

WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL

Economy: a dismal outlook

میری پاکی میری جیت



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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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Economy: a dismal outlook

Farhan Khan

It is no surprise that the authorities concerned try to give a positive spin to an otherwise negative economic outlook. The Finance Ministry has claimed that the national economy is performing well on the back of improved macroeconomic fundamentals and better fiscal management. But hard facts on the ground tell a different story.

The situation is best illustrated by declining foreign exchange reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan. By end-June, the SBP held only 9.1 billion dollars. This figure is 6.9 billion dollars less than the amount of rollovers extended by the three friendly countries, including China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This shows the precarious state of our foreign reserves. On the other hand, foreign investment declined from 1.58 billion dollars in July-May 2024 to 1.35 billion dollars in the corresponding period of 2024-25. Portfolio investment also turned negative -minus 559.5 million dollars in 2024 to minus 624.4 million dollars in 2025.

Similarly, the claim about containment of inflation is baffling because despite a dip in the inflation rate the poverty levels in the country rose to 44.2 percent as per the World Bank figures. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has shown a decline in the consumer price index for June as compared to May 2025 — 3.2 percent against 3.5 percent in May. But CPI takes into account the fluctuation in the price of imported items as well as those domestically produced. The actual weightage of fuels is lumped together with other utilities which results in lowering the inflation rate. For example, the weightage given to liquefied hydrocarbons, associated with crude oil and petroleum, had a low weightage of only 0.9994, while that ascribed to solid fuel, notably wood, charcoal, peat, dry dung, inexplicably was given a weightage four times higher at 4.4761 in calculation of CPI. According to experts, inflation is expected to rise in the current year due to various fiscal and administrative measures agreed with the IMG, including a raise in utility prices to meet the objective of full-cost recovery.

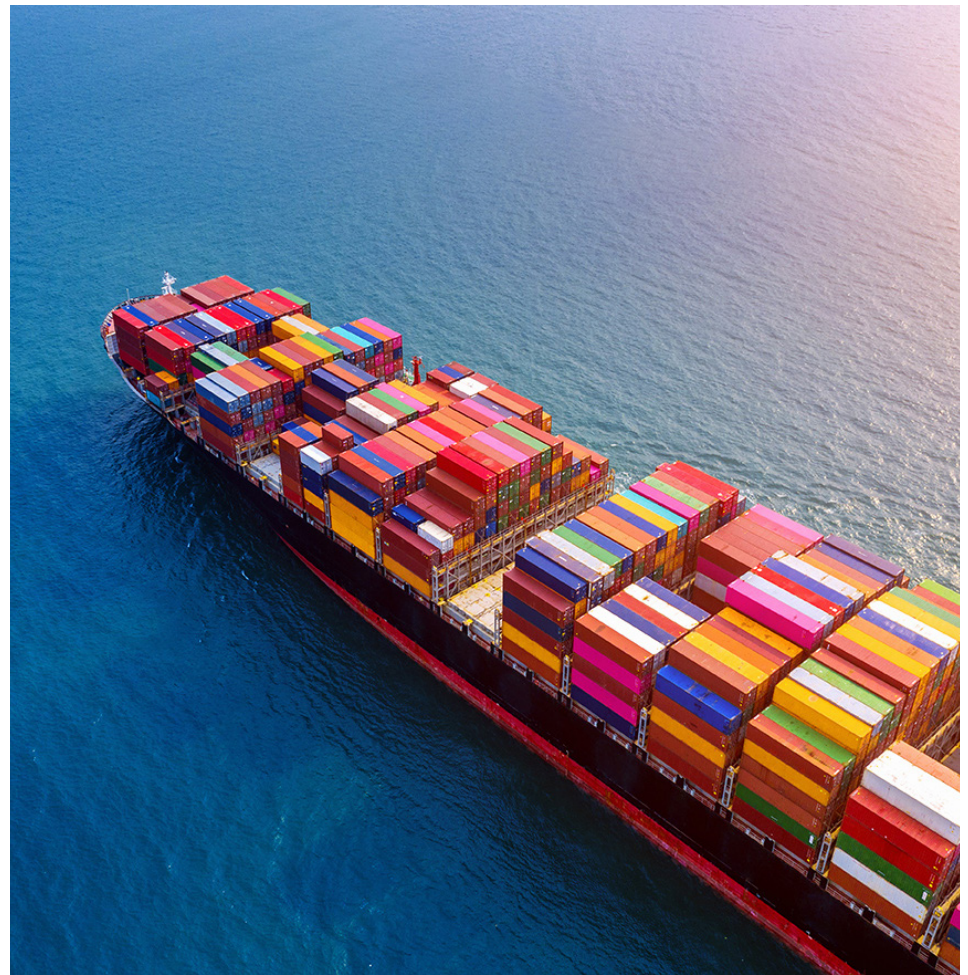
The claim about good fiscal management also does not stand scrutiny. There has been a massive rise in non-tax revenue from collections under petroleum levy, an indirect tax whose incidence is more on the poor than on the rich. Revenue from this source accounted for a 21 percent rise in the revised estimates of 2023-24 and in the current year's budget the rise is projected at 26 percent more than last year — from 1161 billion rupees in the revised estimates of last year to 1468.39 billion rupees in 2025-26. This will put a heavy burden on the budget of the low-income group.

