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Red line crossed in Israel-Iran war?

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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, 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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Red line crossed in Israel-Iran war?

Nasim Ahmed

What was feared has happened. US forces struck Iran's three main nuclear sites. Announcing this, President Donald Trump said last weekend that he warned Tehran it would face more devastating attacks if it does not agree to peace.

"The strikes were a spectacular military success. Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated." In a speech that lasted just over three minutes, Trump said Iran's future held "either peace or tragedy and there were many other targets that could be hit by the US military. If peace does not come quickly, we will go after those other targets with precision, speed and skill."

Trump said US forces hit Iran's three principal nuclear sites: Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow. He told Fox News' Sean Hannity show that six bunker-buster bombs were dropped on Fordow, while 30 Tomahawk missiles were fired against other nuclear sites. Iranian media quoted Iran's nuclear body as saying there were no signs of contamination after the attacks, and no danger to residents living nearby. In retaliation, Iran launched missiles at US military bases in Qatar and Iraq on Monday evening. The bases were attacked by short-range and medium-range ballistic missiles originating from Iran.

The world community has reacted sharply to Trump's decision to join Israel's military campaign against Iran which is seen as a major escalation of the conflict and risks opening a new era of instability in the Middle East region. The strikes came as Israel and Iran had been engaged in more than a week of aerial combat that resulted in deaths and injuries in both countries. Israel launched the attacks on Iran saying it wanted to remove any chance of Tehran developing nuclear weapons. Iran says its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes only.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned the US military strike on its nuclear facilities, calling the action an unprecedented breach of international law and a grave violation of the UN Charter. In a statement, Iran accused the United States of a "brutal military aggression" against its peaceful nuclear infrastructure. Tehran held Washington responsible for what it called a "heinous crime" and warned of "dangerous consequences" stemming from the attack. The Foreign

Ministry said the attack violated Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force, and breached UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, expressing his concern over the dangerous development, stated: "I am gravely alarmed by the use of force by the United States against Iran today. This is a dangerous escalation in a region already on the edge — and a direct threat to international peace and security. There is a growing risk that this conflict could rapidly get out of control — with catastrophic consequences for civilians, the region, and the world. I call on Member States to de-escalate and to uphold their obligations under the UN Charter and other rules of international law."

Reacting to the US attacks, Pakistan



stressed that "recourse to dialogue and diplomacy, in line with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, remains the only viable pathway to resolve the crises in the region". "We emphasise the imperative need to respect civilian lives and properties and immediately bring the conflict to end. All parties must adhere to international law, particularly International Humanitarian Law," the Foreign Office said.

Russia has also strongly condemned the United States over its recent strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, calling the move a "blatant violation" of international law and a threat to global security. In a statement, Moscow criticised the attacks, saying "the decision to launch missile and aerial strikes on the territory of a sovereign state, regardless of the justifications offered, constitutes a blatant violation of the UN Charter and relevant Security Council resolutions." China too has criticized the US strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities and reiterated that it's willing to join international

efforts to restore peace in the Middle East: "The US move seriously violates the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law and exacerbates tensions in the Middle East. China calls on all parties to the conflict, especially Israel, to cease fire as soon as possible."

Reacting to the critical turn in the Middle East, Arab countries have in one voice censured the US air strikes on nuclear facilities in Iran, warning of serious repercussions and calling for a return to diplomacy. In a statement, Saudi Arabia said: "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is following with great concern the developments in the sisterly Islamic Republic of Iran, represented by the targeting of Iranian nuclear facilities by the United States of America." Saudi Arabia called for "efforts to exercise restraint, de-escalate tensions, and avoid further escalation".

Besides Saudi Arabia, the Gulf countries have been engaged in hurried diplomatic efforts for a solution to the conflict. Oman, the mediator of nuclear talks between Washington and Tehran, has condemned US strikes on nuclear sites in Iran, calling it an unlawful act of aggression: "The Sultanate of Oman denounces this unlawful act of aggression and urges immediate and comprehensive de-escalation," according to a statement by the foreign ministry. Qatar, host of the biggest US military base in the Middle East, said it feared serious repercussions after US air strikes

on nuclear facilities in Iran. In a statement, the foreign ministry warned that the current dangerous escalation in the region may lead to catastrophic consequences at both the regional and international levels. On the other hand, the United Arab Emirates has urged an immediate halt to the escalation to "avoid serious repercussions" in the region following strikes by the US. It warned that such actions could lead the region to "new levels of instability."

It is clear that the Middle East faces a dangerous future and if urgent steps are not taken to douse the fires, anything can happen. An emergency meeting of the UN Security Council should be convened to arrange an immediate ceasefire and initiate a process of multilateral dialogue to find a peaceful solution to the Iran-US conflict. In this situation, the OIC can play a vital role by becoming the united voice of the Muslim world at the UN and other world forums. It also has the capability to act as a mediator to find a negotiated settlement to the Iran-Israeli dispute.

Budget and the challenge of rising unemployment

Farhan Khan

The federal budget 2025-26 shows an unemployment figure at 6.3 per cent, particularly affecting the young persons aged 15-35 years. Youth joblessness is particularly alarming, with 44.9pc of jobseekers aged 15-24, and female unemployment far exceeding male.

Pakistan has a domestic labour force of 71.8 million, which is the sixth largest in the world. Each year, approximately 2m young Pakistanis join the labour market, contributing to an expanding talent pool. There is a serious mismatch between the jobs demanded and the supply of skills and trained manpower in the country. The various issues involved in youth unemployment include gender disparities, and lack of facilities and opportunities for skill development. There is no correlation between educational outcomes and labour market needs, both in rural and underserved regions. The situation is exacerbated by deep-rooted issues like limited access to quality education, insufficient job creation, and gender inequality in economic participation.

Pakistan has a population of 241.5m (Population Census 2023) with an annual growth rate of 2.55pc which may worsen the unemployment situation in the coming days. Pakistan's population is characterised by a high proportion of youth. The latest labour force survey shows that the total youth population (15-29 years) is close to 62.58m. Over 40pc of the population falls in the age group 0-14 years, implying that the youth population will continue to swell further. The Pakistan Demographic (2020) report says that by 2030 out of a total estimated population of 280m, 100m will be youth. For lack of job opportunities at home, around 0.8m semi-skilled, skilled and highly skilled Pakistanis go abroad for employment annually.

According to a report by the Ministry of Planning, Pakistan's unemployment rate surged to 7% from 1.5% over the past decade. The report attributes the rising unemployment to insufficient GDP growth and industrial stagnation. The report highlights the country's inability to generate enough jobs, particularly for women and youth, and notes that unemployment is higher in Pakistan than in neighbouring countries.

Needless to emphasise, with an annual population increase of 5 million, the country faces mounting challenges in addressing poverty and unemployment. The Planning Commission estimates that Pakistan needs to create 1.5 million jobs annually to meet employment demands. To combat the growing crisis, the Planning Commission has recommended reducing youth unemployment by at least 6% and cutting

women's unemployment by 17%. The report underscores the urgency for economic reforms to address unemployment and inflation, emphasizing the need for robust strategies to boost job creation and stabilize prices in the country.

In the face of mounting employment, the government's response remains inadequate. This neglect is deeply damaging to the country's social fabric and long-term economic prospects. The new budget fails to propose any serious, targeted plan to tackle youth unemployment. The crisis is further exacerbated by persistent gender disparities in the labour market. Young women face a significantly higher unemployment rate—14.4% compared to 10% for young men. But the government's budgetary priorities offer no meaningful remedies for

not include any plans for expanding technical and vocational education, nor does it introduce reforms for upgrading polytechnic institutes. Pakistan needs to invest in life skills education that aligns with real-world job needs. Polytechnic and vocational training institutes create a pool of workers equipped for employment in construction, IT, and other vital sectors. But the budget offers no fiscal incentives for establishing such institutions or partnerships with the private sector to make skills training a national priority.

