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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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Low FDI highlights Pakistan's investment challenges

Farhan Khan

The inflow of FDI into Pakistan has always been meagre and much below expectation. The latest figures show a declining trend. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), net FDI for the month stood at \$194 million, marking a 37 percent decline compared to May 2024, when it had reached \$307 million. The dip has naturally raised concern over investor confidence in the face of current economic challenges.

Over the first eleven months of FY25 (11MFY25), the country attracted \$1.979 billion in net FDI, a 7.5 percent decrease from the \$2.142 billion recorded during the same period in FY24. The monthly net FDI trend from May 2024 to May 2025 shows a volatile pattern. While gross inflows during 11MFY25 remained

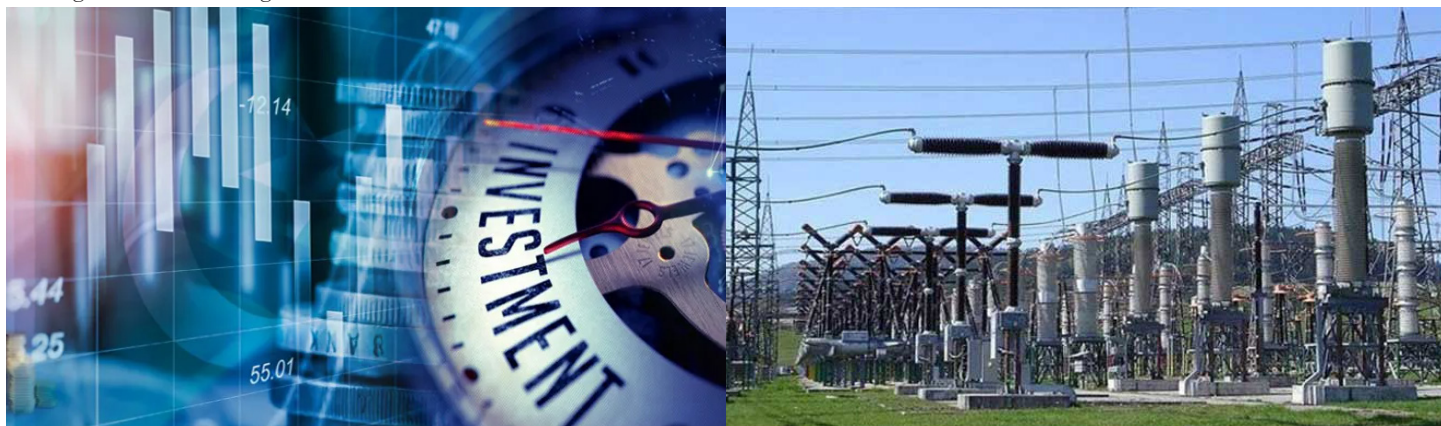
was lower than the \$613.2 million in the same period last year. Within the power sector, hydel power remained the top sub-segment, with \$405.2 million in net inflows. Financial businesses received \$628.9 million in net FDI, up from \$570.4 million in 11MFY24, while oil and gas exploration saw net inflows of \$320.8 million, marginally lower than the \$326 million seen last year. The communications sector reported a net outflow of \$69.1 million, largely due to significant repatriation from the telecom sector. China is Pakistan's largest investor, with \$790.4 million in net inflows during 11MFY25—up from \$598.6 million last year. The United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and Switzerland followed with inflows ranging from \$178 million to \$229 million.

Experts identify political and economic instability, high taxation and inadequate

permits, and enforcement of contracts and intellectual property rights. Additionally, high costs of complying with local regulations discourage foreign companies from entering the Pakistani markets.

Pakistan's tax rates are high, especially the corporate income tax compared to other countries. Frequent changes in tax policies create uncertainty. The absence of tax incentives for foreign investors in critical sectors reduces the country's competitiveness in global markets. On the infrastructure side, Pakistan's transport, energy, and communication networks are underdeveloped, hindering industrial growth and operational efficiency. Inefficiencies at ports and in logistics also affect export competitiveness. Similarly, Pakistan also ranks low on digital infrastructure vis-a-vis peer countries.

In Pakistan, FDI has hovered at about



relatively resilient at \$2.893 billion (compared to \$2.922 billion in 11MFY24), the increase in outflows—rising to \$914 million from \$780 million—eroded the overall net gains.

It is relevant to mention here that foreign private investment comprises Foreign Portfolio Investment (FPI) and FDI. Emerging economies, like Pakistan, prefer to attract FDI, which is of long-term and developmental nature. FDI offers numerous advantages such as providing much-needed capital, facilitating infrastructure development, and creating job opportunities in host countries. FDI often brings advanced technologies and expertise that enhance productivity and force competition in the domestic market. However, FDI inflow into Pakistan continues to trail behind the regional countries, despite its strategic location, and immense economic potential.

In Pakistan, the power sector attracts the largest FDI inflows. It attracted \$945 million in gross inflows and recorded \$562.8 million in net FDI over 11MFY25, though this

infrastructure as major obstacles to attracting foreign direct investment in the country. These fundamental issues continue to erode investor confidence, making it difficult for the country to attract and retain long-term international capital despite its strategic location and market potential.

According to a recent report by the SBP, there are serious impediments to the inflow of Foreign Private Investment in Pakistan, including the security environment, legal system, property rights, and law and order are other crucial factors in attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and it is essential to address these issues to attract foreign investment in the country. Additional factors are political and economic instability, high taxation rates and lack of adequate infrastructure. Frequent changes in government and policies discourage investors seeking long-term interests in the economy. Pakistan scores low in the ease of doing business index, specifically due to difficulties in registering businesses, securing

1.0 percent of GDP per year in the last decade, which is less than half of the Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) average of 2.7 percent on average, per year. The government is working to attract foreign investors by establishing the Special Investment Facilitation Council for this purpose. However, the results have remained almost negligible.

Increasing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Pakistan requires a comprehensive, consistent, and investor-friendly policy framework. To improve political and economic stability, we need to ensure policy continuity regardless of government changes, strengthen democratic institutions and rule of law, and maintain stable macroeconomic indicators. Secondly, there is an urgent need to develop infrastructure and industrial zones under the CPEC with investor incentives, and improve transport and energy reliability. At the same time, for investors one-window operation should be launched and investor protection laws should be enforced to ease dispute resolution.

Climate change – a disaster in the making

Nasim Ahmed

Pakistan will start losing about 6.5-9% of its GDP by 2050 due to changing climate patterns, according to the Country Climate and Development Report by the World Bank. The Climate Rate Index report in 2025 put Pakistan at the top of the list of the most affected countries based on 2022 data, the year when extensive flooding submerged approximately one third of the country, affecting 33 million people and caused \$14.8bn worth of damages, as well as \$15.2bn of economic losses.

Last year, more floods affected thousands, and a heatwave killed almost 600 people. According to a study conducted last year by the climate change ministry and Italian research institute EvK2CNR, Pakistan is home to 13,000-plus glaciers. The gradual rise in temperatures is resulting in the melting of glaciers, increasing the risk of flooding, damage to infrastructure, loss of life and land and water scarcity.

Last month, Amnesty International said in a report that Pakistan's healthcare and disaster response systems are failing to meet the needs of children and older people who are most at risk of death and disease amid extreme weather events related to climate change. Children and older people in Pakistan are suffering the most from the climate crisis, exposed to extreme heat or floods that lead to disproportionate levels of death and disease. Recent media reports say that at least 32 people have been killed in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces since the start of the monsoon season. Last month, at least 32 people were also killed in severe storms.

For Pakistan, climate change is an existential crisis. It has given rise to a host of environmental issues that severely harm its economy, general health, and food security. Countless lives have been lost as a result of heatwaves and other forms of climatic disaster. Extreme weather events, droughts and floods have become a recurrent annual phenomenon. Due to massive flooding in Pakistan in 2022, millions of people were displaced and thousands of homes were washed away. The Pakistani Meteorological Department reported that August 2022 marked a historic climatic event, surpassing the records set in 1961 by receiving 243% more rainfall than the national average. Heavy rains and melting glaciers in 2024

resulted in widespread flooding, affecting over 1.5 million people. The impact of climate change on economic activity is severe – extensive infrastructure damage, declining agricultural output, and rising healthcare costs.

