an estimated 70,000 teaching positions remain vacant. The imbalance in student-teacher ratios reflects this: primary schools face a ratio of 39:1, whereas secondary schools report a more manageable 11.2:1. These figures point to an urgent need for recruitment and equitable distribution of staff.

Infrastructure is another area of chronic neglect. Basic facilities are missing in thousands of schools. About 35% of public schools lack playgrounds — rising to 52% in girls' high and higher secondary schools. Electricity is not available in 10,560 schools, and 2,370 are without drinking water. Sanitation is inadequate, with 3,634 schools lacking toilets. A further 5,761 institutions operate without boundary walls, compromising student safety. Moreover, science labs and libraries are scarce, severely restricting access to practical learning.

The government has acknowledged these issues, and in 2024, the School Education Department ordered all district authorities to compile detailed reports on missing facilities, including cost estimates. While a necessary step, it is widely viewed as a reactive approach to a long-standing crisis.

Financially, Punjab has seen significant increases in education budgets over the years. In 2008, Rs62 billion were allocated to school education. This figure rose to Rs315 billion in 2016–17, and Rs345 billion in 2017–18, with Rs74.1 billion earmarked for development projects. Under the caretaker setup in 2023–24, Rs195 billion were allocated for a four-month period. The 2024–25 budget soared to Rs669.74 billion, including Rs604.24 billion for current expenditures and Rs65.5 billion for development.

Yet, the growing budgets have not translated into proportional improvements on the ground. Education remains under-prioritised in practical terms, and structural reforms remain elusive.

Since the 1990s, the PML-N has governed Punjab for approximately 20 of the past 30 years: 1990–1993: Chief Minister Ghulam Haider Wyne; 1997–1999: First tenure of Shehbaz Sharif; 2008–2013 & 2013–2018: Shehbaz Sharif's return to power post-Musharraf era; 2022–2023: Brief tenure of Hamza Shehbaz Sharif; Since 2024: Maryam Nawaz currently leads the province.

Despite the longevity of the PML-N rule and billions spent on education, the gap between potential and performance remains vast. Without structural reforms, effective governance, and a genuine commitment to prioritising education, Punjab's schoolchildren may continue to suffer the consequences of political complacency.

The power of experiential learning: A story of grit and perseverance

Idrees Butt

Last year, Pakistan celebrated a historic moment as Arshad Nadeem, from a small village near Khanewal, stunned the world with a record breaking throw.

For a country like Pakistan, where the majority of the population is under 30 and faces numerous challenges, such victories are not to be taken lightly. Arshad ignited a lasting wave of inspiration among the youth, offering them a new hero to look up to and motivating them to ensure that the nation does not have to wait another 40 years for the next Olympic gold. Arshad's victory is not just a matter of national pride but a testament to the power of perseverance, resilience, and the relentless pursuit of excellence.

But let's pause and consider—what exactly were we celebrating? Was it merely the act of throwing a javelin 92.97 meters, or was there something more profound at play? The real celebration lied not in the distance the javelin traveled, but in the years of hard work, grit, and resilience that led Arshad to this moment. Under the guidance of his coach, Salman Iqbal Butt, Arshad developed the discipline, focus, and mental toughness necessary to compete at the highest level. This journey is a powerful example of how experiential learning—the process of learning through doing and immersion—cultivates the very characteristics that made his victory possible.

Understanding the importance of experiential learning is crucial to grasping how Arshad's perseverance and success were forged. Experiential learning is not attained as much through books as it is through the guidance of mentors. Mentorship is the key to unlocking the path of learning by doing. A mentor doesn't just impart knowledge—they immerse you in the experience itself. They push you to act, to apply, to fail, and to learn from those failures. Arshad Nadeem's coach, Salman Iqbal Butt, played a pivotal role in guiding him to victory. Butt didn't just teach Nadeem the technical aspects of javelin throwing; he helped him internalize the discipline, focus, and mental strength needed to compete at the highest level. Through the love and respect Nadeem developed for his coach, his ego diminished, making room for the lessons to take root deeply within him. This love, born from passion and humility, transformed the arduous journey of mastery into one filled with joy and fulfillment. Mentors like Butt help you navigate the complexities of experiential learning by guiding you through practical application, ensuring that your learning is not just theoretical but deeply rooted in reality.