As far as external sector performance is concerned, there has been an impressive rise in remittances — from 27 billion dollars July-May 2023-24 to 34.89 billion dollars in 2024-25. But it is alleged by some economists that the State Bank of Pakistan purchased dollars in the open market and credited them under remittances. On the other hand, the unpaid dues of the Independent Power Producers established under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor amount to 1.72 billion dollars.

No doubt, exports have improved by 4 percent during July-May 2025 as compared to the same period the year before. But imports rose by 11.5 percent with the trade deficit rising to 24 billion dollars against 20 billion dollars

of material default risk with a limited margin of safety. One reason is the lack of structural reforms to put the economy on the right path. Tax reform measures are conspicuous by their absence and the reliance on indirect taxation continues unabated. Indirect tax constitutes 80 percent of the total budgeted tax revenue — 60 percent from identified indirect taxes and 75 to 80 percent of direct taxes to be collected from withholding taxes levied in the sales tax mode. Also, no policy measures have yet been taken to put the energy sector on an even keel. Despite continued pressure from the IMF, the privatisation process is yet to get under way.

The upshot is that the economy is in a state of stagnation with the general public



in the previous year. Further, during July-April 2025 there was a negative 1.52 percent growth in large-scale manufacturing sector against positive 0.26 percent growth in the comparable period the year before.

Foreign investors are reluctant to come to Pakistan because all major credit rating agencies place Pakistan below investment grade and within the highly speculative indicative

suffering grievously under the twin burden of poverty and high unemployment. In this year's budget while development expenditure has been reduced, non-productive administrative expenses have been raised. Nothing better illustrates the distorted priorities of the government. It is clear, until this damn-care approach is changed, there is little hope of any major economic turnaround in the foreseeable future.

Global poverty and persistent inequality

Nasim Ahmed

According to the latest World Bank report, almost 800 million people (8.5 percent of the global population) live in extreme poverty on less than \$2.15 per day.

The World Bank's Poverty & Inequality Platform (PIP) uses over 2,400 household surveys from 172 countries to reach the conclusion that around 3.5 billion people (44 percent of the global population) remain poor by a standard that is more relevant for upper middle-income countries (\$6.85 per day).

According to Oxfam's research, inequality is high or increasing in 25 (54 percent) of the countries that receive funds from IDA. The 2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) report has pinpointed a strong link between violent conflict and multidimensional poverty – a concept that defines lack of access to health and education facilities as components of poverty. This year's update of the global MPI database presents data from 112 countries covering 1,359 subnational regions. The results show that 1.1 billion of 6.3 billion people live in acute multidimensional poverty, over half of them children. Poverty markers include a lack of adequate housing, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, nutrition and schooling facilities.

It is relevant to mention here that the introduction of the international poverty line in 1990 established a global benchmark that captured the daily cost for a person to meet their basic needs in a low-income country, which at that time was \$1. The line has been updated several times since then to reflect changing prices and the costs of meeting basic needs. The most recent update sets it at \$3 per person per day.

It is estimated that at the present pace of progress, it would take decades to eradicate extreme poverty. It is now universally accepted that poverty is multidimensional and there are many non-monetary indicators such as access to education, health, sanitation, water, and electricity which deepen deprivation. Different measures of poverty help provide a broader view and can guide policy decisions to improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable.