Pakistan's capacity to invest in climate adaptation and resistance measures is limited by its stringent financial condition. According to a recent report, Pakistan needs an annual investment of \$40 to \$50bn until 2050 to meet the challenge of climate change. The World Bank report on Pakistan says that the country will need \$368 billion by 2030 for climate mitigation and adaptation if it were to avoid floods, droughts, and heat waves.

To mitigate the issue of climate change, the government needs to involve international

are not enough to mitigate the severity of climate calamity.

Through a \$140 million climate investment fund, the UK is helping Pakistan by reducing the risk for investors in weather-resilient projects. According to some reports, Pakistan's Gulf allies have also shown an interest in contributing \$6 billion over the following five years to corporate farms operated by the military. Under the partnership framework, the World Bank will lend \$20 billion over 10 years from 2026 to support low-income nations.

An urgent issue is the growing water crisis facing Pakistan. A special window of hope has been opened by the US-Pakistan Green Alliance which is addressing the issues of climate resilience, energy transformation, and sustainable



donors and lenders to improve the country's well-being by addressing its increasing water shortages and developing more environmentally-friendly farming methods. But despite committing billions of dollars, whatever meagre funds received so far are mostly in the form of loans rather than grants, further exacerbating the economic and financial problems of developing countries, like Pakistan. In January 2023, pledges worth about \$10bn from multilateral financial institutions and countries were reported. The following year, Pakistan received \$2.8bn from international creditors against those pledges.

Earlier this year, the International Monetary Fund said Pakistan will receive \$1.3bn under a new climate resilience loan programme, spanning 28 months. But these pledges and loans

economic prosperity. It is a good augury that Pakistan's international partners are investing in water-efficient farming and promoting less water-intensive crops, thereby encouraging sustainable agriculture and enhancing the country's resilience.

This requires that Pakistan should work more closely with the international community to enhance its water management, that should include afforestation, urban planning, investment in renewable energy and building of dams. Pakistan's economy is significantly impacted by climate change. To ensure a better future, we need to reshape our environment by engaging communities, investing in clean energy, promoting sustainable farming practices, and adapting to changing climate patterns.

From demographic dividend to time bomb

Muhammad Ali

Pakistan is witnessing a population growth rate declared the highest globally and regionally, with projections indicating a doubling by 2050. The latest reports highlight significant demographic shifts, including a notable rural-to-urban migration and a young population predominantly under the age of 40.

These trends underscore the immense challenges posed to economic planning and resource allocation. As the country grapples with burgeoning urban centers and disparities in education and gender ratios, comprehensive policy interventions are urgently needed to navigate the complex demographic landscape.

Pakistan's population growth rate, now declared the highest globally and regionally, is anticipated to double by 2050, according to the latest report from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). The report emphasizes a significant population surge observed in 2023, following the 2017 census. It underscores that at the current rate, Pakistan's population could reach an astronomical figure by mid-century. Key findings reveal demographic intricacies, including a diverse populace of Afghans, Bengalis, Chinese, and other nationalities totaling over 21 million, along with notable religious diversity.

Education remains a critical concern, with over 25 million children aged 5 to 16 out of school nationwide, highlighting challenges in educational access. The report also notes a considerable portion of the population living with disabilities. Despite advances in literacy, the report highlights disparities with a 61% national literacy rate, showing significant gaps between male (68%) and female (53%) literacy levels.

Provincial breakdowns showcase disparities in educational access, with millions of children out of school in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, stressing the necessity for targeted educational reforms nationwide. A pivotal UN report places Pakistan, with its current population exceeding 245 million, among countries whose population is expected to increase through 2054 and potentially peak in the latter half of the century. According to projections in the UN's World Population Prospects 2024 report, Pakistan will reach its peak population of 404.68 million in 2092. The report indicates that Pakistan's population will surpass that of Indonesia in 2048, reaching 331.29 million. Between 1998 and 2017, Pakistan's average population growth rate was 2.40%, equating to an annual increase of approx-

imately 5.28 million people. Pakistan has one of the highest birth rates, with 22 births per 1,000 people. "Very few women in Pakistan use any form of birth control, and the burgeoning population can strain water and sanitation systems, lead to massive unemployment, and overwhelm health and education systems," it warns.

The findings of the 2023 population census, while expected, confirm the alarming trends in the country's population growth across various metrics. However, the predictability of these results does not diminish the severity of the situation, necessitating urgent and comprehensive policy interventions to address the demographic challenges that have directly contributed to and exacerbated the nation's numerous economic issues.

The overarching reality revealed by the census is of a nation teetering on the edge, with the population having surged from 207.68 million in 2017 to 241.49 million in 2023, reflecting a growth rate of 2.55%. If this rate persists, Pakistan's population will double by 2050. Not only is Pakistan's population growth rate the highest in the region, but only 27 countries worldwide have higher growth rates.

Additionally, approximately 79% of the population is under the age of 40, accompanied by significant rural-to-urban migration. Urban centers have experienced a substantial growth rate of 3.67% compared to 1.88% in rural areas. Notably, the number of cities with populations of at least 500,000 has risen from 14 to 22 since 2017. The rapid population growth has underscored the immense challenge it poses to effective economic planning.

How can our economic managers begin to devise strategies for such an unpredictable and escalating situation to ensure that our resource base aligns with a rapidly expanding population, infrastructure needs are met promptly, and basic indicators related to education, health, housing, food supply, and employment opportunities keep pace with the demands of a swiftly growing populace?

A population growth rate of 2.55% indicates that the economy needs to grow at a similar rate just to meet the needs of the current population base. With the country teetering from one economic crisis to another, achieving economic growth commensurate with the population growth rate is a formidable challenge.

Furthermore, a youthful population concentrated in densely populated urban spaces places additional strain on urban infrastructure and services, leading to overcrowding and a

diminished quality of life. While this largely young populace has the potential to provide a significant demographic dividend through increased labor force participation and productivity, the challenge lies in ensuring sufficient investments in education, healthcare, and job creation amidst unplanned population growth. This misalignment between resources and population growth threatens to turn a potential demographic dividend into a population time bomb, which, if it explodes, could lead to severe social and economic consequences.

Another concerning finding is an imbalanced gender ratio of 1.06, with the total number of males at 124.32 million compared to 117.15 million females. This disparity can be attributed to adverse health outcomes for females, such as higher rates of malnutrition and maternal mortality, as well as a systemic preference for males in terms of access to better food and healthcare resources. This gender imbalance also underscores how women's contributions to the economy remain underutilized. Unlocking our full economic potential entails addressing this imbalance.

It is evident that the initiation of a nationwide family planning and population control program on an urgent basis has become imperative. From rapidly expanding reproductive health and family planning services to incentivizing smaller families and transforming societal attitudes that favor large family sizes, a comprehensive set of measures is needed to bring the crisis under control. Apart from policymakers, society at large must also recognize the obstacles uncontrolled population growth poses to economic progress.

The rapid population growth in Pakistan presents a formidable challenge to economic planning and sustainable development. The significant demographic shifts, coupled with the youthful population and urban migration, exert tremendous pressure on infrastructure, education, and healthcare systems. Addressing these challenges requires urgent and comprehensive measures, including nationwide family planning programs, investments in education and healthcare, and societal changes to support smaller family norms. The gender imbalance further complicates the situation, highlighting the need to enhance women's contributions to the economy. Only through coordinated efforts by policymakers and society can Pakistan hope to transform its demographic challenges into opportunities for sustainable growth and development.

Pakistan's recovery myth

Husnain Shahid

While the corridors of power echo with declarations of economic revival, the street-level reality tells a vastly different story. Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators may flash signs of stability—cooling inflation, marginal GDP growth, and improved external accounts—but beneath these headline figures lies a stark and widening divide.

Public debt remains burdensome, political chaos festers, and external shocks continue to shake the fragile foundation. Most damningly, poverty and joblessness—especially among the youth—are climbing, not falling. The economic “recovery,” as claimed, seems more rhetorical than real. Pakistan's economic tableau is no longer monochrome. A clutch of encouraging signals—buoyant merchandise exports, a flourishing tech enclave, ebbing sovereign default anxiety, and a rare current account surplus—suggest a tentative renaissance. Foreign direct investment is edging upward, expatriate remittances remain muscular, and the bourse has resumed its upward cadence, collectively kindling a flicker of investor optimism. Yet, beneath the statistics lurk widening poverty trenches and stubborn joblessness that tarnish every proclamation of revival.