While mentorship is a vital part of the journey, certain fields by their very nature force you into the realm of experiential learning. Athletes and artists are prime examples of this. These are areas where experience and practice are integral to success—where knowing is not enough; doing is everything. Consider a musician who has studied every raga and scale. No amount of theoretical knowledge can replace the understanding that comes from performing,

from experiencing the music in the moment. Similarly, an athlete might know all the techniques and strategies of their sport, but mastery comes only through the countless hours spent honing their skills on the field. These fields are designed to engage the body and mind in a way that transforms knowledge into deep, instinctual understanding. The best performers, whether on stage or in the field, reach a point where their actions are no longer consciously directed—their subconscious mind, trained through years of experience, takes over. A skilled driver, for example, can maintain control of the vehicle even while their thoughts are elsewhere, their subconscious managing the intricate dance of muscles and reflexes. This is the power of experiential learning: it becomes a part of who you are, guiding you even when you're not actively thinking about it.

Art and sports not only teach us the power of experience, but they also show us how to immerse ourselves in our pursuits. Through poetry, for example, we transcend the rigid structures of grammar, allowing our imagination to explore new meanings. When we free ourselves from conventional boundaries, we discover that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. In the same way, when we engage our bodies and minds in an art form or a sport, we experience the profound synergy that comes from fully immersing ourselves in the activity. Every part of your body, when engaged, forms a relationship with you. The benefits of experiential learning are not confined to sports, arts, or spiritual pursuits. Once you adopt the mindset of learning through doing, this approach can be applied to any field, whether it's engineering, business, or entrepreneurship. The discipline, focus, and resilience you develop through experiential learning in one area will carry over into others. Imagine an engineer who has not only studied the principles of design but has also built and tested prototypes with their own hands. This engineer understands the nuances and challenges of the work far better than one who has only read about it.

Similarly, a business leader who has navigated the ups and downs of launching a startup will have a more profound understanding of what it takes to succeed than someone who has only studied business theory. By engaging deeply with our experiences and pursuing mastery in our chosen fields, we develop the ability to apply these lessons across different domains, enhancing our overall capacity for success and fulfillment.

Knowing this reality—understanding that true knowledge comes not from words but from experience—forces you to act. It exposes the hidden constraints within you, such as procrastination or laziness, that often prevent you from realizing your true potential. When you embrace the philosophy of doing, you confront these weaknesses head-on. You can no longer sit back and passively consume ideas; instead, you are compelled to engage, to struggle, to grow. This active engagement is what leads to true understanding and mastery, unveiling the full spectrum of your capabilities and freeing you to become your true self. And so, let us celebrate Arshad Nadeem's victory once again; the journey, the struggle, and the doing. Let us reflect on his story and discover our path to similar glory by engaging more in sports, arts, and making our involvement in our profession more immersive. In this way, we too can play our part in raising the flag of Pakistan on the global stage.

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The Hawaii of Israel: How Trump legitimised a longstanding Israeli vision

Trude Strand

On April 7, United States President Donald Trump met Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for a second time since his inauguration. Speaking to the media, Trump doubled down on his earlier comments about the Gaza Strip, describing it as an "incredible piece of important real estate".

Trump also repeated his suggestion that the Palestinians should leave the Strip "to different countries" and claimed that people "really do love that vision. … A lot of people like my concept."

Days later, about 70 percent of Gaza had been turned into a "no-go zone" for Palestinians. Confirming that Israel is working "in accordance with the US president's vision, which we seek to realise", Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz declared Israel's intention to "seize" more territory, adding that "wilful passage" will be given to Palestinians who want to leave. It is by now clear that Trump's statements on Gaza have had the effect of legitimising a longstanding Israeli vision of ethnic cleansing of the Strip. What the US president calls "my concept" is in fact not his at all.