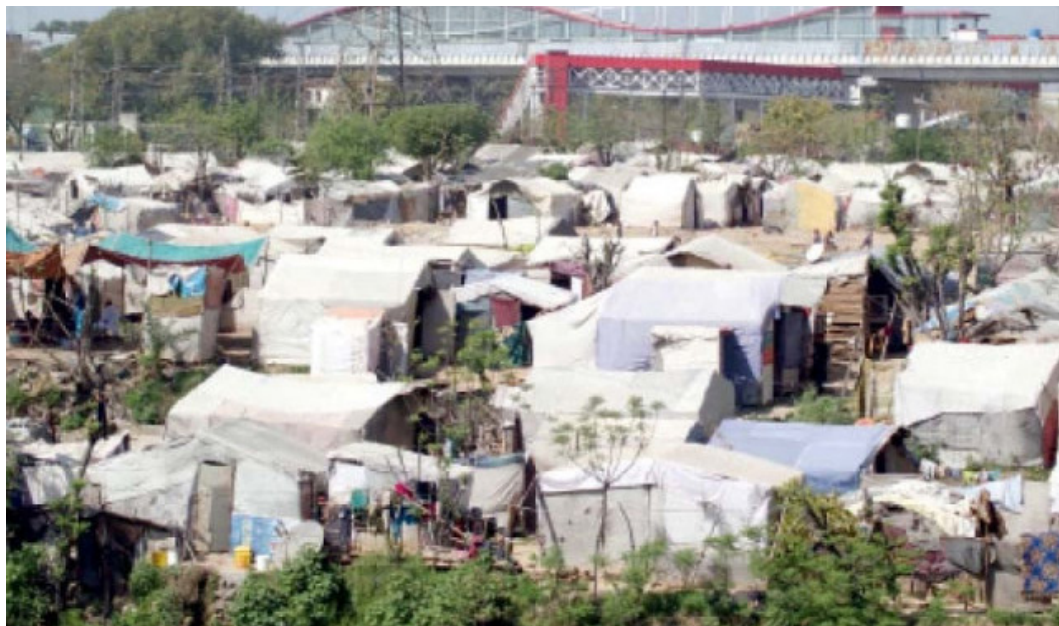
It is said that globally one in five people live in a highly unequal society. A new World Bank indicator tracks the number of economies

with high inequality. These are defined as economies with a Gini index greater than 40, based on income or consumption from the most recent household survey for a country. Based on this metric, 49 countries, comprising 22 percent of the world's population, had a Gini index above 40. These 49 economies with high inequality are concentrated in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In 2024, Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for 16 percent of the world's population, but 67 percent of its population was living in extreme poverty. This figure rises to three quarters when we include all fragile and conflict-affected countries. Based on the current estimates, 622 million people (7.3 percent of the global population) are projected to live in extreme

risk to poverty and inequality reduction. Today, one in five people are at risk of an extreme weather event in their lifetime. This means they are likely to face severe setbacks in their livelihoods, significantly hindering poverty reduction efforts. People's risks to climate hazards are expected to increase unless resilience is strengthened and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions decline.

Average income growth alone is not a sufficient marker of development and poverty reduction. The Global Prosperity Gap, a new indicator of shared prosperity used by the World Bank, tracks how far the world is, on average, from a threshold of \$25 per person per day with a specific emphasis on the incomes of the poorest. Progress in reducing the Prosperity



poverty in 2030. In addition, 3.4 billion people (nearly 40 percent of the world's population) will likely live on less than \$6.85 per day. The World Bank estimates that it will take decades to eradicate extreme poverty and more than a century to lift people above the \$6.85 per day poverty line.

The situation demands urgent remedial action by the international community. Countries will need to improve the income level of the working classes by creating more and better jobs and investing in education, infrastructure and basic services. This will enable people living in poverty to benefit more from and contribute to growth, and to enhance their resilience to economic shocks.

Climate change also poses a fundamental

Gap has slowed down since the Covid pandemic, highlighting the need to adopt innovative solutions to the problem at hand.

To improve the situation, governments around the world will have to prioritize poverty reduction by delivering economic growth and reducing multidimensional poverty. Middle-income countries will have to aim at income growth that reduces vulnerabilities, while rich countries, which account for four-fifths of global GHG emissions, will need to act fast in transitioning to low-carbon intense economies while managing transition costs. According to experts, greater international cooperation is vital to enable the transition toward more sustainable and resilient economies and create a world free of poverty and deprivation.

Unrealistic targets, narrow tax net and chronic policy failures

Muhammad Hassan

The Federal Board of Revenue's repeated failure to meet its tax collection goals has once again unmasked a deeper fiscal disorder that extends far beyond faulty forecasts.

This year, overblown assumptions regarding import volumes, inflation, and economic momentum led to bloated targets that proved impossible to meet. Yet the real fault line lies not in the projections alone, but in a tax structure that leans heavily on salaried workers and formal businesses, while allowing vast, high-earning sectors like retail, agriculture, and real estate to roam largely untaxed.