For FY 2025, gross domestic product is poised to expand by roughly 2.5%–2.6%. The Asian Development Bank cleaves to the lower bound, while the IMF nudges its outlook a hair higher. A United Nations brief, however, hints at a more subdued 2.3%, reminding policymakers that confidence is fragile. Government functionaries trumpet stabilisation: the latest Economic Survey unfurls a 2.7% growth print—up from last year's limp 2.5%—credited to an agrarian rebound, sturdier remittance inflows, and sterner fiscal stewardship. Consumer price turbulence has moderated sharply, with inflation collapsing to a single digit 4.7% average (July to April) versus a bruising 23.4% a year before. On the external front, foreign exchange coffers have swelled to \$16.64 billion, buttressed by a \$1.9 billion current account windfall.

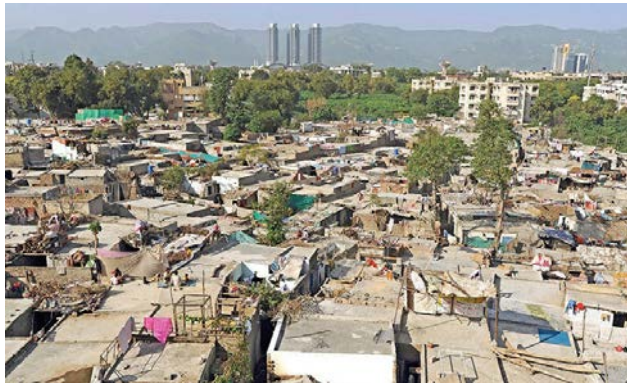
Much of this respite stems from the IMF's \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility and the austere reforms grafted onto tax policy and an overburdened energy lattice. Skeptics, though, warn that the growth spurt lacks breadth: anaemic factory floors and an underpowered farm sector could stunt momentum if global or domestic headwinds intensify. With tax receipts still hovering near a meagre

10% of GDP, the exchequer's margin for error is wafer thin.

The ADB envisions 2.5% growth in FY 2025 and a slightly brisker 3.0% in FY 2026, conditional on reform stamina and macro calm. The IMF sketches a 3.2% climb next year, edging toward 4% by 2026, assuming energy and financial sector fixes persist. The World Bank situates FY 2024 at 2.5%, inching to 3.2% in FY 2025 on the back of smoother external winds and spending restraint. Islamabad's own target is a spirited 4.2% for FY 2026, though private sector analysts whisper a far cooler 1.5% amid recessionary cross currents.

These visions rest on delicate pillars—fiscal rectitude, fresh external funding, and structural surgery—while looming risks such as a debt to GDP ratio north of 69% and policy zigzags could unravel the tapestry.

Labour dynamics remain the Achilles' heel. The Fund pegs unemployment at



8% for 2024, evidence that the economy is not spawning jobs commensurate with the nation's swelling workforce. Female participation languishes, vocational avenues are narrow, and an unforgiving business climate repels would-be employers. The Asian Development Bank underscores cultural strictures and childcare scarcities that sideline women, thereby intensifying labour market strain. Historical data echo the malaise: unemployment climbed from 5.9% in 1991 to 7.2% by millennium's turn, peaked at 7.8% in 2002, and has averaged just over 6% through the past decade. Each cyclical uptick reiterates the need for deeper schooling, broader skills, and an ecosystem hospitable to enterprise.

In sum, Pakistan stands at an inflection, its macro meters flashing amber rather than red. A veneer of stability has returned, yet the scaffolding is brittle. To transmute today's fragile gains into durable prosperity, Islamabad must press forward with tax overhauls, energy sector detoxification, and determined

labour market liberalisation. Without such grit, rising poverty and joblessness will eclipse today's modest victories and consign the country to another lost economic season.

Although Islamabad proclaims renaissance, the economic edifice rests on brittle stilts: a towering \$87 billion external liability, febrile politics, and capricious climate shocks such as ruinous deluges. Output is inching ahead yet still lags pre pandemic trajectories, and GDP per head—\$1,587 in 2024—barely budges the welfare needle. Labour statistics oscillate, but youth unemployment remains stubbornly high, betraying a recovery that manufactures headlines, not livelihoods. Genuine renewal demands arduous surgery—broadening the tax net, shrinking the state's sprawling footprint, and cultivating a hospitable business habitat—yet each remedy collides with entrenched fiefdoms and volatile coalitions. Social media chatter on X resounds with exasperation: claims of 45% poverty and eroding purchasing power expose the chasm between ministerial optimism and quotidian hardship.

Consensus now pegs FY 2025 growth at a modest 2.5%–3.2%, while price pressures have cooled into mid single digits (4.7%–6.0%). Still, joblessness hovers near or above 8%, and deep seated frailties shadow every macro victory. Only dogged, inclusive reforms can ensure the dividends of expansion reach the 45% languishing beneath the poverty watermark.

The World Bank estimates that, by 2025, some 44.7% of Pakistanis—roughly 108.9 million souls—subsist below the \$4.20 per day bar (2021 PPP). Extreme privation, measured at \$3, has vaulted from 4.9% to 16.5%. In 2024 the national line poverty rate leapt to 25.3%, seven points above 2023, thrusting 13 million additional citizens into indigence. Earlier progress—a dip to 17.1% in 2022—was short lived, undone by economic tremors and record floods.

Despite glowing government projections and placid macroeconomic trends, Pakistan's recovery narrative unravels under scrutiny. Nearly half the population lives below the poverty line, job creation remains sluggish, and public frustration simmers across platforms. The gap between policy optimism and lived experience is not just wide—it is dangerous. Until structural reforms are no longer stalled by vested interests and until growth translates into tangible improvement for ordinary citizens, Pakistan's economy will remain stable in appearance but hollow in essence.

Debt, deficits and dilemmas

Shahid Hussain

Pakistan's fiscal position reveals a precarious blend of mounting debt, dwindling export capacity, and deep-rooted structural flaws. With external debt servicing consuming nearly half of its export earnings and economic reforms hanging by a thread, the country stands at a financial crossroads.

While international institutions extend lifelines, and officials forecast a turnaround, the reality on the ground suggests a more brittle foundation. The widening fiscal gap, shallow foreign reserves, and a fragile political climate only deepen the complexity of the crisis.

Amid the realm of volatile sovereign landscapes, Pakistan has surfaced as the most markedly ameliorated emerging market in the domain of sovereign credit peril—boasting the most pronounced downtick in its default odds over the past annum. Yet, the shadows of fiscal fragility and entrenched structural entanglements linger stubbornly. Bloomberg Intelligence, in its nuanced discernment, delineates a pivotal recalibration in global investor outlook—largely galvanized by macroeconomic tempering, calculated policy pivots, and Islamabad's deft reengagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This recalibration manifests in a fall of Pakistan's sovereign default likelihood from a daunting 59% to a comparatively subdued 47%—an 11-point plummet unmatched by its contemporaries in the emerging economies' ensemble.

In stark juxtaposition, states such as Argentina, Tunisia, and Nigeria showcased marginal contractions in their own risk metrics, while others—Turkey, Ecuador, Egypt, and Gabon—bore the brunt of deteriorated investor assessments. This quantifiable pivot in Pakistan's risk index is emblematic of its evolving perception across global capital corridors.

Credit Default Swaps (CDS), instruments often deployed to shield against sovereign insolvency, serve as the pulse of credit sentiment. A tapering in CDS-implied risk, as witnessed in Pakistan's case, typically signals revitalized confidence and recalibrated investor expectations. This emergent optimism is tethered to a confluence of vectors: punctual sovereign repayments, incremental structural refinements, affirmative rating outlooks from heavyweight evaluators like S&P and Fitch, and encouraging momentum under the IMF's scrutiny. Pakistan's fiscal narrative, once riddled with peril, now reflects a tentative but meaningful renaissance.

The renaissance, however, unfolds under the weight of formidable trials. The administration continues to grapple with inflationary tempests, shallow foreign exchange cushions, and twin deficits—both fiscal and current. Islamabad's dialogue with the IMF has now veered toward a long-haul Extended Fund Facility (EFF), intended to outlast the recently concluded \$3 billion Stand-By Arrangement—indicating both necessity and ambition.