Over decades of Israeli occupation and colonisation of the Gaza Strip, there have been multiple plans to empty out or disperse the Palestinian population in a bid to secure full control over this part of Palestine. The power of colonial practices has also been tested. For example, to draw Israeli settlers and thereby help transform Gaza's demographics, the Strip was at one point even promoted as the "Hawaii of Israel".

Left out of Israeli war aims in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Gaza Strip emerged out of the 1949 Armistice Agreements under Egyptian military rule. Constituting only a small part of what until then had been the Gaza District of Palestine, the Gaza Strip was home to two groups of Palestinians: the local population and refugees – people who had been forced off their land as Israel expanded its territorial reach during the war.

As the guns fell silent, the Gaza Strip became known in Israeli policy circles as the "job unfinished" – a slice of land next to the Egyptian border that Israel's leaders would like to control, preferably without its Palestinian population.

Israel's first attempt to take Gaza by force occurred in 1956. But under pressure from US President Dwight Eisenhower, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion had no choice but to withdraw and put an end to the Israeli occupation. The botched attempt taught Israel an important lesson: To redraw the map of the Middle East and to make its territorial expansionist agenda a success, Israel needed American support and approval.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War was far more successful in this regard. Through conquest and occupation, the Gaza Strip was brought under direct Israeli rule. This opened the door to revitalise "transfer" – the forced displacement and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Seen as both necessary and permissible or, in Ben-Gurion's words, "an important humane and Zionist idea", transfer was recognised as an effective tool to advance Zionist colonisation of Palestine.

In the following years, as noted by Palestinian historian Nur Masalha, transfer acquired different labels. These included "population exchange", "Arab return to Arabia", "voluntary emigration" and "rehabilitation" with different Israeli governments taking different approaches.

One approach was Defence Minister Moshe Dayan's "open bridges", which allowed Palestinians in Gaza to leave for other countries in search of work. Another was to open offices in Gaza's refugee camps to organise and pay for travel and passports for Palestinians willing to "voluntarily migrate", which in effect turned the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs into a "global travel agency". Regardless of the approach, Israel's policy objective remained the same: to create a drive in Palestinians to leave the Strip. "I want them all to go, even if they go to the moon," Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol said. Expressing Israeli frustration, Eshkol articulated the feeling of being stuck with what was considered the problem of Gaza. After all, only the Palestinian population there – and the sizeable refugee population in particular – stood in the way of full Israeli annexation.

In response to Israel's Gaza "dilemma", its politicians also looked for more comprehensive solutions. This led to an almost continuous flow of plans for the "rehabilitation" of Palestinians outside the Strip. Starting immediately after the 1967 war, a variety of potential destinations came up. These included the West Bank, the Sinai Peninsula, Iraq, or even as far afield as Canada and Australia.

Despite Israeli efforts and elaboration of plans – and much to the disappointment of Israel's decision-makers – the initiatives came to naught as the number of Palestinians leaving the Strip remained limited. And given other considerations, including moral, legal and diplomatic ones, the plans to displace a large number of Palestinians from Gaza were left in the drawer.

The cynical promises of a better future for people who are left with nothing but their land after a brutal war of erasure and plausible genocide must be taken seriously. The legitimacy Trump has given to Israeli plans poses a threat in the here and now, but it could also outlast his presidency.

That is because he has offered US presidential sanction of ethnic cleansing as an acceptable tool. This leaves the door open for Israel – in the near or distant future – to pursue "transfer", "rehabilitation" and "voluntary emigration" of Palestinians, whether in Gaza or the West Bank. Furthermore, the American president has repeatedly communicated US support for illegal land seizures and colonisation. Suggesting Gaza (and Greenland) could become "US territory", he has reintroduced and validated ideas that most leaders of the world had put on the scrap heap of history.

The peril of a president who's never wrong

Andrew Mitrovica

Donald Trump is holding the world hostage. True to his erratic nature, the US president has toyed with the global trading regimen like a yo-yo.