Moreover, the government has ignored the vital role that the corporate sector could play in addressing youth unemployment. Structured apprenticeship and internship programs—if incentivised properly—can offer young people essential workplace experience while giving



correcting this imbalance.

Pakistan's education system produces a workforce that is unprepared for the realities on the ground. Graduates with limited technical skills and no exposure to applied learning enter a job market that increasingly demands flexibility, digital fluency, and vocational competence. But the government's budget fails to offer any comprehensive skills development strategy that could bridge this widening gap.

Another issue is the use of outdated data to shape policy. The Economic Survey depends on unemployment figures based on the 2020-21 Labour Force Survey—a dataset that is nearly four years old. To tackle mass unemployment it is wrong to make policy decisions based on obsolete figures. The fact that updated labour market data was not prioritized in time for the budget process highlights a complete lack of institutional coordination in combating unemployment.

It is important to note here that the budget does not contain any policy measures or long-term vision for employment generation. It does

companies access to trained, motivated entry-level workers. Other countries have successfully implemented such models, but Pakistan's budget makes no mention of this pathway.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)—which form the backbone of Pakistan's informal economy—can play a vital role in job creation. Small businesses are inherently labour-intensive and absorb a large portion of the unemployed workforce. But the budget has failed to provide any incentives to SMEs. There are no new credit facilities, no tax reforms for small businesses, and no concrete steps toward their integration into the formal financial system. Also, no measures have been proposed to invest in labour-intensive sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, or construction. These industries hold the potential to generate mass employment at relatively low investment, especially for semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Similarly, the rapidly growing digital economy, no special funds, incubation platforms, or tax incentives have been proposed in the budget.

Economic growth and structural weaknesses

Muhammad Hassan

The headline growth rate of 2.7 percent in the outgoing fiscal year offers a deceptively optimistic picture of Pakistan's economic performance. Beneath this modest figure lie deeper structural imbalances and questionable statistical representations, particularly in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

Meanwhile, the Monetary Policy Committee's (MPC) decision to leave the policy rate untouched casts a long shadow over fiscal planning and investor sentiment, especially as macroeconomic risks intensify. Despite a discernible uptick in inflationary pressures, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) elected to maintain the benchmark interest rate at a steady 11 percent. This stance emerged even as the year-on-year Consumer Price Index (CPI) in May 2025 surged to 3.5 percent — a dramatic leap from April's tepid 0.3 percent, and the most pronounced inflation figure since January 2024, which registered at 2.4 percent. Nonetheless, the accompanying Monetary Policy Statement (MPS) placidly noted that "some near-term volatility in inflation is expected before it gradually inches up and stabilises within 5 to 7 percent," implying transient turbulence before settling into a tolerable corridor.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the average CPI for fiscal year 2024-25 rests at 4.61 percent — a figure more subdued than what is forecast for the upcoming financial cycle.

Core inflation, a more stable barometer often stripped of food and energy volatility, decelerated to 7.3 percent in May — the lowest notch since May 2024. Though April's rate edged marginally higher at 7.4 percent, this slim divergence inexplicably prompted the MPS to refer to "persistence in core inflation." A puzzling assertion, considering the gradual decline charted between January and March 2025 — readings of 7.8 percent, 7.8 percent, and 8.2 percent, respectively — do not paint a portrait of obstinacy.

The MPS further contended that the real interest rate remains comfortably in the positive zone, ostensibly capable of anchoring inflation expectations. Yet, had the CPI been used as the decisive metric — as was common practice between 2019 and 2022 — a modest hike of 25 to 50 basis points would have been warranted. Conversely, if core inflation served as the benchmark, a trim of 25 basis points would have aligned more sensibly.

This selective rigidity reinforces the

pervasive speculation that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) quietly vetoed any recalibration of the policy rate at this juncture — an opaque maneuver, particularly given the MPC convened on 16 June, a day after domestic fuel prices were jacked up in response to swelling international oil costs, triggered by the intensifying Israel-Iran confrontation. Nevertheless, the MPS curiously declared that "energy prices continued to remain lower than last year, mainly reflecting the impact of moderation in global oil prices" — a statement that rings hollow, given the contemporaneous upward adjustment in domestic fuel rates.

The IMF's shadow looms unmistakably over the narrative, with the MPS echoing the Fund's earlier rhetoric: "economic growth is picking up gradually and is projected to gain further traction next year, supported by the still unfolding impact of earlier policy rate cuts." This near-verbatim duplication mirrors the IMF's first review commentary, published just weeks prior, which claimed: "the MPC's decision to hold the policy rate in their March 10 meeting was appropriate, allowing time for past rate cuts to feed through to the economy."

Ultimately, the central bank's decision — cloaked in institutional justifications — appears more the product of externally imposed orthodoxy than of independent economic calibration.

The ostensibly modest economic growth rate of 2.7 percent for the outgoing fiscal year masks deeper structural weaknesses. Two pivotal macroeconomic indicators expose the fragility beneath the surface: the large-scale manufacturing sector, already in retreat, saw its contraction deepen from -0.22 percent during July-March 2023-24 to -1.47 percent in the same span of 2024-25, as per Finance Division data. On the agricultural front, crop performance faltered noticeably. Yet the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) buoyed overall agricultural figures by elevating livestock growth — a segment notoriously difficult to quantify accurately, considering it comprises over 14 percent of agriculture's total 24 percent contribution to GDP. Meanwhile, the services sector's numbers remain suspect, with its core component — wholesale and retail trade — largely embedded within the shadow economy and thus eluding proper documentation.

The MPS claims that economic momentum gathered pace in the latter half of 2024-25, citing a rise in GDP growth to 3.9 percent from a subdued 1.4 percent in the first half — in line with MPC forecasts. However,

empirical substantiation of this claimed surge remains scarce, casting doubt on the validity of such projections.

The decision to preserve the policy rate at its current level could ripple unfavorably through the yet-to-be-ratified federal budget for 2025-26. Notably, the budget projects a 738.677 billion-rupee reduction in debt servicing costs compared to the revised estimates of the outgoing fiscal year — a bold assumption in light of ballooning government borrowing, which stands at a staggering 3.438 trillion rupees. This disconnect may ultimately undermine fiscal equilibrium.

On a more affirmative note, the MPS highlighted two significant macroeconomic gains. First, the successful conclusion of the IMF's first program review unlocked a \$1 billion tranche, bolstering foreign reserves — though these remain overwhelmingly reliant on borrowed inflows. Second, a primary surplus amounting to 2.2 percent of GDP was achieved this year — a key IMF benchmark — with an even more ambitious 2.4 percent targeted for 2025-26. However, maintaining this surplus target may become untenable should the policy rate remain unmoved, especially amid evolving geopolitical uncertainties in the Middle East and slight détente in US-China trade relations, which the MPS acknowledges as potential variables.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), under IMF directives, must refine its public messaging. The Fund, in its first review, emphasized the importance of enhanced central bank transparency, urging "greater clarity on the MPC's assessment of the current and desired policy stance." Such communication, it argues, is vital to aligning public expectations with central bank actions between policy meetings. For now, this ambition remains aspirational — a blueprint still being assembled rather than a completed structure.

While the MPS outlines some favorable developments — such as improved foreign reserves and adherence to IMF-set fiscal benchmarks — these are largely debt-fueled and may prove unsustainable if underlying structural issues remain unaddressed. The lack of credible data transparency, continued reliance on informal economic activity, and ambiguous central bank communication only exacerbate uncertainty. As the government prepares its next fiscal roadmap, clarity in monetary policy and realism in growth projections are urgently needed to restore both market confidence and macroeconomic stability.

Deepening external vulnerabilities

Muhammad Zain

Amidst rising import bills and faltering export momentum, Pakistan's trade deficit continues to swell, casting a long shadow over the country's economic stability.