Yet, not all is buoyancy. Debt endurance remains a perilous slope. Analysts warn of Pakistan's fragile fiscal sinews, even as the debt-to-GDP ratio inches downward—from 72.4% in FY24 to a projected 70.3% in FY25—bolstered by austerity pursuits and sub-real interest rates. The specter of gross financing needs looms large, with over USD 8 billion in external debt coming due in FY25, and another USD 9 billion stalking FY26.

The IMF's \$7 billion EFF, the inaugural review of which culminated in May 2025, lends a stabilizing scaffold—but it's girded with stringent reform prerequisites. These include not merely fiscal tightening, but also an overhaul of structural inefficiencies that have long calcified economic dynamism.

In sum, while Pakistan's credit arc signals a modest but noteworthy ascension in investor esteem, the bedrock of sustainable solvency remains under strain. It is a tale of paradox—of resurgence tempered by risk, of ambition constrained by arithmetic.

Pakistan's balance sheet betrays a heavy yoke: in 2023 the country's external obligations swelled to 39.39 percent of GNI, while servicing those liabilities devoured 43.26 percent of export receipts—an unmistakable sign of repayment duress. Skeptics warn that official blueprints for a rapid debt ratio descent over the coming half decade rest on wishful arithmetic; any stumble in growth could thrust the budget into harsher contortions. The red ink already runs deep: the FY25 fiscal gap is projected near seven percent of GDP, and hard won reserves barely cloak three months of import demand.

Some analysts champion a Sri Lanka style recalibration—renegotiating both domestic and foreign paper—to buy breathing space. Yet the calendar of short term maturities has thickened, and fresh loans arrive with sterner covenants, clouding the prospect of orderly relief. Islamabad therefore leans ever more on the IMF's lifeline and its regiment of reforms—support that is vital, though politically taxing.

Underlying fragilities, long ignored, continue to sap vigor. The tax take languishes at 10.12 percent of GDP, hobbled by a threadbare

base, endemic evasion, and a tilt toward regressive indirect imposts, leaving scant fiscal room for investment or interest payments. In the power labyrinth, circular debt has mushroomed past Rs2.6 trillion, a byproduct of leaky grids, subsidy overhangs, and managerial drift; inconsistent and pricey electricity stifles factories and drains the treasury. Exports, still dominated by low margin textiles, hover below 10 percent of GDP—far behind regional peers—while heavy import dependence keeps foreign exchange coffers thin.

Governance woes compound the bind. Cumbersome bureaucracy, pervasive graft, and capricious policymaking chill private capital; the World Bank's gauges of regulatory quality and rule of law consign Pakistan to the lower rungs. Loss ridden state behemoths—most notoriously PIA and Pakistan Railways—bleed over Rs500 billion each year, a fiscal hemorrhage born of mismanagement and political meddling. Human capital likewise suffers: literacy clings to 60 percent, some 22 million children remain out of classrooms, and combined outlays on health and education scarcely crest three percent of GDP. Add to this a patchwork infrastructure—creaking roads, under specced logistics, spotty digital networks—that places Pakistan 119th on the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, and the cost of doing business climbs steeply. Finally, recurrent bouts of political turbulence and fragile coalitions erode the staying power of any reform agenda.

These intertwined bottlenecks feed chronic deficits, external imbalances, and a reflexive turn to overseas borrowing—thereby entangling debt sustainability in a vicious loop. The IMF's \$7 billion program aspires to prise open some of these knots, yet every milestone demands steely resolve amid volatile streets and wary legislators. Until structural sinews are strengthened and governance revamped, the specter of fiscal strain will continue to shadow Pakistan's economic horizon.

Despite modest policy efforts and IMF-backed reforms, Pakistan's debt sustainability remains entangled in a web of fiscal mismanagement, institutional decay, and systemic inefficiencies. The challenge extends far beyond balancing ledgers—it demands reimagining the state's role in revenue generation, investment in human capital, and structural transformation. Without bold, uninterrupted reform and political stability, temporary fixes will falter, and the cycle of borrowing and crisis will persist. Only a comprehensive, long-term commitment to real change can lift the nation from the edge of its economic precipice.

Trump's Pakistan policy: Old demands, new pressures

Raza Khan

Recently, US President Donald Trump has praised Pakistan and its current leadership for providing invaluable support to Washington in the war against terrorism and in stabilizing the South Asian region. In this context, President Trump particularly thanked the Pakistani leadership for responding positively to the US call for a ceasefire in early May, during the armed conflict with India that was triggered by Delhi's allegations against Islamabad following the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Why has President Trump suddenly started praising Pakistan, a country he showed little affection for during his previous tenure from 2016 to 2020? This is a crucial question that warrants serious attention. At present, the main target of both the US and Israel is Iran, a neighboring and friendly country to Pakistan. Thus, much of President Trump's recent appreciation for Pakistan appears closely tied to Washington's increasingly aggressive posture towards Tehran. In other words, President Trump likely seeks to bring Pakistan onto the US-Israeli side in their conflict with Iran.

The Trump administration may desire various forms of cooperation from Pakistan—ranging from political support to facilitation of military operations against Iran. Pakistan's potential role in enforcing or supporting an economic blockade on Iran also seems to be under consideration in Washington. However, the extent to which Pakistan can or will accommodate these expectations is difficult to determine. What can be said with some certainty is that meeting all of Washington's demands will be extremely challenging for Pakistan.

That said, in international politics, nothing is ever absolute. The only real measure of a country's foreign policy is its national interest. Yet, even identifying that national interest can be a daunting task—especially in a politically unstable country like Pakistan. At this point, we are witnessing the emergence of a new US policy under President Trump toward Pakistan. The outcome of the most recent US presidential election is proving significant for global affairs, and Pakistan is no exception.

Indeed, President Trump's proactive engagement with Pakistan stands in sharp contrast to the indifferent approach of his predecessor, President Joe Biden. Pakistan is already facing severe political and economic instability, and further deterioration is not in

the interest of the United States or the broader international community. Therefore, Pakistanis must approach this situation rationally and without emotional bias.

It is a fact that the United States is the most powerful country in the world, and it is Pakistan's good fortune that Washington continues to have strategic interests in the region. These shared interests have sustained the Pakistan-US relationship through numerous ups and downs over the decades. While the post-2001 era has seen the relationship dominated by the war in Afghanistan, reducing the bilateral dynamic solely to that conflict fails to capture the broader factors behind both the challenges and the potential for improvement in ties.

Moreover, given Pakistan's dire macroeconomic situation, it is crucial for policymakers to understand that most international economic decisions are shaped by political considerations. The United States holds a dominant voting share in major international financial institutions—particularly the IMF—so Pakistan's ability to secure economic relief packages is likely to depend, at least in part, on its willingness to accommodate US political interests.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the United States has maintained the following key objectives in Pakistan: (1) preventing the use of Pakistani territory by global terrorist networks; (2) ensuring the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal; (3) countering China's growing influence in South Asia; and (4) maintaining regional stability, particularly in relation to Afghanistan and Iran. For Pakistan's foreign policy to be effective and strategic, understanding these American priorities is essential.

These US objectives include securing Pakistan's all-out support in the Global War on Terror (GWOt), encompassing military and counterinsurgency operations in the tribal areas, along with logistical and intelligence support primarily in Afghanistan and in other parts of the world such as Iraq and Yemen. Another key objective is preventing Pakistan from engaging in what Washington fears is the proliferation of nuclear materials and technology, particularly to Iran. Additionally, the US seeks Pakistan's support in the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan, in bolstering the US stance against Iran, and in exerting pressure on Islamabad to hand over control of Gwadar Port to American companies instead of China. Washington also wishes to reduce tensions between Pakistan and India, though

notably not by addressing the root cause of conflict—the Kashmir issue.

It is important to note that these US policy objectives often stand in direct conflict with Pakistan's own national interests, especially in relation to China and India. Pakistan's relationship with China has largely been strategic and economic. Like any other global power, the US expects Pakistan to compromise its interests in favor of US strategic goals. This reflects the typical dynamics of a patron-client relationship, which has characterized U.S.-Pakistan relations for decades. However, times have changed, and the nature of this relationship must also evolve—something both Washington and Islamabad must come to realize.