We are captive, to one degree or another, to Trump's trigger-happy whims that – beyond the costs to balance sheets, jobs, retirement savings, and wallets – have exacted a heavy toll on our weary psyches. His omnipotence overwhelms, leaving most of us feeling bereft and pining for a moment's reprieve from the incessant chaos. Trump confirmed, yet again, his talent for self-preservation without a speck of regret for the trauma and uncertainty he has caused. In the face of disquieting polls, roiling equity markets, a sell-off of US Treasuries, and a brewing backlash within the Republican caucus and among the oligarchs who championed his presidency, Trump took to his social media platform, Truth Social, to announce a sudden reversal of the central aspect of what he considers to be a considered "economic policy" – blanket and hefty tariffs.

Reportedly, Trump's allies on Capitol Hill were caught unawares by the president's change of bulldozing course and left wondering what the captor-in-chief would do next. One by one, the supposed "checks and balances" have, on the shameful whole, capitulated or, worse, enabled Trump's imperious modus operandi. In this broader context, Trump's qualified and likely temporary tariff amnesty is not deemed a "defeat" or a "retreat" by the lord of Mar-a-Lago. It is part of his larger, ever-evolving "master strategy" to resuscitate America's bygone manufacturing prowess. To his legion of admirers and supporters, Trump is a mythical, infallible figure who spurns doubt since it is a symptom of weakness.

For Trump, certitude is a virtue. Posing questions and introspection are for sissies, not strongmen who have been tasked with rehabilitating America's waning "greatness". Trump has the answers because he is the answer. While others may scoff at his evangelical "conversion", I am convinced that after dodging an assassin's bullet, Trump had a transformative epiphany that reshaped his presidency into a messianic mission.

In a little-noticed section of his meandering address to a joint session of Congress in early March, Trump gave pointed expression to his belief that he had been saved by divine intervention in order to, in turn, save America. "I believe my life was saved … for a very good reason," Trump said. "I was saved by God to make America great again. I believe that."

I am loath to disappoint, but this may be the rare occasion when Trump is telling the truth. Though Trump's latest prescriptions to "make America great again" have gone spectacularly awry, his critics are deluding themselves if they think that the "market mayhem" or a few fretting billionaire-bros will prompt him to abandon his chosen destiny and just cause.

Unlike Democrat US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), Trump confuses obstinacy with wisdom. FDR braved calamity – financial collapse, sweeping poverty and despair, and the gathering advance of fascism overseas. He was obliged, to borrow a phrase, to make America great again. During a speech delivered in May 1932, FDR addressed Americans' anxiety – an unease that mirrors, almost to the letter, the angst felt by many of their descendants nearly a century later in the wake of the current jarring and potentially persistent financial turmoil. "With these savings has gone, among millions of our fellow citizens, that sense of security to which they have rightly felt they are entitled in a land abundantly endowed with natural resources and with productive facilities to convert them into the necessities of life for all of our population," Roosevelt said. "More calamitous still, there has vanished with the expectation of future security the certainty of today's bread and clothing."

FDR's solutions were borne out of experimentation, not dogma. "The country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something," Roosevelt said. FDR's approach not only meant leveraging the means, resources, and ingenuity of the federal government to revive America, but the willingness of the commander-in-chief to dispense with orthodoxy and the arrogance of strutting firmness.

His legacy was not just the singular length of his revolutionary presidency – it was the good and fruitful sense to admit that failure is inevitable. The other implicit meaning of FDR's admonition is that even presidents can learn valuable lessons from making mistakes.

The experience and insight derived from "screwing up" can solve other troubles – big and small, near and far – that occur throughout a presidency. Roosevelt listened. He learned by encouraging dissent. He wanted to be challenged. He knew that the people around him enjoyed expertise that he lacked. He understood that presidents are not all-knowing, that exercising his weighty responsibilities required, on occasion, a measure of humility.

Trump prefers dictates over debate. He demands and values absolute loyalty over discourse and objection. He is driven by instinct and seething grievances, not patience and deliberation.