The latest data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) for April and May 2025 paints a worrying picture: ballooning import volumes, shrinking export figures, and a trade imbalance reaching its highest level in years. Despite the cushion of growing remittances and a modest uptick in cumulative exports, the country's balance of payments remains under acute strain—threatening to unravel fragile gains in external account management.

In a flicker of upward momentum amid industrial unease, Pakistan's large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sector eked out a 2.29 percent year-over-year expansion for April 2025, as unveiled by recent figures—offering a rare glint of revival within a largely beleaguered economic matrix. Yet, this tentative elevation masks a more disconcerting truth: from July through April in FY2024-25, the broader LSM terrain dwindled by 1.52 percent. Chronic hindrances across pivotal sectors—ranging from alimentary production to chemical synthesis, mechanical apparatuses, and ferrous metallurgy—continue to choke industrial resurgence. Compounding the concern, a sequential month-on-month downturn of 3.2 percent was registered in April alone, amplifying apprehensions about the resilience of manufacturing dynamics.

As a cornerstone of the national economic edifice, LSM encapsulates nearly 67.5 percent of the country's total manufacturing output and injects approximately 8 percent into the gross domestic product (GDP). Juxtaposing April 2025 against the same month the prior year reveals grim erosions across major manufacturing echelons. The iron and steel crucible contracted by 1.82 percent, mechanical and engineering outputs collapsed by a staggering 50.7 percent, while garments (wearing apparel) receded 8.55 percent. Chemical manufacturing, too, endured a 1.3 percent decline, with chemical products alone plummeting by a punishing 10.78 percent. Other collapses included a 0.14 percent fall in fabricated metalware, furniture manufacturing freefalling by 40.3 percent, and football (sports goods) production nosediving 41.5 percent year-over-year.

Amidst the erosion, bright spots glim-

mered. Textiles surged 7.9 percent, vehicular production catapulted by 60.2 percent, and pharmaceuticals lifted by 7.5 percent. Leather goods etched out a modest 1.8 percent rise, while cement ascended by 3.6 percent. In auxiliary sectors, coke and petroleum goods edged up 5.54 percent, computer and optical instruments climbed 5.13 percent, and food and beverage manufacturing registered 3.47 percent and 4.27 percent hikes respectively. Notably, sugar production ballooned by an astronomical 184 percent. Cotton yarn spun an 8.66 percent increase, tobacco swelled by 9.1 percent, fertilizers expanded 5.07 percent, and cotton cloth trickled up 0.74 percent.

Turning to the external trade vista, Pakistan's exports inched upward by 5.15 percent during the initial eleven months (July–May) of FY2024-25—reaching \$29.564 billion, a discernible rise from the \$28.117 billion logged during the same stretch last year. Imports, too, recorded a substantive escalation—up 7.50 percent to reach \$53.55 billion from the previous year's tally of \$49.815 billion. In May 2025, outbound shipments climbed to \$2.672 billion, marking a robust 22.91 percent year-over-year lift from \$2.174 billion in May 2024. In contrast, imports fell by 5.77 percent month-on-month to \$5.273 billion from April's \$5.596 billion, yet this still reflected a 7.28 percent climb over the \$4.915 billion reported in May of the prior year.

However, compared to the preceding month, May's exports tumbled by 5.88 percent from \$2.839 billion, reflecting market fragility. The linchpins of export revenue in May 2025 included knitwear at Rs123.121 billion, readymade garments at Rs105.420 billion, and bed linen items valued at Rs75.937 billion. Rice and derivatives fetched Rs50.707 billion, cotton cloth Rs38.147 billion, towels Rs25.939 billion, while miscellaneous home textiles (excluding towels and bedding) reached Rs19.895 billion. Other notables were basmati rice (Rs16.682 billion), seafood and derivatives (Rs15.908 billion), and cotton yarn (Rs11.976 billion).

In summary, despite selective upticks and sectoral rallies, the industrial and trade architecture remains ensnared in volatility. A nuanced recalibration of policy and stimulus, perhaps, is required to unlock sustained momentum in Pakistan's industrial heartland.

April's deficit expanded by 55.2% compared to March, largely due to dwindling exports and concurrently ballooning imports. Exports in April nosedived to \$2.14 billion—a

staggering 19.05% drop month-on-month and 8.93% slide year-on-year. Conversely, imports soared to \$5.53 billion, marking a 14.52% monthly increase and a 14.09% rise over the previous year. This disproportionate dynamic inflated the monthly deficit by over \$1.2 billion. Translated into rupee terms, Pakistan's April 2025 exports amounted to Rs601.4 billion, while import expenditure surged to Rs1.55 trillion, culminating in a colossal Rs952 billion deficit. This stark divergence, in dollar terms, illustrates a 55.2% expansion in the trade shortfall over March.

Reviewing the cumulative narrative of the first ten months (July–April) of FY2024-25, the data narrates a deepening trade conundrum. Exports rose modestly to \$26.86 billion—a 6.25% year-over-year climb—while imports swelled to \$48.21 billion, representing a 7.37% increase. The resulting gap stood at \$21.35 billion, up 8.81% from the analogous period in the preceding fiscal year.

The trend reached a critical inflection in April 2025. The \$3.4 billion trade deficit—anchored in a perilous cocktail of export attrition and import escalation—marked the highest monthly imbalance since August 2022. Exports tumbled 8.9% YoY and 19.1% MoM to \$2.1 billion, while imports surged 14.1% compared to April 2024 and 14.5% over the previous month, cresting at \$5.5 billion—the loftiest figure since the aforementioned benchmark.

Cumulative exports hit \$26.9 billion—up 6.3% YoY—whereas imports ballooned to \$48.2 billion, a 7.4% uptick. This widened the trade gap to \$21.4 billion, reflecting an 8.8% expansion from FY24. The persistent uptick in imports juxtaposed with stifled export performance underscores intensifying external sector fragilities and an urgent need for corrective macroeconomic recalibration.

Pakistan's external trade trajectory is veering toward a critical juncture. The disproportionate rise in imports against a backdrop of declining exports has widened the trade deficit to levels not seen since 2022, underscoring structural weaknesses in the economy. With the current account balance once again showing signs of chronic stress, urgent policy recalibration is imperative. Without targeted interventions to bolster export competitiveness, reduce energy-related import dependency, and stabilize external inflows, Pakistan risks deepening its vulnerability to global shocks and undermining prospects for sustained economic recovery.

Igniting sectoral revival through reform, resilience

Shahid Hussain

Amid shifting global economic crosswinds and domestic recalibrations, Pakistan's blueprint for FY2025–26 presents a reinvigorated vision of recovery, resilience, and reform.

Spearheaded by the "Uraan Pakistan" initiative and embedded within the broader contours of the National Economic Transformation Plan, the government charts a forward-looking roadmap targeting sectoral resurgence—from agriculture to industry and services. With measured optimism, the state intends to leverage macroeconomic stability, structural reforms, and investment-driven momentum to navigate the complexities of inflation control, food security, and sustainable development.

In a recalibrated fiscal tableau for 2025–26, Pakistan's external ledger is poised to pivot from a current account surplus of \$1.8 billion—seen in the waning financial cycle—to a projected deficit of \$2.12 billion. Concurrently, consumer price inflation, tethered to the CPI index, is envisaged to hover around 7.5 percent for the impending year.

Sanctioned by the National Economic Council under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's stewardship and unveiled in tandem with the federal budget, the Annual Plan offers a sanguine macroeconomic forecast. It charts an ambitious GDP expansion trajectory of 4.2 percent, built upon sector-wide resurgence and revitalisation.