Historically, Pakistan has played a central—and often instrumental—role in helping the United States achieve its foreign and security policy goals. From providing clandestine airbases to the US on its soil to counter the Soviet Union during the Cold War, to acting as a mediator for American contact with Communist China in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and launching the CIA-sponsored war in Afghanistan against the USSR in the 1980s, Pakistan has often gone above and beyond in its support of US interests. In the post-9/11 era, Pakistan again aligned itself with the US in the GWOt. In most of these cases, Pakistan's power centers acted unilaterally—without public accountability—to serve American interests, often at the expense of Pakistan's own sovereignty and long-term strategic goals. A notable example is Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's 1960 threat to reduce Peshawar to rubble after the downing of a US U-2 reconnaissance aircraft over Soviet airspace, which had taken off from the US airbase in Badaber, near Peshawar.

That said, it must also be acknowledged that Pakistan received considerable military and financial aid from Washington in return. However, the US still expects Islamabad to comply with its demands, even when doing so contradicts America's repeated claims of supporting stability in Pakistan. For example, in the past decade, Pakistan took two highly significant strategic decisions: signing the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement and handing over operational control of its key seaport, Gwadar, to China. While the US has not openly opposed the CPEC, it has expressed strong displeasure over Chinese control of Gwadar, considering Beijing a strategic competitor in the region.

With regard to the CPEC, Washington

fears that it will not only strengthen China's position in South Asia but also enhance its global strategic influence—thus undermining US interests. It is important to recognize that the CPEC is a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to integrate the Eurasian landmass much like the ancient Silk Road, with China standing to

gain immensely from the resulting economic connectivity. While the US rivalry with China continues to intensify, Washington must also consider that the CPEC could contribute to stabilizing Pakistan—an outcome that aligns with its stated foreign policy objectives.

While President Trump is expected to pursue all of these longstanding US policy

goals in relation to Pakistan, the Iran factor is likely to assume even greater importance in the coming weeks and months. Pakistani policymakers and strategic thinkers will need to navigate this situation with extreme caution, as they face limited room for maneuver. Any miscalculated decisions could lead to severe and far-reaching consequences for Pakistan.

AJK schools fight for the future

Rasheed Ali

In a region where the distant echo of gunfire and shelling often punctuates the stillness of dawn, a quieter, more powerful revolution is taking root — one built not on weapons, but on chalk, books, and unyielding resolve. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), long known for its proximity to the volatile Line of Control (LoC), has quietly emerged as a literacy leader in Pakistan — a remarkable feat given the region's recurring brushes with conflict.

Tucked between breathtaking mountains and bristling bunkers, the classrooms of AJK carry stories of perseverance that defy conventional expectations. With a population of roughly 4.5 million, AJK boasts a literacy rate that hovers around 77 per cent — a figure that outshines many more stable and economically advantaged regions of Pakistan. In some years, the literacy numbers have soared to a staggering 91pc, making AJK a compelling case study in how education can flourish even under geopolitical duress.

But scratch beneath the surface of this statistical success, and the cracks begin to show — quite literally. Thousands of students attend classes in buildings declared structurally unsafe, many of them remnants of the devastating 2005 earthquake or battered by monsoon floods that followed. Of the over 6,000 government schools spread across the region, more than 900 urgently need reconstruction or repair. And that's just the beginning of the infrastructure crisis.

Electricity, a basic amenity most urban schools in Pakistan take for granted, is a luxury in AJK's primary schools — only 21pc have access to it. On sweltering summer days or bone-chilling winter mornings, children study in dim rooms without fans or heating. Nearly 70pc of these schools lack boundary walls, leaving students, particularly girls, exposed to safety concerns that often discourage consistent

attendance. The situation becomes even more precarious when one learns that only 31pc of primary schools have access to clean drinking water, and just 42pc are equipped with functional toilets. For adolescent girls, this absence of sanitation becomes a barrier not just to comfort, but to education itself.

Despite these glaring deficiencies, AJK has made impressive headway in expanding access to education. The region is home to five public universities, several degree and postgraduate colleges, and even four government-run medical

ing federal shifts in Islamabad, has changed hands several times in the past three decades — PML-N, PPP, PML-Q, and more recently PTI. But despite these political transitions, education has remained a relatively constant agenda. The recently launched Education Policy 2023-2040 promises free elementary education, teacher training academies, and greater inclusion of IT and entrepreneurship skills. An ongoing education census is also attempting to formalise data for over 2,000 private institutions, a step toward bringing regulation and recognition to the

shadow system supporting AJK's educational framework.

Yet promises on paper are far from reality on the ground. Donor agencies like UNICEF and Islamic Relief are helping fill the gaps — constructing toilets, installing water systems, and rebuilding classrooms — but much more remains to be done. It's not enough to celebrate literacy percentages when a majority of students sit on cold floors without desks, scribbling notes under flickering light or no light at all. It's not

enough when the mere act of attending school remains a question of personal risk for many girls.

In AJK, education has become a defiant act of hope, a refusal to be defined by conflict or neglect. The children of AJK are learning under shadows — those cast by crumbling roofs, absent walls, and the looming uncertainty of border tensions. And yet, they persist. Their story isn't just about numbers on a national education dashboard; it's about the quiet dignity of progress against all odds.

As Pakistan looks inward to solve its education crisis, AJK's example offers both inspiration and warning. If a region grappling with war and weak infrastructure can lead in literacy, what excuse remains for the rest of us? And if we fail to invest in these children beyond the alphabet, what future are we truly building?



colleges offering around 330 MBBS seats annually. In a place where textbooks often arrive late and teachers sometimes pay for their own chalk, the teacher-student ratios remain impressively low: around 1:16 in schools, offering an intimate learning environment where personal attention is still possible.

Much of AJK's educational resilience can be traced to its people's deep-rooted belief in the transformative power of education. Parents, even in the remotest valleys of Neelum or Hattian Bala, insist their children attend school. Teachers walk miles to reach their assigned villages, sometimes crossing rivers or landslide-prone tracks, driven by a quiet commitment to their students. It's this cultural prioritisation of education that explains how literacy has surged even when infrastructure has crumbled.

The region's political landscape, mirror-

Pakistan's monsoon threat

Dr. Zaheer Ahmed Babar

As monsoon rains begin lashing parts of Pakistan earlier than usual, the country once again finds itself ill-prepared to cope with the seasonal deluge.

In mountainous regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and parts of Balochistan, flash floods and landslides threaten to isolate entire communities and destroy critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, in urban centres such as Karachi and Rawalpindi, the lack of proper drainage and incomplete flood mitigation efforts have made even moderate rainfall a serious hazard. Despite repeated warnings and past disasters—including the catastrophic 2022 floods—systemic weaknesses remain deeply entrenched. The situation calls for urgent, coordinated action across all levels of government to manage the immediate threat and rethink long-term climate resilience.

Pakistan is once again entering the monsoon on the back foot. Already this season, torrential cloudbursts have swept away roads, triggered fatal landslides in the north, and turned city streets into knee-deep rivers. Dozens of people have lost their lives, underscoring how quickly “normal” rain can become a life-threatening event when drainage is inadequate and hillsides are stripped of vegetation. With the Meteorological Department predicting an unusually long and intense monsoon, communities from the Himalayan foothills down to the Indus delta face weeks of heightened danger.

Pakistan routinely ranks among the ten most climate vulnerable nations. Rising sea surface temperatures in the Arabian Sea are turbocharging monsoon systems, while Himalayan glaciers—already melting at record pace—release more water into rivers just as seasonal downpours peak. The result is a pattern of erratic extremes: crippling drought in one district, catastrophic flash floods in the next. The summer of 2022 provided a stark benchmark: one-third of the country underwater, 1,700 lives lost, two million homes damaged, and economic losses in excess of US \$30 billion. Three years later, many of the structural weaknesses exposed in that disaster remain unaddressed.

Major cities illustrate the problem vividly. Karachi's storm water drains are choked with plastic waste; Lahore has paved over natural waterways in pursuit of rapid real estate

growth; Peshawar's expansion has crept into floodplains once reserved as safety buffers. As a result, every cloudburst overwhelms already fragile infrastructure, forcing vulnerable residents—often informal settlement dwellers—to wade through sewage-laced water or find makeshift shelter on higher ground.