In any working democracy, serious initiatives are the product of serious scrutiny. Trump is all performance, all the time. He rejects outright the essential qualities that informed Roosevelt's shrewdness: Perspective and pragmatism. The striking irony is that Trump hopes to mimic FDR by extending, albeit illegally, his presidency into a third term – if his health and popularity hold up.

The predictable consequence? Trump will never admit failure. To do so would involve Trump the invincible acknowledging that he has been or could be wrong. That, as we know, has not happened and will not happen. To his acolytes, Trump's unwavering certainty is bewitching. His mad careening is celebrated as a calculated tactic. Amid these unsettling and turbulent times, the illusion of a leader who claims to be faultless may be comforting. Still, it remains a mirage.

Water politics

The ongoing interprovincial conflict over canals is refusing to die down. Sindh is protesting against what it calls an 'unjust project', stressing that these canals would convert Sindh into a 'desert'. Punjab, as the upper riparian, claims it is trying to salvage floodwater that gets 'wasted' into the sea, arguing that this water can be stored and utilised during periods of acute water shortage. The counterargument is that 10 million acre feet (MAF) of water is needed to protect the delta by checking sea intrusion. Besides, historically, high flood in the Indus occurs with an interval of 10 to 15 years. This simply means there is no regular water stream to be stored.

It is also true that the phenomenon of climate change has brought into sharp focus the already limited water resources, and there is a need to use the available water resources efficiently and justly. Water conservation is the need of the hour. The fact of the matter is that no proper groundwork for educating the public is ever carried out before launching any project that aims to mitigate the un-sustainable water use.

It is vital to explain the environmental impact assessment to the public in local languages so that the people may know the advantages and disadvantages of any project. The projects are announced as well as undertaken without educating the public, or hearing the points of view of independent experts. This allows many to politicise the issue, and some projects, like, say, the Kalabagh Dam, never get started.

As things stand, the likely scenario is that the project would be abandoned or discontinued in the wake of strong opposition. However, the damage to the mighty cause of provincial harmony, and the loss of public trust in the political leadership would be rather irreparable.

Gulsher Panhwer
Johi

Net metering policy

Amid widespread concerns over proposed net metering (NM) policy with reduced buyback rates and limitations regarding the sanctioned load, there is, indeed, a need for a balanced, well-informed approach with robust stakeholder input, ensuring policy stability while addressing sectoral challenges.

Pakistan's energy crisis has driven the shift towards the solar option, but while it cuts bills and curbs fossil fuel usage, there are risks to grid stability as well as the financial stability of power distribution companies (Discos). While aligning rooftop solar capacity with sanctioned loads may help manage grid congestion, such measures should be guided by holistic technical evaluations and regulatory oversight rather than blanket restrictions. If strategically integrated and managed, the solar facility can effectively address Pakistan's energy challenges. By reducing reliance on costly fossil fuels, minimising transmission losses, and easing the burden of high electricity prices, NM enhances both individual and national energy security. A well-implemented NM frame-work can lower consumer bills, stabilise the grid, and curtail peak demand. Pakistan's distribution losses in FY23 stood at 22,286 GWh — far exceeding NM exports (482MW) — with an estimated financial impact of Rs734 billion, as highlighted in a study by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (Pide). Instead of restricting NM, the policy-makers should prioritise grid upgrades, regulatory reforms and smart metering for efficient integration. However, Discos' aging infrastructure and weak regulatory mechanisms limit their capacity to accommodate NM growth. The absence of both real-time monitoring and hosting capacity analyses (HCAs) tend to increase risks to grid stability. Periodic pre- and post-installation inspections can curb unauthorised capacity additions and power quality challenges.

Systematic HCAs will assess network readiness, prevent transformer overloading, and enable structured solar integration. A phased time of use (ToU) net metering approach, integrated with advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) can balance solar generation with grid demand.

On the other hand, solar energy is also bridging the energy access gap, with four million households (7.4 per cent) relying on solar energy.

While urban consumers benefit from financial incentives for rooftop solar systems, rural households in Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) rely on off-grid solar to meet basic energy needs. Policymaking should support decentralised energy solutions, such as community micro-grids, to bridge this gap, particularly in the energy-poor rural regions. Additionally, Pakistan's energy planning has historically favoured large-scale independent power producers (IPPs) even though stranded capacity has exceeded 17,799MW.