Despite a record Rs5.8 trillion contribution from the salaried class and corporations, the imbalance in fiscal burden continues unchecked. The political class lacks the will to challenge its own support base, leaving meaningful reform untouched. Instead, the tax regime resembles high-tax Scandinavian systems in rate alone—offering none of their protections or public services in return.

The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the country's primary fiscal lifeline, once again failed to meet its annual tax collection mandate for FY2024-25—harvesting Rs11.7 trillion in receipts against an aspirational benchmark of Rs12.9 trillion. The revenue apparatus backpedaled twice over the year, first trimming the goal to Rs12.3 trillion, then settling at a more lenient Rs11.9 trillion—only to fall short of even that tempered figure by Rs163 billion.

This pattern of serial recalibrations and persistent underperformance betrays more than flawed arithmetic or short-sighted economic stewardship. Beneath the surface lies an entrenched malfunction—a structural rot gnawing at the very marrow of Pakistan's tax regime.

Despite heavy-handed levies on salaried citizens and corporate entities, the taxation of everyday essentials, and a supposed digitization drive within the FBR, the machinery sputtered. Even the rollout of anti-smuggling crackdowns and supplementary tax tactics, valued at a staggering Rs1.3 trillion, couldn't jolt the system into compliance. Consequently, the board also missed the IMF-mandated tax-to-GDP ratio of 10.6 percent—a red flag for international fiscal overseers.

Notably, the burden has been hoisted squarely onto the shoulders of wage-earners. The FBR extracted a record Rs545 billion in income tax from salaried individuals by June 30, 2025—the lion's share of direct tax contributions. This cohort paid over thrice as much as the nation's dollar-earning exporters and coughed up eight-fold the contribution made by retailers.

Exporters, whose foreign currency earnings should imply greater fiscal weight, contributed a relatively meager Rs180 billion. Retailers—shielded by cross-party political patronage—surrendered only Rs62 billion to the exchequer, laying bare the glaring imbalances in tax equity.

Yet, amid the glaring shortfall, a silver sliver glimmers: the year's haul still reflects a 26% uptick over last year's figures. This raises a piercing question—were the collection goals

firms, already sagging under an elephantine levy, still poured a formidable Rs5.8 trillion into the treasury last year. Low and middle income households likewise feel the squeeze. By contrast, heftier, more lucrative realms—retail emporia, sprawling farms, speculative real estate fiefdoms—linger on the periphery or luxuriate entirely outside the net. Political courage to correct this disequilibrium remains a mirage.

Thus, Pakistan now mimics Nordic tax rates while offering none of the Scandinavian welfare consolations. Ever steeper tariffs and shock and awe surcharges have turned the FBR into a ravenous predator, yet public services, social insurance, and institutional transparency remain skeletal.

Blueprints for widening the base—dragging the bazaar economy into daylight, or imposing a credible agricultural levy—have largely gathered dust. The token agriculture tax now unveiled is less an act of statesmanship than an IMF mandated rite. Squeeze the same oranges long enough and you yield only rind; beyond a threshold, punitive rates simply fertilise evasion.

Even the last chairman, Amjad Zubair Tiwana, forecast a ceiling of Rs11.8 trillion—an admonition that proved uncannily precise. Evidently, the command deck recognises its own speed limits, yet opts for heavier boots instead of tuning the engine. New mini budgets, harsher penalties, expanded coercive muscle—these

remain the reflexive salves.

Until political grit, administrative sinew, and genuine accountability converge to broaden the tax mosaic, Pakistan will cycle endlessly between over reach and under shoot, chasing ever receding targets across a landscape pocked with structural fault lines.

Unless Pakistan musters the political resolve, bureaucratic stamina, and institutional integrity to expand the tax base and distribute the fiscal load equitably, the FBR will remain trapped in a cycle of inflated ambitions and inevitable disappointments. Widening the net, enforcing fair taxation on untapped sectors, and shedding the overreliance on a shrinking pool of compliant payers is no longer a policy choice—it is a survival imperative. Until then, the state's desperate measures will keep squeezing the same exhausted sources, chasing an illusion of fiscal stability while the foundation quietly erodes beneath it.



unrealistically inflated to begin with? Revenue forecasts often lean on assumptions tethered to volatile metrics—GDP trajectories, monetary policy swings, inflationary pressure, and the whims of IMF-influenced governance.

Ultimately, the FBR's misfire doesn't just expose its operational lethargy. It casts a harsh light on a taxation paradigm long in need of overhaul—where structural inertia, political cowardice, and fiscal myopia continue to triumph over equity, efficacy, and ambition.