This anticipated acceleration in economic tempo is moored in persistent macro-fiscal recalibration and the flagship initiative 'Uraan Pakistan.' Key enablers include fiscal stringency, recalibrated interest benchmarks, regulatory overhauls, and resurgent investor morale—all converging to catalyse a climate conducive to economic buoyancy. Exports are envisioned to ascend to \$35.3 billion in FY2025-26, in alignment with the strategic contours of the National Economic Transformation Plan 2024-29. Within the contours of its "5Es Framework," the administration advances an export-anchored development paradigm—invigorating strategic verticals such as agronomy, digital technology, industrial fabrication, mineral exploitation, service delivery, and both marine-based and imaginative economies. Nonetheless, the textile complex retains its traditional preeminence within the export matrix.

In tandem, diaspora remittances are

forecasted to continue their upward arc, culminating in a projected inflow of \$39.4 billion. This increment is anticipated through diversified stratagems: fortifying formal transfer conduits, penetrating untapped European and ascendant employment geographies, augmenting vocational and linguistic proficiency, facilitating outbound labour mobility, and elevating the proportion of skilled expatriates from 44% to 50% via synergistic efforts with TVET bodies and academic institutions. Meanwhile, tech-sector exports are set to perpetuate their double-digit ascent, forecasted to breach the \$5 billion mark—buoyed by policies under the 5Es ethos.

Agricultural resurgence is also on the horizon, contingent upon the prompt provisioning of critical inputs, the resolution of chronic energy disruptions, and systematic enhancements in crop yield efficacy.

The consolidation of external sector steadiness, buoyed remittance inflows, and steadfast adherence to IMF conditionalities will serve as lynchpins for the realization of the envisaged growth metrics. Complementary vectors—political tranquillity, robust institutional stewardship, favourable international trade winds, moderated global commodity valuations, and persistent foreign appetite for Pakistani goods—remain instrumental in actualising these aspirations.

In the fiscal arc of 2025–26, Pakistan's agrarian realm is charted for a 4.5% expansion, led by a substantial resurgence in major crops, forecasted to surge by 6.7%—a sharp pivot from the contraction experienced in the preceding year. Minor crops, riding on the winds of benevolent climate, climate-adaptive cultivation, and productivity-oriented PSDP mechanisms, are anticipated to rise by 3.5%.

Policy scaffolding is actively facilitating the punctual supply of premium-grade seeds, agro-nutrients, and mechanised tools, with provincial machineries lending auxiliary heft to this strategy. The livestock domain is envisaged to clock in a 4.2% growth rhythm, while forestry and aquaculture sectors are on track to ascend by 3.5% and 3.0%, respectively. Collectively, these initiatives under the flagship 'Uraan Pakistan' blueprint aim to fortify the nation's food buffer and tether the inflationary tide.

On the industrial frontier, a projected elevation of 4.3% is on the cards. Mining and quarrying activities are anticipated to edge forward by 3.0%, while the manufacturing

engine is primed for a 4.7% lift. Within this industrial tapestry, large-scale manufacturing (LSM) is poised to rebound with a 3.5% uptick—propelled by a favourable statistical base, rejuvenated energy supplies, moderated lending rates, exchange rate poise, and a softening global commodities spectrum.

Momentum is likewise expected to persist across small and medium enterprises, infrastructure utilities, the construction sector, and ancillary services like slaughtering. Structural recalibrations under the National Economic Transformation Plan, alongside strategic financial infusion from the SIFC, are set to galvanise industrial productivity further.

The service economy is projected to chart a 4.0% growth course. This trajectory is buoyed by anticipated recoveries in agriculture and manufacturing, which are expected to amplify the pulse of wholesale-retail commerce, logistics, warehousing, and telecoms. Building upon its demonstrated endurance through FY2024-25, the services sector is poised to maintain its growth continuum.

Aggregate investment is forecasted to climb from 13.8% of GDP in FY2024-25 to 14.7% in FY2025-26—a reflection of rekindled economic dynamism, a more inviting commercial environment, and reinforced political constancy. Fixed investment, in tandem, is estimated to ascend from 12% to 13% of GDP, while national savings are set to reach 14.3%.

Looking outward, the administration aims to harness latent potential in regional synergies, digital commerce, and verdant economic models to bolster the external flank. Strategic imperatives are concentrated on sharpening export competitiveness, deepening regional integration, diversifying trade geographies, and scaling the digital trade frontier.

FY2025–26 emerges as a year of calibrated ambition for Pakistan's economy—grounded in pragmatic policy interventions and bold sectoral pivots. By synchronising climate-smart agriculture, revitalised industrial output, and a digitally integrated services landscape, the government seeks not only to expand economic volume but to rewire its foundational mechanisms. Through enhanced regional collaboration, strategic diversification, and unwavering structural reforms, the nation aspires to not just weather the fiscal tides—but to soar steadily above them.

Will Iran fight or fold?

Raza Khan

In a dramatic reversal of his earlier campaign promises, US President Donald Trump on June 22 entered the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran by launching airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities. This move has significantly escalated the crisis, raising the risk of a full-scale regional war unless cooler heads prevail among the leadership of the involved nations.

What began as a bilateral confrontation between Israel and Iran has now become a far more complex and dangerous conflict with the United States siding openly with Israel. The most alarming aspect of Washington's entry into the conflict is its potential to trigger far-reaching changes in the regional balance of power—and even shift global geopolitical dynamics.

Realistically, Iran is now in a precarious position. On the very first day of the US involvement, advanced weapons, including B-52 bombers, were deployed to strike Iranian nuclear sites. Iran appears ill-equipped to counter such high-level aerial assaults. However, according to international media citing Iranian officials, Iran has already moved its stockpile of enriched uranium to undisclosed, presumably safer, locations.

More troubling is the report that even Iran's heavily fortified nuclear facility at Fordow has come under attack. The US and Israel appear united in their objective: to strip Iran of its nuclear capabilities and prevent it from becoming a nuclear power. Israel has justified its initial strikes—targeting Iran's army chief and top nuclear scientists—by alleging that Tehran was on the verge of crossing the nuclear threshold. Iran has denied this, insisting that its uranium enrichment levels remain well below weapons-grade. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has, to some extent, supported Iran's position in its assessments made prior to Israel's strikes.

At this point, the strategic goals of the US and Israel seem twofold: first, to dismantle Iran's nuclear program; and second, to bring about regime change by overthrowing the radical theocratic government led by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Both Washington and Tel Aviv have hinted at eliminating Khamenei if necessary.

These objectives are closely linked. If the Israeli and American forces succeed in destroy-

ing Iran's nuclear infrastructure and its ability to develop nuclear weapons, the ideological foundation of the current regime—established after the 1979 Islamic Revolution—would be severely undermined. Without its nuclear ambitions, the regime could lose legitimacy in the eyes of many Iranians, potentially triggering widespread dissent and even open rebellion.

The evolving situation is becoming increasingly difficult for the Iranian regime to manage. Both ordinary Iranians and independent analysts have begun questioning the military strategies and ideological rigidity of Iran's leadership. In response to Israeli attacks, Iran has retaliated with advanced missile strikes. These attacks have reportedly caught both Israel and Washington off guard, as several Iranian missiles managed to breach Israel's highly regarded missile defense systems, causing significant damage in Tel Aviv and other cities.



Some Iranian commentators, quoted in international media, report growing public sentiment in Iran urging the government to intensify its attacks on Israel, arguing that Israel has not yet been adequately punished for its initial strikes on Iranian soil. Despite these pressures, Iran has so far refrained from directly targeting US military bases in the region, including those in Iraq and Jordan. Tehran is likely aware that such a move would provoke an even greater American military response—something it may not be prepared to withstand. President Trump has already demonstrated a willingness to escalate, and any Iranian strike on US forces could lead to the deployment of more American troops and further assaults on Iran.

Despite Iran's missile strikes on Israel, which may not yet reflect its full military capacity, there are signs of strategic restraint. This could be an effort by Tehran to leave room for diplomacy and avoid total war. However, if Israel and the US escalate their campaign—

especially with intensified attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities—Iran may respond with a full-scale missile barrage against Israel. If the regime finds itself unable to defend against these coordinated assaults, it may also expand its response to include US military assets in the region. Such a move could trigger a regional conflagration with global implications, particularly if powers like Russia—and less visibly, China—choose to support Iran.