What must change

1. Climate resilient infrastructure:

Raising river embankments, restoring wetlands that act as natural sponges, and climate proofing critical roads and bridges should top spending priorities.

2. Early warning systems: More automatic weather stations, community level sirens, and mobile alerts translated into local languages can buy precious evacuation time.

3. Land use enforcement: Halting

construction in flood channels and enforcing building codes—especially for hillside developments—will reduce future casualty counts.

4. Community preparedness: Local disaster response teams, stocked relief warehouses, and first aid training can close the gap between an emergency and the arrival of professional rescuers.

Without sustained political will and predictable funding, each monsoon will continue to expose the same fault lines—costing lives, shredding livelihoods, and draining the national budget. The 2025 rains are only the latest warning shot; whether Pakistan heeds it will determine how often the headlines repeat themselves in the years ahead.

In Pakistan's mountain belts—from the high valleys of Gilgit-Baltistan and the Hindu Kush of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the arid uplands of northern Balochistan—torrential cloudbursts can trigger sudden, wall-like flash floods and landslides that scour entire hillsides. A single debris flow can wipe out bridges, bury hydropower intakes, and leave whole valleys cut off for weeks, jeopardising food supplies, medical care, and mobile phone

links. Field engineers note that many rural roads in these regions still lack proper retaining walls and culverts, so even moderate rainfall can shear them away.

Down on the plains, the hazards shift from vertical slopes to clogged concrete. Karachi's storm water network—a maze of natural nullahs, ageing pipes, and hastily laid out “escape channels”—is choking on plastic bags, construction rubble, and untreated sewage. As a result, one neighbourhood may drain swiftly while an adjacent street turns into a waist-deep canal. Rawalpindi faces a parallel dilemma: the long-promised de-silting and widening of Lai Nullah is only partially complete, leaving thousands of downstream residents dependent on sandbags and prayer when a cloudburst hits the Margalla Hills.

With the Meteorological Department forecasting an early and more volatile monsoon, all tiers of government and the National Disaster Management Authority must treat the rains as a crisis in waiting rather than an annual inconvenience.

Looking beyond this monsoon, Pakistan's planners must pivot from piecemeal repairs to genuine climate resilience. That includes enforcing land use rules to keep houses

out of river channels, restoring upstream forests and wetlands that absorb runoff, adopting climate-smart crops suited to erratic rainfall, and expanding water storage capacity to buffer both floods and droughts. Such investments are not optional add-ons; they are the foundation of a stable economy and safer communities in a warming world.

The current monsoon season is not merely a weather event; it is a stark reminder of Pakistan's growing climate vulnerability. The combination of poor urban planning, neglected infrastructure, and inadequate emergency preparedness continues to place millions at risk. Federal and provincial authorities, along with the NDMA, must shift from reactive responses to proactive strategies—clearing drainage systems, deploying rescue teams in advance, and educating communities in high-risk areas. More importantly, Pakistan must treat climate adaptation as a national priority—investing in sustainable urban design, flood-resilient infrastructure, and water management systems. The time to act is now; failure to do so will only deepen the human and economic cost with each passing monsoon.



Why manufacturing consent for war with Iran failed this time

Ahmad Ibsais

On June 22, American warplanes crossed into Iranian airspace and dropped 14 massive bombs. The attack was not in response to a provocation; it came on the heels of illegal Israeli aggression that took the lives of 600 Iranians.

This was a return to something familiar and well-practised: an empire bombing innocents across the orientalist abstraction called “the Middle East”. That night, US President Donald Trump, flanked by his vice president and two secretaries, told the world “Iran, the bully of the Middle East, must now make peace”. There is something chilling about how bombs are baptised with the language of diplomacy and how destruction is dressed in the garments of stability. To call that peace is not merely a misnomer; it is a criminal distortion. But what is peace in this world, if not submission to the West? And what is diplomacy, if not the insistence that the attacked plead with their attackers?

In the 12 days that Israel’s illegal assault on Iran lasted, images of Iranian children pulled from the wreckage remained absent from the front pages of Western media. In their place were lengthy features about Israelis hiding in fortified bunkers. Western media, fluent in the language of erasure, broadcasts only the victimhood that serves the war narrative.

And that is not just in its coverage of Iran. For 20 months now, the people of Gaza have been starved and incinerated. By the official count, more than 55,000 lives have been taken; realistic estimates put the number at hundreds of thousands. Every hospital in Gaza has been bombed. Most schools have been attacked and destroyed. Leading human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have already declared that Israel is committing genocide, and yet, most Western media would not utter that word and would add elaborate caveats when someone does dare say it live on TV. Presenters and editors would do anything but recognise Israel’s unending violence in an active voice.

Despite detailed evidence of war crimes, the Israeli military has faced no media censure, no criticism or scrutiny. Its generals hold war meetings near civilian buildings, and yet, there are no media cries of Israelis being used as “human shields”. Israeli army and government officials are regularly caught lying or making genocidal statements, and yet, their words are

still reported as the truth.

A recent study found that on the BBC, Israeli deaths received 33 times more coverage per fatality than Palestinian deaths, despite Palestinians dying at a rate of 34 to 1 compared with Israelis. Such bias is no exception, it is the rule for Western media. Like Palestine, Iran is described in carefully chosen language. Iran is never framed as a nation, only as a regime. Iran is not a government, but a threat — not a people, but a problem. The word “Islamic” is affixed to it like a slur in every report. This is instrumental in quietly signalling that Muslim resistance to Western domination must be extinguished.

Iran does not possess nuclear weapons; Israel and the United States do. And yet only Iran is cast as an existential threat to world order. Because the problem is not what Iran holds, but what it refuses to surrender. It has



survived coups, sanctions, assassinations, and sabotage. It has outlived every attempt to starve, coerce, or isolate it into submission. It is a state that, despite the violence hurled at it, has not yet been broken.

And so the myth of the threat of weapons of mass destruction becomes indispensable. It is the same myth that was used to justify the illegal invasion of Iraq. For three decades, American headlines have whispered that Iran is just “weeks away” from the bomb, three decades of deadlines that never arrive, of predictions that never materialise. But fear, even when unfounded, is useful. If you can keep people afraid, you can keep them quiet. Say “nuclear threat” often enough, and no one will think to ask about the children killed in the name of “keeping the world safe”.

This is the modus operandi of Western media: a media architecture not built to illuminate truth, but to manufacture permission for violence, to dress state aggression in technical language and animated graphics, to anaes-

thetise the public with euphemisms. Time Magazine does not write about the crushed bones of innocents under the rubble in Tehran or Rafah, it writes about “The New Middle East” with a cover strikingly similar to the one it used to propagandise regime change in Iraq 22 years ago.

But this is not 2003. After decades of war, and livestreamed genocide, most Americans no longer buy into the old slogans and distortions. When Israel attacked Iran, a poll showed that only 16 percent of US respondents supported the US joining the war. After Trump ordered the air strikes, another poll confirmed this resistance to manufactured consent: only 36 percent of respondents supported the move, and only 32 percent supported continuing the bombardment.

The failure to manufacture consent for war with Iran reveals a profound shift in the American consciousness. Americans remember the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq that left hundreds of thousands of Afghans and Iraqis dead and an entire region in flames. They remember the lies about weapons of mass destruction and democracy and the result: the thousands of American soldiers dead and the tens of thousands maimed. They remember the humiliating retreat from Afghanistan after 20 years of war and the never-ending bloody entanglement in Iraq.

At home, Americans are told there is no money for housing, healthcare, or education, but there is always money for bombs, for foreign occupations, for further militarisation. More than 700,000 Americans are homeless, more than 40 million live under the official poverty line and more than 27 million have no health insurance. And yet, the US government maintains by far the highest defence budget in the world.

Americans know the precarity they face at home, but they are also increasingly aware of the impact US imperial adventurism has abroad. For 20 months now, they have watched a US-sponsored genocide broadcast live. They have seen countless times on their phones bloodied Palestinian children pulled from rubble while mainstream media insists, this is Israeli self-defence. The old alchemy of dehumanising victims to excuse their murder has lost its power. The digital age has shattered the monopoly on narrative that once made distant wars feel abstract and necessary. Americans are now increasingly refusing to be moved by the familiar war drumbeat.