When baseline presumptions misfire—misgauged trade inflows, phantom inflation, and over hyped growth—the fiscal compass skews, and the revenue vessel lists off course. FBR brass now mutter that their optimism over imports and price spirals proved delusional, explaining away the yawning gap. But such arithmetic myopia camouflages a deeper malaise.

At the bedrock sits a tax base as skinny as a reed. Salaried employees and incorporated

Global economy: Deepening structural faults

Muhammad Zain

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS), in its latest annual economic dispatch, delivers an unflinching assessment of a world economy nearing a critical precipice. Far beyond routine market cycles or transient liquidity strains, the report exposes entrenched systemic flaws—ranging from rising global debt and waning productivity to geopolitical fragmentation and inflation's lingering aftershocks.

With protectionist trade policies tightening their grip and trust in institutions deteriorating, the BIS warns that the margin for error is vanishing. As emerging markets wobble under mounting vulnerabilities, the report calls for decisive international coordination, tougher regulation, and investment in financial innovation to brace for the storm ahead. The report casts a stark light on the labyrinthine crossroads confronting the global economy.

Navigating through a terrain riddled with institutional distrust, surging instability, and entrenched systemic frailties, the report doesn't mince words. It signals an inflection point—one where monetary orthodoxy and financial equilibriums are under siege by a confluence of global tremors. Amid a crescendo of protectionist rhetoric, stubborn inflationary undercurrents, and powder-keg geopolitics, the BIS rings the bell for bold recalibrations. It urges stewards of the world's financial architecture to abandon inertia and brace for strategic overhaul.

The narrative is unflinchingly candid: the edifice of the financial system is being splintered by festering trade ruptures and diplomatic rancor. These fissures are aggravated by an erosion of societal faith in bedrock institutions—including central banks—that now stand beleaguered under the weight of monetary tightening and public skepticism.

Emerging markets (EMs), already vulnerable to capital flight and policy shocks, are caught in the undertow of these macro headwinds. The report flags a precarious reality for them—one riddled with asymmetrical recoveries and amplified exposure to geopolitical convulsions. At the heart of the report lies a compelling thesis: the inflationary tempest has coerced central banks into a sustained regime of elevated interest rates. This monetary scaffolding, once built upon a foundation of low-cost borrowing and copious liquidity, is now being disassembled brick by brick.

As credit becomes dearer, pivotal economic strata—namely banking, real estate, and private lending—are being choked, with stress fractures surfacing across the board. The BIS

exhorts policymakers to realign, advocating for structural overhauls and disciplined fiscal stewardship in an era where easy money is no longer a panacea. Threaded throughout the report is the conundrum of balancing price stability with financial durability—a task muddled further by fractured supply chains and mounting trade barricades. The delicate act of inflation-taming, it notes, must be approached without destabilizing already fragile markets.

The ascendancy of non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) occupies another critical spotlight. These shadow banking entities—spanning private equity giants to hedge fund behemoths—have flourished in recent years, but often dwell in regulatory penumbras. Bereft of the same scrutiny traditional banks endure, NBFIs are now susceptible to liquidity tremors and could catalyze systemic ripples if left unchecked. The BIS insists on fortified surveillance and a tightening of the regulatory lattice to curtail latent vulnerabilities exposed by the current monetary squeeze.

On the innovation frontier, the report navigates the dual-edged promise of tokenization and artificial intelligence (AI) in reshaping fiscal topographies. Tokenization—digitizing real-world assets onto decentralized ledgers—heralds transactional efficiency and cost streamlining. Project Promissa, a pioneering BIS endeavor, spotlighted how tokenizing promissory notes within multilateral development frameworks can slash bureaucratic friction and enhance transparency across sovereign financial operations. Artificial intelligence, meanwhile, is acknowledged as both boon and bane. While it harbors the capacity to revolutionize decision-making and analytics within financial systems, its unchecked deployment could imperil stability. Governance mechanisms, the BIS emphasizes, must evolve in tandem to rein in these nascent risks and extract AI's transformative value judiciously.

In sum, the BIS delivers a clarion call: the old playbook is obsolete. To traverse the shifting sands of the current economic epoch, steely resolve, intellectual elasticity, and unwavering vigilance are imperative. Fractious geopolitics—most glaringly the escalating trade skirmishes—loom as an existential menace to global equilibrium. The BIS cautions that a lurch toward protectionism and splintered commerce could widen the chasm of inequality while throttling the arteries of cross border capital.

Emerging markets, already teetering under towering debt and mercurial currencies, stand precariously exposed. Their fiscal armor is thin; another shock could cleave it entirely.