This suggests that Israel and the US may not find it easy to achieve their goal of denuclearizing Iran. Still, the possibility of regime change in Iran remains a central objective. Washington and Tel Aviv hope that a new leadership in Tehran will abandon the country's nuclear ambitions and adopt a less confrontational stance toward the West and Israel.

This strategy echoes previous US and

Israeli efforts across the Middle East—in countries like Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria—where regime change often led to the rise of governments either aligned with or less hostile to American and Israeli interests. In the case of Iran, both countries appear to be placing their bets on Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the last Shah, to lead a post-revolutionary government.

Whether Reza Pahlavi would be accepted by the Iranian public remains uncertain. Many Iranians may only consider supporting him if he

advocates for continued nuclear advancement, albeit without confrontation with Israel and the US. There is, however, a broad consensus that future leaders would need to distance Iran from its current policy of supporting proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and the Houthis in Yemen.

For now, the current Iranian regime appears determined to continue its fight, particularly against Israel, and possibly against the US if provoked further. One major strategic option still available to Tehran is the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical choke point through which a significant portion of the world's energy supply passes. This remains Iran's most powerful card in the unfolding geopolitical crisis.

However, if present trends continue, the coming months are likely to bring a period of high volatility across the broader Middle East—potentially engulfing not only Iran and Israel, but also neighboring countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Pakistan slides in global gender equality rankings

Dr. Fatima Khan

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025 has once again placed Pakistan at the bottom of its rankings, 148th out of 148 countries — a disheartening position that reflects deep-seated structural and societal inequalities.

With a gender parity score of just 56.7%, Pakistan has not only fallen behind its global peers but also regressed from its own previous score of 57.7% in 2023. The report exposes chronic disparities across economic participation, education, health, and political representation — highlighting the urgent need for sustained, transformative reforms. Pakistan has been ranked last among 148 countries in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2025, achieving a gender parity score of just 56.7% — its highest since the index began in 2006, yet still placing it at the bottom.

The WEF's annual report measures gender parity across four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. According to the 2025 findings, Pakistan trails behind countries such as Sudan (57%, 147th), Chad (57.1%, 146th), Iran (58.3%, 145th), Guinea (59.5%, 144th), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (60.1%, 143rd), Niger (61.3%, 142nd), Algeria (61.4%, 141st), and Mali (61.7%, 140th). The report noted a slight decline in Pakistan's overall parity score from 57% in the 2024 edition to 56.7% this year. Since 2006, Pakistan has closed just 2.3% of its gender gap. The current score also marks the second consecutive annual drop since reaching its peak of 57.7% in 2023.

The largest setback was observed in the economic participation and opportunity category, which saw a 1.3 percentage point decline. While economic representation indicators remained largely unchanged, the income gap slightly widened (by 0.02 points), and perceived wage inequality increased by 4 percentage points.

On a more positive note, the only sub-index showing improvement was educational attainment, where parity increased by 1.5 percentage points to reach 85.1%. This progress was largely attributed to a rise in female literacy rates—from 46.5% to 48.5%. However, the gain was also influenced by a decrease in male enrolment in tertiary education, which improved

gender balance but also indicated a drop in overall educational access.

In terms of political empowerment, Pakistan experienced a notable decline. The sub-index score fell from 12.2% in 2024 to 11% in 2025. While female representation in parliament improved by 1.2 percentage points, women's presence in ministerial roles dropped sharply—from 5.9% in 2024 to zero in 2025. Pakistan now ranks among countries such as Azerbaijan, Hungary, Saudi Arabia, and Vanuatu, which currently have all-male ministerial cabinets.

Commenting on the findings, Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum, said the 2025 report comes at a critical time marked by technological disruption, geopolitical tensions, and economic uncertainty. "Amid such change, gender parity is both a principle and a strategy. Economies that harness



the full potential of their human capital are better equipped to thrive in times of transformation," she stated. Zahidi also noted that many countries are still not making full use of this opportunity for inclusive growth.

Globally, the report found that the average gender gap across the four categories remains above 30%. The global gender parity score in 2025 stood at 68.8%, reflecting a modest improvement of 0.3 percentage points from 68.4% in 2024. Based on the current rate of progress across the 100 monitored economies, the report estimates it will take 123 years to achieve full global gender parity.

The economic landscape in Pakistan remains deeply skewed. Only 36% of women participate in the economy, with just 23% represented in the formal workforce. In agriculture, where women play a critical yet invisible role, their labor often goes unrecorded and unrecognized by national data — including WEF metrics.

Women continue to face a significant wage gap, earning 18% less than men for similar work. The situation is worse in unpaid labor: 76% of women in agriculture work without pay, compared to 24% of men. Income disparity increased by 0.2 percentage points in the past year, while perceived wage inequality rose by 4 points, reflecting growing discontent.

Managerial roles remain largely inaccessible to women. Discriminatory practices in recruitment, postings, and promotions further entrench gender-based exclusion from economic leadership. The only area showing relative improvement was educational attainment, where parity rose by 1.5 percentage points to 85.1%. This increase is partly due to higher female literacy rates, which climbed from 46.5% to 48.5%. However, the gain in parity also reflects a drop in male enrolment in tertiary education,

indicating a narrowing gap due not to collective progress, but to overall educational decline.

Pakistan has made modest gains in closing the gender gap in healthcare, but serious concerns remain. Maternal mortality rates remain among the highest globally, and access to reproductive health services is alarmingly limited. Cultural norms often undervalue women's health needs, which exacerbates the problem and delays effective healthcare interventions.

While Pakistan reserves 33% of parliamentary seats for women, most of these seats are occupied

through political selection rather than public election. Women are often placed in these roles because of familial or political ties, leaving little room for independent or grassroots voices. This symbolic representation rarely translates into meaningful policy influence, and crucial gender issues remain sidelined in legislative agendas.

Pakistan's persistent position at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Index is more than a statistic — it is a mirror reflecting widespread exclusion, entrenched patriarchy, and policy inaction. While there are signs of progress in certain areas, such as education, these gains are fragile and overshadowed by deeper systemic failures. Achieving gender equality in Pakistan will require more than symbolic gestures — it demands robust law enforcement, cultural change, and inclusive policy-making that centers women's voices and contributions. Only then can the country unlock its full potential and build a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

What the US and Israel really want from Iran

Muhammad Ayyash

In his 2002 testimony to the United States Congress, then former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US lawmakers that an invasion of Iraq was necessary for winning the “war on terror” and preventing Iraq and terrorist groups from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. He further claimed that the war would be quick and would usher in a new age of Western-friendly democracy, not just in Iraq, but across the region, including Iran. Neither proclamation was true.

As many experts and officials already knew before the 2003 invasion began, Saddam Hussein’s regime did not have weapons of mass destruction and held no ties to al-Qaeda. The war was bound to cause widespread devastation, instability, insecurity, unspeakable suffering, chaos and the breakdown of governance. And that is what happened. Iraq today is at best a fragile state with enormous economic and political challenges.

After Israel and then the US attacked Iran earlier this month, many analysts rushed to comment on how the two allies have supposedly failed to learn the lessons of the Iraq war and are now repeating the same mistakes in Iran. These analyses would have been accurate had the actual goals of the 2003 invasion been to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to establish democracy. But they were not.

For the US and Israel, the desired outcome of the war was an Iraq that would not pose any resistance to the Israeli settler-colonial project in Palestine and its role as an agent of US imperial power in the region. This is also the desired outcome in Iran today.

Just like the claims about the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq proved completely false, the claims that Iran was on the “verge of” developing a nuclear weapon have no grounds. No real evidence that Tehran was in fact close to gaining nuclear capabilities has been put forward. Instead, we have been presented with a truly unmatched level of hypocrisy and lies.