Unlike utility-scale projects, a rooftop solar system does not require extensive transmission infrastructure or capacity payments, making it a cost-effective and sustainable alternative. Thus, reforming the current NM policy requires a long-term, evidence-based approach. What we need to avoid at all costs is short-term financial considerations.

Shafqat Hussain Memon
Jamshoro

A sad reality

In our country, materialistic things are valued more than a person's competence, knowledge and education. People are treated nicely or poorly on the basis of their vehicle, dress and appearance. Let me share a recent incident to illustrate this.

In Islamabad's G-11 sector, we liked a building and considered purchasing an apartment there. A few days later, my father, a Supreme Court lawyer, and elder brother went to check the place. When they reached there, my father remained seated in the car, and asked my brother to go inside and inquire about the apartment. When my brother reached the building's reception, he approached an employee there to seek the relevant information. The man assumed that my brother was just a random visitor 'wasting' his time. He dismissively asked him to come some other time as it was a Sunday.

Hearing this, my brother returned to the car. Just as he was about to sit inside, the same person came running towards him, telling him that the apartments were in fact available. Obviously, he had seen the car and therefore changed his attitude. This incident reflects the sad reality of our society, where people are valued not for who they are, but for what they have. In the past, people's education and intellect used to determine their status in the eyes of society. People generally treated others as human beings, but now the situation has changed drastically. Instead of harbouring resentment towards one another, we should learn to live in harmony. Rather than fighting and dividing, we should take pride in our wealth by sharing it with our relatives and friends. We must bring back the unity and sincerity of the past rather than showing arrogance and fostering hatred among ourselves. Let us try to live in harmony.

Safeer Khan
Chaman

Dumper deaths in Karachi

There has been an alarming rise in fatal accidents caused by dumper drivers in Karachi. Innocent lives have been lost, but no action has been taken to curb this menace. It is widely believed that elements within the police and civil administration accept illegal gratification from these operators and allow them to violate traffic laws with impunity. These dumpers, often driven by untrained or underage drivers, speed recklessly through crowded streets, ignoring traffic signals and endangering the lives of pedestrians, motorcyclists and other commuters. The city roads have turned into death traps. This crisis must not be ignored any longer.

Muhammad Anwar ul Haque
Karachi

Road accidents

The traffic police force in Karachi should start carrying out random inspections after the sunset to ensure that all vehicles, especially motorcycles, have functional front and rear lights. Also, speed humps should be painted in translucent yellow at least on main roads and streets to make them visible at night. Besides, all traffic signals should remain functional for a smooth flow of traffic across the city. Finally, either a traffic signal or a small underpass is needed at Jauhar Mor in Gulistan-i-Jauhar.

Khawaja Tajammul Hussain
Karachi

Scientists reveal signs of crucial life-sustaining process on Mars

Ben Turner

NASA's Curiosity rover has found some of the best evidence yet that ancient life may have existed on Mars — and an answer for what could have wiped it out.

When drilling into rocks on Mount Sharp, the central peak of the Red Planet's Gale Crater, the rover found evidence of siderite, an iron carbonate whose presence suggests Mars once had a carbon cycle. This hints that Mars once had potentially habitable conditions, and therefore possibly even life. The finding, hidden from satellite scans, raises hopes that once samples collected by the Perseverance rover are brought to Earth, scientists may find evidence that ancient life once thrived on our now-desiccated neighbor. The researchers published their findings in the journal Science. "When it became apparent that these rocks contained siderite in such high quantities, I was unbelievably excited," study lead-author Ben Tutolo, an associate professor with the department of earth, energy and environment at the University of Calgary, told Live Science. "One of the biggest questions in Mars science is: 'Where are all the carbonates?' So I knew right away how important this discovery was."

For roughly the last 4 billion years, Earth's carbon cycle has been key to its habitability — cycling carbon between the atmosphere, land and ocean, thus providing the key material for all living things and setting the atmospheric thermostat for them to thrive.