Hence, the BIS presses for renewed multilateralism, casting itself as the agora where central bankers converge to defuse these hazards.

Gazing forward, the report sketches a hard edged blueprint for a sturdier monetary architecture. It urges muscular regulatory scaffolding, tighter synchrony among central banks, and bold investment in digital rails. Rebuilding public faith, it insists, demands policymaking that is both lucid and unflinchingly effective.

In a single breath, the BIS sounds its rallying horn: act decisively or brace for turbulence. Tame inflation, corral the shadow bank behemoths, harness tokenization and AI judiciously, and—above all—rekindle international cooperation. Only then can stewards of finance chart a safe passage through the gathering fog.

The warning is unsparing. This juncture is not another cyclical trough or a fleeting liquidity hiccup; it is a reckoning with structural fragilities that threaten to fracture what resilience remains. Debt mountains climb, productivity idles, supply chains fray, and the post Covid inflation echo still reverberates through policy chambers. A sagging dollar and rate sensitive sovereigns deepen the unease. Market rallies may gild the surface, yet the BIS points to the tectonic fissures beneath.

What distinguishes this alarm is its unvarnished prognosis: resilience is eroding less from economic tides than from policy lassitude. Years of fiscal insouciance, paltry productivity investment, and an over dependence on the monetary spigot have bred a brittle status quo. One external jolt—a geopolitical flare up or trade rupture—could tilt heavyweight economies into protracted malaise.

Buffers are thinning. For policymakers, investors, and institutions alike, this is the moment to abandon illusions of gentle landings and steel themselves for sterner realities. When even the BIS starts to tremble, the prudent cease hoping—and start fortifying.

This is no mere cautionary footnote—it's a stark directive. The BIS's message lands with weight: the world economy is running perilously low on shock absorbers. Decades of fiscal drift, policy inertia, and overreliance on monetary easing have sapped resilience from the global system. One sharp jolt—a flare-up in geopolitics or a trade system fracture—could send economies tumbling into sustained distress. The call is clear: policymakers must act not with half-measures, but with clarity, courage, and coordination. Because if even the BIS is sounding the tocsin, the global financial community must shed complacency and prepare for the hard truths ahead.

Economic winds start shifting?

Shahid Hussain

A blend of moderating inflation, spirited export growth, and buoyant remittance inflows is reconfiguring Pakistan's economic landscape. Recent fiscal markers highlight a cautiously optimistic trajectory—cement exports have spiked, foreign inflows surged, and the manufacturing sector shows flickers of resilience despite domestic demand headwinds. With CPI inflation tapering sharply from last year's high and the current account flipping into surplus, the economic narrative is evolving from one of survival to measured revival.

With inflationary undercurrents for June 2025 projected to meander between 3% and 4%, the Ministry of Finance foresees a tentative but promising resurgence within the manufacturing domain across the imminent horizon. According to its freshly unveiled Monthly Economic Outlook, the ministry envisions that CPI-driven inflation will likely hover within the tempered corridor of 5% to 7% throughout FY26. "In deliberations held on June 16, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) resolved to anchor the policy rate at 11%, citing latent inflationary tremors, looming external disequilibria, and the geopolitical fog enveloping the region," the document conveyed. Despite May's year-on-year inflation settling at 3.5%, forward-looking estimates nestle firmly within the 5-7% band for the forthcoming fiscal cycle.

Signals emerging from high-frequency indices such as cement allocations and automotive transactions suggest that Large Scale Manufacturing (LSM) is regaining vitality. The ministry underscored these indicators as harbingers of an industrial upturn. Simultaneously, the government reiterated its allegiance to systemic recalibration—channeling efforts toward tax coherence, energy valuation overhaul, and privatization pursuits. It also spotlighted climate-conscious ventures aimed at forging a growth model that's as inclusive as it is sustainable.

Economic cadence in FY25 remained steady, fueled by solid macroeconomic underpinnings, circumspect fiscal maneuvering, and an emboldened external outlook. Real GDP clocked a growth of 2.68%, inflation tapered methodically, and the current account ledger etched a surplus of \$1.81 billion. Fiscal rigidity tightened with a narrowing deficit, while the primary balance attained 3.2% of GDP from July through April FY25.

Meanwhile, the ongoing IMF engagements—namely the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and Resilience and Sustainability

Facility (RSF)—coupled with upgraded creditworthiness assessments, reinforced policy fidelity and recharged investor morale. An uptick in credit procurement by the private sector serves as an emblem of mounting productive capacity and confidence across commercial circles.