Here we have a situation where two nuclear powers – one which stands out as the only state in history to use, not once but twice, a nuclear weapon and another that refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has a mass-murder-suicide type of nuclear doctrine – are undertaking illegal “pre-emptive” aggression under the guise of stopping nuclear proliferation.

Clearly, the US and Israel are not after Iran’s nuclear programme. They are after Iran as

a regional power, and that is why regime change has already been floated in public. In addition to multiple statements from Netanyahu, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz, and other Israeli officials, US Senators Lindsey Graham and Ted Cruz have also called for toppling the Iranian government. On Sunday, US President Donald Trump joined the calls for regime change in Iran with a post on social media.

The Iranian people are now being encouraged to “stand up” and fight for their “freedom”. But freedom and democracy in Iran are certainly not what Israel and the US aim for. Why? Because a free and democratic Iran would not



serve their interests and accept the brutalities of a settler-colonial project in its vicinity. They would rather see Iran return to the violent, tyrannical monarchy under the Pahlavi dynasty, which was overthrown in a popular revolution in 1979, or any other political force willing to do their bidding.

If that doesn’t happen, Israel and the US would rather have a fragmented, weak, chaotic, destabilised Iran, marred by a civil war. That would suit their interests, just as a war-torn Iraq did. Weakening regional powers in the Middle East and spreading instability through subversion and aggression is a well-established policy goal that the political elites in Israel and the US have jointly embraced since the 1990s.

A policy document called Clean Break, authored by former US Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle and other neoconservatives in 1996, outlined this strategy of attacking Middle Eastern states under the pretext of preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to secure Israel’s strategic interests. Perle et al did not come up with something radically new; they simply built on the well-known imperial strategy of sowing division and chaos in order to facilitate imperial domination.

But this strategy is not without risks. Just like the collapse of the Iraqi state paved the way for violent non-state actors to emerge and for Iran to solidify its position as a regional

power challenging US-Israeli interests, a weakened or fragmented Iranian state can result in the same dynamics. On a more global scale, the actions of the US and Israel are encouraging more countries to pursue nuclear weapons. The lesson that states are drawing from the US-Israeli aggression on Iran is that nuclear weapons are necessary to acquire precisely to prevent such attacks. Thus, we are likely heading towards more proliferation as a result of this war, not less.

The Israeli state does not seem to be concerned about proliferation as long as the chaos and destruction it spreads in the region allows it to achieve its strategic goal of eradicating the Palestinian struggle once and for all, and ending all resistance to its settler colonisation project. Israel, in a nutshell, wants the entire region on its knees and will stop at nothing to achieve that objective. This is because it does not really have to foot the bill of regional instability.

By contrast, US interests are directly impacted when the Middle East descends into chaos. A dysfunctional Iraq or a weakened Iran may serve the US in the short term, but in the longer term, the instability can disrupt its grander plans for control of global energy markets and containing China. The rest of the world will also feel the ripple effect of this unjustified aggression, just as it did after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Given the brutal, decades-long fallout of that war, the global response to the US-Israeli aggression against Iran has been self-defeatingly subdued; some European countries have appeared to endorse the attack, despite the many negative economic impacts they could face as a result of this war. If governments truly desire to make the world a safer place, this complacency with imperial violence needs to end. It is past time that they come to the sober conclusion that the US and Israel are agents of destruction and chaos by virtue of their racist colonial design.

The Israeli settler colonial project is an unjustifiable project of displacement, expulsion and genocide; US imperialism is an unjustifiable project of robbing people of their resources, dignity and sovereignty. To establish peace and stability in the Middle East, the world needs to put pressure on Israel to give up its settler colonial project and become part of the region through a decolonised existence with the Palestinians in a decolonised Palestine; and to compel the US to release its iron grip on the region, allowing its people to live in freedom and sovereignty.

This is the only way to avoid perpetual chaos, instability, suffering and pain.

Netanyahu's legacy will not be security – it will be isolation

Kamel Hawwash

Since its founding in 1948, Israel's prime ministers have sought to leave legacies that would outlast them — some through war, others through diplomacy, and a few through historic blunders. David Ben-Gurion secured the state's independence and built its foundational institutions. Golda Meir presided over a war that cost her office. Menachem Begin signed peace with Egypt while expanding illegal settlements. Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated for trying to make peace with the Palestinians.

Each leader, in some way, left their mark. But none has ruled as long – or as divisively – as Benjamin Netanyahu. And now, more than ever, the question is not just what kind of legacy he wants to leave, but what legacy he is actually creating.

In 2016, I argued that the Arab world had effectively crowned Netanyahu “King of the Middle East” — a title that reflected his success in positioning Israel as a regional power without making any concessions to the Palestinians. Today, I believe he sees an opportunity not only to consolidate that title, but to reshape Israel's regional position permanently — through force, impunity, and a strategy rooted in securitised dominance.

Since his first term, Netanyahu has insisted that Israel's security must override all other considerations. In his worldview, a Palestinian state is not merely incompatible with Israel's security; it is an existential threat. Even were such a state to be created, Netanyahu has made clear that Israel must retain what he calls “security sovereignty” over all of historic Palestine.

This has never been mere rhetoric. It has shaped his every major decision, none more so than the current war on Gaza. The assault has levelled entire neighbourhoods, killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, displaced most of its two million people, and created an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. Israel stands accused by human rights groups and United Nations agencies of committing war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. It is facing genocide

charges, supported by multiple countries, at the International Court of Justice. The International Criminal Court has also issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and his former defence minister, Yoav Gallant, for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the use of starvation as a weapon of war.

Yet Netanyahu presses on, arguing that Gaza must never again pose a threat to Israel, and that the destruction is necessary to secure the country's future. This logic does not stop at Gaza. He has used similar arguments to justify Israel's attacks on Lebanon, including targeted

of regional alignment that marginalised the Palestinians. For Netanyahu, normalisation is not a path to peace — it is a way to cement Israel's position while avoiding a just resolution to the occupation.

What, then, is the legacy Netanyahu seeks? He wants to be remembered as the prime minister who crushed all resistance to occupation, permanently ended the idea of a Palestinian state, and enshrined Israel's dominance in the Middle East through sheer force. In his vision, Israel controls the land, dictates the rules, and answers to no one. But history may remember him differently.

What Netanyahu calls security, much of the world increasingly sees as systemic violence. The global response to the war on Gaza — millions marching in protest, international legal action, growing boycotts, and diplomatic downgrades — suggests that under his leadership, Israel is not gaining legitimacy but losing it. Even among its allies, Israel faces growing isolation. While the United States continues to provide diplomatic cover, terms like “apartheid”, “ethnic cleansing”, and “settler colonialism” are no longer confined to fringe activism. They are entering mainstream political discourse

and shaping public consciousness, particularly among younger generations.

Many commentators argue that Netanyahu is clinging to power merely to avoid prosecution for corruption or accountability for the failures of the October 7, 2023, attacks on Israel. But I believe this analysis misses a deeper truth: that he sees this moment — this war, this absence of accountability — as a historic window of opportunity. In his mind, this is legacy work. The tragedy is that in pursuing this legacy, he may achieve the opposite of what he intends. Not a stronger Israel, but a more isolated one. Not a secure homeland, but a state increasingly seen as a violator of international norms. Not a legacy of strength, but one of moral and political collapse.

Netanyahu will be remembered. Today, as Gaza burns and Iran faces strike after strike, there is no longer any doubt about that. The only question is whether his legacy will be one of national security, or one that leaves Israel more alone, more condemned, and more precarious than ever before.



strikes on Hezbollah figures and the attempted assassination of the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah.

Using the same rationale, Israel has also launched strikes in Yemen and made clear that it will act in Iraq whenever and wherever it deems necessary. The security argument has likewise been used to justify the continued occupation of Syrian territory and is currently invoked to legitimise ongoing attacks on Iran, ostensibly to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons and to degrade its missile and drone capabilities.