The North Pole could wander nearly 90 feet west by the end of the century

Skyler Ware

Dramatic ice melt due to climate change may move the locations of Earth's geographic poles in the coming years, a new study finds. As ice sheets melt and ocean mass gets redistributed around the planet, Earth's geographic North and South poles could shift up to 89 feet by 2100 as the planet's axis of rotation changes, according to the study, published in the journal Geophysical Research Letters. The shift could affect satellite and spacecraft navigation, the researchers said. As Earth spins, changes in the distribution of the planet's mass cause it to wobble on its axis like a top. Many of these wobbles are regular and predictable — some are due to regular changes in atmospheric pressure and ocean currents, while others result from interactions between the core and the mantle. Recent studies have suggested that melting ice sheets and glaciers could also affect this mass distribution and shift Earth's poles. In the new study, researchers at ETH Zurich used both the movement of the poles from 1900 to 2018 and projections of ice sheet melt to predict how far the poles might move under different human-caused climate change scenarios. The North Pole could shift westward by more than 89 feet by 2100 under the worst-case greenhouse gas emissions scenario, the team found. Under a more optimistic emissions scenario, the pole could still shift as much as 39 feet relative to its location in 1900. Meltwater from the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets played the largest role in the simulations, followed by glacier melt. "This effect is somewhat surpassing the effect of glacial isostatic adjustment, which is the effect of solid Earth rebound after the termination of the last ice age," study co-author Mostafa Kiani Shahvandi, an Earth scientist now at the University of Vienna, told Live Science.

Parkinson's disease may soon outpace dementia: What to know

Lisa O'Mary

Two incurable diseases loom over our aging populace: Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Right now, Alzheimer's is more common and seems a more widespread concern than the relatively narrow shadow cast by Parkinson's. That may change, as revealed by a surprising new study. North American cases of Parkinson's disease are projected to increase 30% by 2050, and will double globally, according to the study, published in the journal The BMJ.

That's about 25 million people worldwide by 2050 – the kind of prediction that gets attention in the realms of public health, insurance, hospitals, and politics. But what should it mean to you? A lot, said Parkinson's expert Alfonso Fasano, MD. Alzheimer's is the most common nerve-degrading disease, he said, citing recent dementia figures. If dementia rates continue to decline as they have been, Parkinson's will take over first place in the coming decades, he said.

"People need to know about it because there is something that can be done to prevent, if possible, the occurrence of the disease, but also to live better with the disease if you get it," he said. The field of Parkinson's research is afire with recent breakthroughs in diagnostics and treatments. Symptoms mostly affect movement – slowing down, stiffness, and tremor while at rest. Others range from mental health effects to pain and fatigue.

The case for hitting pause on all your supplements

Caitlin Carlson

Maybe you swear by fish oil. Maybe you had a vitamin D deficiency a decade ago and just never stopped taking it. And then you added creatine because everyone is talking about it. At some point, two or three others got added to the mix and you take them diligently every day with your caffeine supplement, er, morning coffee, or maybe some electrolyte-spiked water.

But how do you know if any of these supps are doing anything? Well, you don't. And that's why it may make sense for you to hit pause on all your supplements and do a "supplement reset," says Zachary Mulvihill, MD, an integrative medicine specialist at NewYork-Presbyterian and Weill Cornell Medicine. "I think people end up in a spot where over the years they have a snowballing supplement bag and maybe it made sense then, but it doesn't make sense now and it's expensive and in the worst case, hurting them a little bit," he says.

For this reason — and a few others we'll get into — it might make sense to do a supplement reset to reevaluate what you're taking. Here's how.

First, vitamins and supplements are loosely regulated by the FDA, meaning it's critical to purchase supps from reputable brands with third-party certifications so you know you're getting what the bottle says — and nothing else. Second, many supplements may not have enough, or any, research to back up their safety and efficacy, says David S. Seres, MD, director of medical nutrition at the Institute of Human Nutrition at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. And many of those that do have solid research behind them are only proven to work for people who have a true deficiency.


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