Political violence is quintessentially American

Donald Earl Collins

Violence begets violence, so many religions say. Americans should know. After all, the United States – a nation founded on Indigenous genocide, African enslavement and open rebellion against an imperial power to protect its wealthiest citizens – cannot help but be violent.

What's more, violence in the US is political, and the violence the country has carried out overseas over the generations has always been connected to its imperialist ambitions and racism. From the US bombing of Iran's nuclear sites on June 21 to the everyday violence in rhetoric and reality within the US, the likes of President Donald Trump continue to stoke the violent impulses of a violence prone nation.

The US news cycle serves as continual confirmation. In June alone, there have been several high profile shootings and murders. On June 14, Vance Boelter, a white male vigilante, shot and killed former Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, after critically wounding State Senator John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette. That same day, at a No Kings mass protest in Salt Lake City, Utah, peacekeepers with the 50501 Movement accidentally shot and killed Samoan fashion designer Arthur Folasah Ah Loo while attempting to take down Arturo Gamboa, who was allegedly armed with an AR 15.

On June 1, the start of Pride Month, Sigfredo Ceja Alvarez allegedly shot and murdered gay Indigenous actor Jonathan Joss in San Antonio, Texas. On June 12, Secret Service agents forcibly detained and handcuffed US Senator Alex Padilla during Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem's news conference in Los Angeles. Mass shootings, white vigilante violence, police brutality, and domestic terrorism are all normal occurrences in the United States – and all are political. Yet US leaders still react with hollow platitudes that reveal an elitist and narcissistic detachment from the nation's violent history. "Such horrific violence will not be tolerated in the United States of America. God bless the great people of Minnesota..." said Governor Tim Walz after Boelter's June 14 shootings. On X, Republican Representative Derrick Van Orden wrote: "Political violence has no place in America. I fully condemn this attack..."

Despite these weak condemnations, the US often tolerates – and sometimes celebrates

– political violence. Van Orden also tweeted, "With one horrible governor that appoints political assassins to boards. Good job, stupid," in response to Walz's message. Senator Mike Lee referred to the incident as "Nightmare on Waltz Street" before deleting the post.

Political violence in the US is commonplace. President Trump has long fostered it – such as during a presidential debate in Philadelphia, when he falsely claimed Haitian immigrants "eat their neighbours' pets". This led to weeks of threats against the roughly 15,000 Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio. On June 9, Trump posted on Truth Social: "IF THEY SPIT, WE WILL HIT... harder than they have ever been hit before."

That led to a federally-sanctioned wave of violence against protesters in Los Ange-



les attempting to end Trump's immigration crackdowns, including Trump's takeover and deployment of California's National Guard in the nation's second-largest city. But it's not just that Trump may have a lust for political violence and is stoking such violence. The US has always been a powder keg for violence, a nation-state that cannot help itself.

Political violence against elected officials in the US is too extensive to list fully. Assassins murdered Presidents Abraham Lincoln, James A Garfield, William McKinley, and John F Kennedy. In 1804, Vice President Aaron Burr killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Populist candidate Huey Long was assassinated in 1935; Robert F Kennedy in 1968; Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was wounded in 2011. Many assassins and vigilantes have targeted those fighting for social justice: Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, Elijah Parish Lovejoy, Marsha P. Johnson, and civil rights activists like Medgar Evers, James Chaney, Andrew

Goodman, Michael Schwerner, Viola Liuzzo, and Fred Hampton. Jonathan Joss and Arthur Folasah Ah Loo are more recent examples of marginalised people struck down in a white supremacist society.

The most chilling truth of all is that, because of the violent nature of the US, there is no end in sight – domestically or overseas. The recent US bomb mission over Iran is merely the latest unprovoked preemptive attack the superpower has conducted on another nation. Trump's unilateral use of military force was done, presumably, in support of Israel's attacks on Iran, allegedly because of the threat Iran poses if it ever arms itself with nuclear weapons. But these are mere excuses that could also be violations of international law.

It wouldn't be the first time the US has sought to start a war based on questionable intelligence or reasons, however. The most recent example, of course, is the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a part of George W Bush's "preemptive war" doctrine, attacking Iraq because they supposedly had a stockpile of WMDs that they could use against the US in the future. There was never any evidence of any stockpile of chemical or biological weapons. As many as 2.4 million Iraqis have died from the resulting violence, statelessness, and civil war that the initial 2003 US invasion created. It has not gone unnoticed that the US mostly bombs and invades nation-states with majority people of colour and non-Christian populations.

Malcolm X said it best, a week after Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated John F Kennedy in 1963: "Being an old farm boy myself, chickens coming home to roost never did make me sad; they've always made me glad." Given that Americans consume nine billion chickens a year, that is a huge amount of retribution to consider for the nation's history of violence. Short of repealing the Second Amendment's right-to-bear-guns clause in the US Constitution and a real commitment towards eliminating the threat of white male supremacist terrorism, this violence will continue unabated, with repercussions that will include terrorism and revenge, domestically and internationally. A country with a history of violence, elitism, and narcissism like the US – and an individual like Trump – cannot divorce themselves from their own violent DNA, a violence that could one day consume this nation-state.

Solar tax cut

The government decision to reduce sales tax on imported solar panels to 10 per cent compared to the 18pc that was announced as part of the budget proposals came in the wake of widespread criticism by the general public. Pakistan, one of the largest importers of solar panels, would have faced a significant price increase due to higher sales tax. This would have killed the industry, especially in the wake of the revised solar net-metering policy that was introduced a few months ago. The government should be mindful of the impact of its policies on the consumers and investors alike.

Nabeel Badr
Islamabad

BMC classes still on hold

Once regarded as the best medical college in the province of Balochistan, the Bolan Medical College (BMC) is now mired in what appears to be an endless crisis. The new batch has yet to begin classes at BMC when medical colleges in other provinces have already completed a quarter — or even half — of their academic year. The college-wise merit list was delayed and announced only two months ago. The college administration continues to offer the same old excuses of ongoing construction and related issues, but where else in the world does a medical college remain shut for seven months without any academic activity at all? The authorities concerned should commence classes without any delay.

Mehran Saleem
Turbat

Zhob-Wana Road in ruins

The road between Zhob and Wana, an important link between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces, had remained in a state of disrepair for years. Last year, things changed, and construction work started on the road. As it turned out, things did change, but they changed for the worse. The earlier strip was scrapped and before a new strip could be laid, the project was abandoned abruptly. Now, there is no road at all. The relevant authorities must complete the project at the earliest.

Amir Shah
Zhob

Empress Market misstep

Recently, renovation work was announced for Karachi's historic Empress Market after more than a decade of neglect. While one would have hoped for a thoughtful plan that balances heritage restoration with due environmental preservation, the reality has been deeply disappointing. The work carried out so far has been half-hearted and clearly lacks a coherent beautification or restoration strategy. The greenery around the market has not been properly revived, and now, in the name of

renovation, the remaining green patches have been replaced with concrete bricks, which was perhaps the easiest and the most unimaginative of all solutions possible.

Worse still, what used to be an open green space is now being used as a paid parking lot, further diminishing the area's charm and public utility. It is heart-breaking to see a historic and cultural icon treated with such disregard. It appears that, as a society, we have become accustomed to replacing living beauty with lifeless concrete. This is not restoration; it is erosion. The city administration, especially the domains of cultural and environmental significance, should be entrusted to communities that have consistently demonstrated respect for order, cleanliness and greenery. Their contribution to Karachi's early development and their known and respected civic sense are worthy of recognition and emulation. Our city deserves better. Empress Market surely deserves better.

Kausar A Jafri
Karachi

Shielding our nuclear minds

While pursuing its own nuclear ambitions brazenly, Israel has been targeting top scientists of Muslim countries in order to keep them lacking in military and nuclear technology. Academics and professionals have been specifically targeted during the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and the recent spate of attacks on Iran showed a similar approach. There is every reason for Pakistan to be wary of this Zionist strategy.

Israel has been pursuing its own nuclear programme since the late 1950s. A nuclear facility started taking shape at Dimona under the garb of 'peaceful' nuclear research. The United States was watching all these negative developments, but chose to turn a blind eye.