In every case, the same narrative is repeated: Israel cannot be safe unless its enemies are broken, its deterrence unchallenged, and its dominance undisputed. All dissent, disagreement, or resistance — whether military, political, or even symbolic — is cast as a threat to be eliminated. Even Netanyahu's diplomatic efforts follow this logic. The Abraham Accords, signed with the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco during his premiership, were hailed as peace deals but functioned primarily as instruments

Israel tried to break Iran – but it may have actually helped unite it

Mohammad Eslami

Israel's ongoing military assault on Iran has already become one of the most consequential cross-border strikes in the region's recent history. Far more than a targeted operation against missile silos or nuclear facilities, it has included high-profile assassinations and sophisticated cyberattacks.

Among the most significant developments so far has been the assassination of several senior Iranian commanders, including Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Hossein Salami and the head of its Aerospace Force, Amir Ali Hajizadeh. These targeted killings represent the most severe blow to Iran's military leadership since the 1980-1988 war with Iraq. Yet, beneath the surface, the assault is not merely a military manoeuvre – it is the expression of a political doctrine decades in the making.

While Israeli officials publicly framed the operation as a preemptive act to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, its deeper strategic logic appears increasingly clear: the destabilisation – and eventual collapse – of the Islamic Republic. For years, Israeli and some American strategists have argued – sometimes discreetly, sometimes overtly – that the only durable solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions is regime change. The current campaign aligns with this longstanding objective, not only through military means but also via psychological, political and social pressure inside Iran.

Recent developments suggest the operation was designed to provoke the early stages of an internal uprising. The playbook is familiar to observers of past regime change efforts: assassinations of top military officials, psychological warfare, disinformation campaigns and the symbolic targeting of state institutions. In Tehran, Israeli backed cyberattacks and precision strikes have reportedly hit government buildings and ministries, even temporarily disrupting national television broadcasts – a key pillar of the Islamic Republic's communications infrastructure.

Israeli political rhetoric has echoed this direction. In closed briefings and selected media interviews, officials have acknowledged that Iran's deeply fortified underground nuclear facilities – some reportedly buried more than 500 metres (1,640ft) beneath the Zagros and Alborz mountains – cannot be destroyed without full United States participation.

Specifically, the operation would require the use of GBU 57 “Massive Ordnance Penetrator” bombs, deliverable only by American B 2 or B 52 strategic bombers. In the absence of such capabilities, Israeli leaders appear to have concluded that halting Iran's nuclear programme is impossible without a change in government.

This context lends new meaning to Israel's concurrent military and political efforts. In the aftermath of the attacks, Israeli messaging aimed at the Iranian public intensified, portraying the IRGC not as national defenders but as the chief oppressors of the Iranian people. The messaging sought to separate the Islamic Republic from the Iranian nation

Even among activists from the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement – which sparked nationwide protests after the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini in police custody – there has been visible reluctance to align with foreign military intervention. As images of bombed out buildings and fallen Iranian soldiers circulated, a mood of empathy and solidarity momentarily replaced the demand for regime change. For many, the conversation has shifted from political reform to national defence.

Notably, several public figures and former opponents of the Islamic Republic voiced support for Iran and denounced the Israeli attacks. Football legend Ali Daei declared, “I prefer to



with slogans such as: “This is not Iran's war. This is the regime's war.” Iranian opposition figures abroad – including Reza Pahlavi, the eldest son of the last shah of Iran, and former footballer Ali Karimi – echoed these narratives, expressing support for the strikes and calling for regime change.

However, the strategy may have produced the opposite effect. Rather than igniting mass revolt or fracturing national unity, the attacks appear to have consolidated public sentiment across political lines. Many Iranians, including longtime critics of the regime, have expressed anger over what they perceive as a foreign assault on national sovereignty. The collective memory of external intervention – stretching from the CIA backed 1953 coup to the Iran Iraq War – has reactivated a deeply embedded defensive reflex.

die rather than be a traitor,” rejecting cooperation with any foreign assault. Mohsen Borhani, a former judge and political prisoner, wrote, “I kiss the hands of all defenders of the homeland,” referring to the IRGC and other armed forces.

What began as a calculated strike on military targets may be achieving the opposite of its intended outcome. Rather than weakening the regime's hold on power, Israel's actions risk reinforcing it – by rallying national unity and silencing dissent. The attempt to engineer revolution from outside may not only fail – it may backfire.

If Israel's ultimate aim was to catalyse a regime collapse, it may have underestimated the historical resilience of Iran's political system and the unifying power of national trauma. As bombs fall and generals die, Iran's social fabric does not appear to be fraying. Instead, it may be stitching itself back together.

Badin's educational crisis

Despite being rich in natural resources and having a population of over 1.9 million, Badin does not have a single university. The educational infrastructure in the district is weak, with many schools and colleges lacking qualified teachers and basic facilities. As a result, a large number of students drop out after passing the intermediate level, while others are forced to travel long distances to pursue university degrees in Hyderabad, Jamshoro and Karachi. For most families in Badin, especially in remote areas, this is simply unaffordable. The absence of a university has limited the academic as well as professional growth of the local youth. The relevant authorities must consider establishing a university in Badin.

Sansar Memon
Badin

Delay for a driver's licence

I had applied for the renewal of my driver's licence almost a year ago on June 27, 2024. Since then, I have visited the Mansehra licence office countless times only to be told that the licence has not yet been printed due to a shortage of paper, and that it would be available next month. This delay raises serious questions about the competence and accountability within the system. Is it fair for a citizen to have to wait this long for a simple document for which all formalities have been completed? And, mind you, the delay is not over yet. The relevant higher authorities should take urgent notice of the matter.

Israr Khan Swati
Mansehra

Senior citizens overlooked

Having worked for over four decades marked by regular payment of all taxes, I was expecting some relief for senior citizens dependent on their savings in the budget. However, no incentive was announced. On savings, initially 15 per cent withholding tax is deducted, and the final balance is paid by calculating the slab of tax on total profit earned. Now, when the prices of medicines and groceries have gone sky-high, we are stressed with low returns on investment, high taxes and high cost of living. The government should reconsider its policies.

Akber D. Vazir
Karachi

A vendor's death and the cost of official apathy

This is with reference to the report 'Vendor dies of heart attack after confiscation of pushcart by CDA staff', according to which, the 65-year-old vendor hailing from Azad Kashmir died of cardiac arrest after his

pushcart had been confiscated in Islamabad by officials representing the Capital Development Authority (CDA).

In these times of high inflation, a man of his age had left his home to earn an honest livelihood, but his only means of earning was mercilessly taken away from him. Who shall we hold responsible for this man's death? I wonder if there ever will be a day when those in power will be able to see beyond their extravagance, and think about the basic needs of the common man. In Pakistan, the elite class enjoys its benefits, taking it as a birth-right. This needs to come to an urgent end.

Afifa Adeel
Lahore

Pakistan Steel Mills: Hope amid uncertainty

The recent 'serious talks' taking place between Pakistan and Russia regarding the potential revival of Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) have sparked renewed discussions about the fate of the long-dormant industrial giant. However, for those with firsthand experience of the mill's protracted stagnation, the focus inevitably shifts to the years of apparent inaction that led to this point.

A key point of contention even today remains the state of the existing machinery at PSM. Nobody knows what the machinery condition is, whether or not it can be put to use again. This uncertainty is underscored by reports that technical experts are assessing the usability of the equipment, with the government indicating that Russian cooperation in restoring PSM would hinge on at least 50 per cent of the machinery being viable.

While the prospect of Russian partnership offers a glimmer of hope for the PSM, the shadow of past inaction and the unknown condition of the existing infrastructure serve as stark reminders of the importance of timely and accountable governance in managing national assets. The nation now waits to see if this new chapter, built upon a historical foundation, can finally bring the PSM back to life.