Externally, the economic buffer is anticipated to remain buoyant due to a confluence of surging remittances and a robust export ledger, thereby extending the current account's surplus into the tail-end of FY2025. In April 2025, LSM metrics told a nuanced tale—ascending by 2.3% on a year-over-year basis, but retracting 3.2% when juxtaposed with the previous month. Cumulatively, LSM receded by 1.5% from July to April FY25, contrasting mildly with the 0.3% upturn charted during the analogous stretch last fiscal year.

Twelve of the 22 mapped sectors displayed forward propulsion, encompassing textiles, stitched garments, refined petroleum



outputs, beverage production, and pharmaceutical formulations. The automotive segment, in particular, surged across the July-May FY25 span—car production ballooned by 39.2%, truck and bus fabrication skyrocketed 94.8%, and assembly of jeeps and pick-ups leapt 74.7%.

Cement dispatches between July and May FY2025 climbed to 42.8 million tonnes, reflecting a modest 2.5% year-on-year ascent. Yet, the domestic appetite softened—slipping 1.9% to 35.1 million tonnes—while the export stream surged a vigorous 25.7%, scaling up to 8.3 million tonnes. Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood markedly lower at 3.5% in May 2025—down from the 11.8% peak in May 2024. On a sequential basis, May brought a 0.2% price contraction, following prior monthly declines of 0.8% in April and 3.2% in May the year before.

Disaggregated inflation data for May 2025 revealed upward cost pressures in healthcare (12.8%), education (10.1%), apparel and footwear (9.7%), tobacco and alcohol (7.9%), hospitality services (7.4%), and stable

food items (5.0%). Conversely, deflation was observed in perishables (-9.2%), transport services (-2.5%), and the housing-utilities-energy cluster (-2.5%). The Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), tracking weekly consumer costs, rose by 0.27% during the week ending June 19. Out of 51 essential commodities monitored, prices for 23 items edged upward, 8 declined, and 20 remained motionless.

Externally, the economy's outward-facing metrics continued their upswing in July-May FY2025, spurred chiefly by enhanced remittance streams and export traction. The current account flipped into a surplus of \$1.8 billion, starkly reversing a deficit of \$1.6 billion logged the prior year. Merchandise exports gained 4%, touching \$29.7 billion, while imports ballooned 11.5% to \$54.1 billion—thus widening the trade gulf to \$24.4 billion, up from \$20 billion. Noteworthy export boosts were posted in knitwear (14.5%), readymade garments (16.4%), and bed linens (10.6%). On the import side, palm oil surged 26.3%, electrical apparatus rose 13.6%, whereas crude oil procurement receded by 1.7%.

Service sector trade mirrored this dynamism—exports climbed 8.5% to \$7.6 billion, while imports swelled 6.6% to \$10.3 billion, culminating in a service trade shortfall of \$2.7 billion. Meanwhile, IT exports soared 18.7% to reach \$3.5 billion.

Worker remittances emerged as a cornerstone of external strength—vaulting 28.8% to \$34.9 billion, compared to \$27.1 billion last year. Saudi Arabia accounted for the lion's share (24.4%), followed closely by the UAE (20.4%).

Net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) registered at \$2 billion—marginally under the \$2.1 billion noted the year before. Capital flows were chiefly steered by China (\$790.4 million), the United Kingdom (\$229 million), and Hong Kong (\$215.2 million). The financial services vertical magnetized the lion's share of investment at \$628.9 million, trailed by the power sector (\$562.8 million) and oil & gas exploration (\$265.6 million).

Despite external uncertainties and uneven domestic demand, the economic pulse is beating with renewed rhythm. The acceleration in remittances, resurgence in IT and textile exports, and continued investor interest in financial services and energy offer glimmers of stability. While challenges in the trade deficit and inflation-sensitive sectors remain, the convergence of fiscal discipline, structural reform, and external sector dynamism hints at a macroeconomic reset that may set the tone for a more balanced FY2026.

Revisiting NFC: A case for greater fiscal equity for Balochistan

Raza Khan

Pakistan's federal structure relies on the National Finance Commission (NFC) to distribute financial resources between the central government and provinces, a process critical for economic stability and national cohesion. However, the failure to announce a new NFC Award since the 7th Award expired in 2015 has exacerbated tensions, particularly in Balochistan, where multidimensional poverty and underdevelopment fuel unrest.