While the Zionist state wished to be a nuclear power, it never wanted a Muslim country, especially the neighbouring Arab states, to have this capacity. Egypt, under Gamal Abdel Nasser, started preparing medium-range missiles to carry unconventional warheads. In doing this, Egypt had the support of German scientists. The Egyptian project made significant progress until it was disrupted by Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency.

The German scientists involved in the project started receiving letter-bombs in their mail. A few were killed and some others were abducted through clandestine means. Nasser's project to counter Dimona soon came to a grinding halt. Similarly, in 1967, an Egyptian nuclear scientist, Samir Naguib, was killed in a car accident in the US. The scientist was reportedly planning to return to Egypt at the height of war with Israel to help launch Egypt's nuclear programme when he was killed. Later the same year, Israel attained nuclear capability.

Iraq had made considerable progress in the field of nuclear sciences with the help of France and Egypt. In the early 1980s, sever-

al Iraqi nuclear scientists were killed under mysterious circumstances while outside the country, prompting Saddam Hussein to issue a ban, preventing them from leaving Iraq.

Among those targeted was Yahya El-Mashad, an Egyptian nuclear scientist who worked for the Iraqi project. He was found dead in his hotel room in Paris while on an official visit. The Iraqi nuclear dream eventually met a tragic end on June 7, 1981, when as many as 14 Israeli fighter jets as part of Operation Babylon flew over Baghdad and destroyed the Osirak nuclear facility. In recent years, Mohammed al-Zawari was shot dead in December 2016 outside his home in Tunisia's southeastern city of Sfax. Hamas swiftly blamed Israel for the murder, saying the slain engineer had been overseeing the group's drone programme. Now the Iranian scientists have also joined the list of martyrs this month. The conflagration in the Middle East has serious repercussions for Pakistan, which is the only Islamic country that has a nuclear deterrence, and has only recently proven beyond doubt its military capacity. Israelis have always been wary of Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. One of the most important measures Islamabad must now take is to beef up the protection and safety mechanism of our top nuclear scientists and their families.

Farrukh Shahab
Lahore

North Karachi gas woes

Already left coping with a trail of issues like prolonged loadshedding and gas shortages, the area residents of Sector 5-E in North Karachi have to put up with a unique issue: water dripping out of gas pipelines. This has been going on for more than two years now.

The people have to endure a complete shutdown of gas supply every few days. This means arranging expensive and dangerous gas cylinders to be able to carry out their daily chores. The people now have to 'de-water' the pipelines by employing suction pumps. This is a dangerous undertaking, but they have no other choice in this regard. If they do not get the accumulated water out of the pipeline, there is no chance of any gas supply at all. After many complaints had been filed, a technical team of Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) visited the area around three months ago to resolve the issue. The team restored the supply by applying pressure into the gas pipelines. However, it turned out to be nothing more than a temporary solution. Things are back to square one.

The technical team refuses to visit the area because it realises the temporary nature of its solution. The area residents are left to do the job manually after every few days. The SSGC management should take immediate and effective action, and redress the issue forthwith, ensuring uninterrupted gas supply to the locality.

Muhammad Zayaan
Karachi

Scientists discover rare planet

Ben Turner

Astronomers have used a space-time phenomenon first predicted by Albert Einstein to discover a rare planet hiding at the edge of our galaxy.

The exoplanet, dubbed AT2021ueyb, is a Jupiter-size gas giant located roughly 3,200 light-years from Earth. Orbiting a small, cool M dwarf star once every 4,170 days, the planet's location is remarkable — it is only the third planet in the entire history of space observation to be discovered so far away from our galaxy's dense center. Yet perhaps more exceptional than the planet's location is the method used to discover it. The effect, known as microlensing, occurs when the light of a host star is magnified by the warping of space-time due to a planet's gravity. The researchers published their findings in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

"This kind of work requires a lot of expertise, patience, and, frankly, a bit of luck," study co-author Marius Maskoliūnas, an astronomer at Vilnius University in Lithuania, said in a statement. "You have to wait for a long time for the source star and the lensing object to align and then check an enormous amount of data. Ninety percent of observed stars pulsate for various other reasons, and only a minority of cases show the microlensing effect." Nearly 6,000 alien worlds beyond our solar system have been discovered since the first exoplanet was detected in 1992. The two most common detection methods, called transit photometry and radial velocity, detect planets through the dimming of host stars as they pass in front of them, or from the wobble that the planets' gravitational tugs impart upon them.



Rhythmic mantle plume rising beneath Ethiopia is creating a new ocean

Skyler Ware

Rhythmic pulses of molten rock are rising beneath eastern Africa, according to a new study. The pulsing plume of hot mantle beneath Ethiopia, driven by plate tectonics, is slowly pulling the region apart and forming a new ocean near the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea, researchers reported in the journal *Nature Geoscience*. "We have found that the evolution of deep mantle upwellings is intimately tied to the motion of the plates above," Derek Keir, an Earth scientist at the University of Southampton and the University of Florence, said in a statement. "This has profound implications for how we interpret surface volcanism, earthquake activity, and the process of continental breakup." The mantle plume lies under Ethiopia's Afar region, at the intersection of three tectonic plates. All of the rifts between these plates are different ages, and they are changing at different rates; some are in the process of forming new oceans, while others are pulling apart the crust beneath Africa. But the structure and motion of the plume, as well as the forces driving these movements, aren't well understood. To investigate the structure of the crust and the mantle plume beneath it, the scientists studied the chemical compositions of more than 130 samples of volcanic rocks from the Afar region. These samples provided information about the depth and composition of melted rock beneath the surface.



Walking could cut your risk of low back pain

Stephanie Anderson Witmer

Need another reason to get your steps in?

According to new research, the more you walk (and the faster you walk), the lower your risk of chronic low back pain. The study, published in *JAMA Network Open*, found that people who walked between 101 and 124 minutes every day had a 23% reduction in chronic low back pain (CLBP) risk as compared to those who walked less than 78 minutes per day. Walking at a moderate or brisk pace was also linked with a lower chance of CLBP. However, the risk reduction from walking intensity wasn't as pronounced as it was with time spent walking.

CLBP—usually defined as pain lasting for at least three consecutive months—is quite common in the U.S., affecting an estimated 28% of adults. Globally, we may see as many as 843 million cases of low back pain by 2050, according to the World Health Organization. "This is an important finding because walking is a simple, low-cost, and accessible activity that can be promoted widely to reduce the burden of low back pain," study author Rayane Haddadj, MS, a PhD candidate in the department of public health and nursing at Norwegian University of Science and Technology, told *Health*. This study included 11,194 adults living in Norway who were 55 years old on average. When the study started, none of the participants had CLBP.

Participants wore accelerometers to track their movement and walking intensity for a week, which provided "more robust and detailed data on walking behavior than self-reported questionnaires," Haddadj explained. Researchers gathered that walking data from 2017 to 2019, and then followed up from 2021 to 2023 to ask participants whether they experienced any chronic "pain or stiffness" in their low back.



This fitness test takes seconds to complete—and may reveal how long you'll live

Cathy Nelson

A simple test that takes only seconds to complete can help predict how long you might live, new research suggests.

The "sitting-rising test," or SRT, gauges how well you can sit down and rise from the floor without assistance. Middle-aged and older adults who scored low on performance had about an 11 times increased risk of death compared to those who could perform the test unassisted, according to a study published in June in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*. The SRT is a good predictor of lifespan because it measures several aspects of non-aerobic fitness, which is increasingly being recognized as just as important to longevity as cardio, Claudio Gil S. Araújo, MD, PhD, lead study author and director of Research and Education at Exercise Medicine Clinic-CLINIMEX, told *Health*. Here's what you need to know about the test and what it might say about your fitness and longevity. The SRT test measures how well you can sit and rise from the floor, deducting points if assistance is needed. Starting with a maximum score of five points for sitting and five for rising, one point is deducted if any body part, such as a knee or hand, is needed for support during test execution. Any unsteadiness or loss of balance during the test knocks off a half point.

To try the test at home, follow these steps: Start by standing barefoot on a non-slip surface such as a thin mat. Make sure you're wearing clothes that allow you to move your body freely. Without worrying about speed, try to sit on the floor using the least amount of assistance needed. From the sitting position, try to rise back up to standing, again using the least amount of assistance needed.





PAANI DALNAY KI NO TENSION