Zahid Maqsood Sheikh
Lahore

Unfair tax hike on savings

The recent federal budget document has proposed an increase in the tax rate on interest income from banks and saving schemes. This is unfair as the existing tax rate on such income already happens to be 15 per cent for filers of tax returns, and a pretty hefty 35pc for non-filers. It is frustrating that nothing is done to widen the tax net, and the entire focus remains on further squeezing those who are already paying taxes.

The step will certainly discourage people from keeping large deposits in commercial banks, and they may also withdraw parked

investments from the National Savings. Pakistan has one of the lowest savings rates in the region, and the current move will make things difficult even more.

With insufficient domestic savings, the country relies on external borrowings. Increased taxation will create a dangerous cycle of debt dependence. On the other hand, people will put themselves at risk by investing in high-risk, untaxed or low-taxed alternative schemes. The worst affected will be the elderly; mostly pensioners and small investors. Keeping in view the prevailing high rate of inflation, this would be unjust for people who rely on income from these two sources.

The federal government and parliament should focus on the welfare of the people. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) should be more realistic, and must rethink its policies. Knee-jerk measures alone will fail to enhance revenue collection.

Dr Alfred Charles
Karachi

GSTA's influence undermines education in Sindh

The Government Secondary Teachers Association (GSTA) has become an existential threat to quality education in Sindh, with documented evidence revealing systemic failures. A 2023 Sindh Education Department audit exposed that 42 per cent of GSTA-affiliated teachers in Karachi division maintain attendance below 60pc, compared to just 18pc among non-union teachers. The 2022 matriculation board scandal implicated 127 GSTA members across eight districts for operating organised cheating rackets, with bribes ranging from Rs5,000 to as high as Rs50,000 per student.

More alarmingly, 2021 Anti-Corruption Establishment data shows that 68pc of harassment complaints against GSTA members were dismissed due to union interference in investigative processes.

Proven solutions exist if the political will is there. Punjab's five-year probation policy for new teachers has successfully limited union influence during critical formative years. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's 2019 decision to empower headmasters with transfer authority reduced teacher absenteeism by 37pc. Sindh's own biometric attendance system in colleges has achieved 92pc compliance, demonstrating the viability of technological solutions. The establishment of special education courts could break the cycle of compromised investigations that currently protects offenders.

With 2.8 million students trapped in this broken system, Sindh faces a clear choice: continue appeasing a union or implement reforms to rescue the system.

Munawar Ali
Khairpur Mirs

A 'new star' becomes visible in North America

Harry Baker

A "new star" is shining in the constellation Lupus thanks to an unexpected stellar explosion within the Milky Way — and it can currently be seen with the naked eye from parts of North America.



On June 12, astronomers from the All-Sky Automated Survey for Supernovae at Ohio State University first spotted the new point of light, which had an apparent magnitude of +8.7 at the time, still too dim to be seen by the naked eye, Sky & Telescope originally reported. (A smaller magnitude signifies a brighter object; for example, the moon has an apparent magnitude of -12.7).

Over the next few days, the rapidly brightening object took on several temporary names — including AT 2025nhr, ASASSN-25cm, and N Lup 2025 — as researchers scrambled to determine its identity. Astronomer Yusuke Tampo, from the South African Astronomical Observatory at the University of Cape Town, then analyzed the light coming from the object and determined that it is likely a classical nova — a massive stellar explosion that temporarily shines bright in the night sky. On June 16, it was given the official designation V462 Lupi. By June 18, V462 Lupi had brightened to an apparent magnitude of +5.7, which makes it just visible to the naked eye. This also makes it around 4 million times brighter than its extremely dim progenitor star was before June 12, according to Space-weather.com. There is a chance that the nova will continue to brighten in the coming days, making it even easier to spot.

What to know about 'forever chemicals' if you're pregnant

Marta Zaraska

Like many expectant mothers, Sara Blixt avoided canned tuna — even though it was the food she craved. But tuna meant mercury, a potential threat to her unborn son. When he was born, she managed to breastfeed for only three months. "I felt like crap," she said. Three years later, Blixt learned that she and others in her town, Ronneby, Sweden, had extremely high levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, in their blood. The municipal water supply was contaminated by firefighting foam used on a military base for years.



Blixt had likely passed the PFAS to her children through pregnancy and breastfeeding, and again by mixing formula with tap water. Today, Sara Blixt is grateful — her children are healthy. Yet research increasingly shows that for many others, PFAS may mean harm: Fetal exposure has been linked to a higher risk of birth defects, liver disease, language disorders, and cancer. Mothers, too, may get pregnancy complications due to PFAS, research suggests — such as high blood pressure and preeclampsia, a serious condition responsible for over 10% of maternal deaths across the globe. And just like Blixt, they may have trouble breastfeeding, and throw in the towel sooner than they would like. PFAS, also known as "forever chemicals," are a class of man-made compounds used in nonstick and waterproof products. They are everywhere: in makeup, cookware, parchment paper, microwaveable popcorn, and rain-proof clothing. We ingest them via contaminated tap water and foods like meat and fish, and we absorb them through the skin. Our bodies can get rid of PFAS, but slowly: It takes three to five years for the levels of PFOS, a common type of PFAS, to go down by half. "Everyone carries a little bit of PFAS in them," said Tracey Woodruff, PhD, MPH, a reproductive health researcher at the University of California, San Francisco.

Humanity could be just 3 years away from dire climate threshold

Ben Turner

Record greenhouse gas emissions could exhaust Earth's "carbon budget" in as little as three years, dooming the planet to breach the symbolic threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warming.



Global warming of 2 C (3.6 F) is considered an important threshold — warming beyond this greatly increases the likelihood of devastating and irreversible climate breakdown that include extreme heatwaves, droughts and the melting of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets. Under the 2015 Paris Agreement, nearly 200 countries pledged to limit global temperature rises to ideally 1.5 C and safely below 2 C. Yet, according to a new assessment by more than 60 of the world's leading climate scientists, this target is quickly moving out of reach — only 143 billion tons (130 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide remains before we have likely exceeded the Paris Agreement target, and humanity is already releasing over 46 billion tons (42 billion metric tons) each year. The researchers published their findings June 19 in the journal Earth System Science Data.

"The window to stay within 1.5 C is rapidly closing," study co-author Joeri Rogelj, a professor of climate science and policy at Imperial College London, said in a statement. "Global warming is already affecting the lives of billions of people around the world.

FDA OKs new monthly treatment for rare swelling disorder

Joyani Das

The FDA has approved a first-of-its-kind treatment for a rare genetic condition that causes frequent, unpredictable, and painful swelling in different parts of the body.



The drug, known as garadacimab but sold under the name Andembry, is used to prevent attacks of hereditary angioedema (HAE) in adults and children 12 and older. It is the only preventive treatment with a monthly dosing schedule for this potentially life-threatening condition that affects about 1 in 50,000 people. HAE happens when a faulty gene leads to low levels or poor function of a protein called C1 inhibitor, which normally helps keep inflammation in check. Without enough of it, people can have swelling in their face, throat, belly, or limbs. Swelling in the abdomen can cause pain, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. If it affects the throat or face, it can block the airway and become life-threatening if not treated. CSL Behring, the maker of Andembry, said the approval was based on a clinical trial involving patients aged 12 and older with HAE. For six months, they received either Andembry (a 400-milligram starting dose followed by 200 milligrams monthly) or a placebo. Andembry helped 62% of people stay attack-free during the treatment period. For many, HAE attacks dropped by more than 99%, and on average, they decreased by about 89% compared to a placebo. It also lowered the need for emergency treatment by about 99% and reduced moderate to severe attacks by around 90% on average. An interim report from an ongoing study showed that Andembry is safe for long-term use and continues to reduce HAE attacks, according to the company's press release.



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