With 38.3% of Pakistan's population (88.7 million people in 2021) classified as multidimensionally poor and Balochistan facing a poverty incidence of 71%, equitable resource allocation is urgently needed. This discussion examines the NFC's role in addressing Pakistan's fiscal challenges and argues for a larger financial share for Balochistan to mitigate deprivation and strengthen national unity.

Since the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award was finalized in 2010 by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government, no new financial award has been announced after its expiry in 2015. This failure violates the Constitution of Pakistan and has created significant economic and financial challenges, particularly in relations between the central and provincial governments.

Distributing financial resources in a federal state is inherently complex. Western nations, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, developed sustainable mechanisms centuries ago to allocate resources between central and regional governments. In culturally homogenous countries like Japan, this process has been relatively smooth. However, in culturally diverse states like Pakistan and India, equitable distribution remains a formidable challenge.

In Pakistan, the vertical distribution of financial resources between the central government and provinces has been particularly contentious, largely due to the country's highly centralized state structure. The 1973 Constitution introduced the National Finance Commission (NFC) to manage the Federal Divisible Pool (FDP), distributing resources vertically between the federal government and provinces and horizontally among the provinces. However, no fixed criteria were established for this distribution. Instead, the federal and provin-

cial governments must negotiate through the Council of Common Interests (CCI) to agree on resource allocation periodically. The NFC Award is a critical mechanism for determining these distributions, and regular agreements are essential for political stability, efficient governance, and addressing the population's needs.

The 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) and the 7th NFC Award, enacted in the same year, granted provinces, including Balochistan, greater fiscal autonomy. The amendment abolished the Concurrent Legislative List, devolving subjects and departments to the provinces as originally envisioned in the 1973 Constitution. While this was a positive step, the 7th NFC Award fell short of delivering justice. Although the provincial share of financial resources increased to 57.5%, this was insufficient given the scope of devolved respon-



sibilities. Provinces should have received at least 75% of the divisible pool, with the federal government retaining the remainder.

The most recent publicly available survey data for Pakistan's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) estimation, from 2017/2018, indicates that 38.3% of Pakistan's population (88.7 million people in 2021) is multidimensionally poor, with an additional 12.9% (29.9 million people) classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty. The intensity of deprivation, measured as the average deprivation score among the multidimensionally poor, is 51.7%. Pakistan's MPI value, which adjusts the share of the multidimensionally poor population by the intensity of deprivations, is 0.198—higher than Bangladesh (0.104) and India (0.069).

The case of Balochistan is critical in discussions of financial resource allocation and poverty. The province faces a strong separatist insurgency, with the state's authority weakening in many areas. A key driver of this unrest is the perception that Balochistan has been denied its political and economic rights, particularly in

the distribution of financial resources through the National Finance Commission (NFC).

Historically, Balochistan has been Pakistan's least developed province compared to Punjab and Sindh. According to the 2016 MPI survey, Balochistan had a staggering poverty incidence of 71%, with a deprivation intensity of 55%. Given these conditions, Balochistan deserves a significantly larger share of financial resources.

Several compelling reasons support allocating a larger NFC share to Balochistan. First, the province has not been a priority for central government development policies, despite claims to the contrary, fostering widespread deprivation and fueling separatist sentiments. In the 7th NFC Award, a "war on terror" criterion was introduced, granting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) a 1.8% share for its role as a frontline province in Pakistan's fight against terrorism. However, this allocation was minimal, and in recent years, Balochistan has faced comparable levels of terrorism. Thus, Balochistan should also receive dedicated "war on terror" funds in the next NFC Award.

The crisis in Balochistan is multidimensional, but increasing its NFC share could help address the pervasive sense of deprivation. This is in Pakistan's broader national interest, as persistent grievances and separatist tendencies

undermine state cohesion and nation-building. Moreover, Balochistan's underdevelopment hampers Pakistan's overall progress. Widespread unemployment, poverty, and misery in the province stem from this neglect, making a larger NFC allocation urgent. Consensus on a new NFC Award is critical to address these issues and promote equitable development.

Pakistan's progress hinges on addressing the systemic inequities in its resource distribution, particularly for Balochistan, where poverty and unrest underscore the need for reform. The NFC remains a vital mechanism to achieve this, but its effectiveness depends on timely consensus and fair criteria that prioritize underdeveloped regions. By allocating a significantly larger share to Balochistan, including dedicated funds for terrorism-affected areas, the government can alleviate deprivation, curb separatist sentiments, and foster inclusive development. A new NFC Award, grounded in justice and national interest, is imperative to strengthen the federation and ensure a cohesive, prosperous future.

War and deception go hand in hand

Faheem Amir

Peace is a dream sold to people to justify more wars, seize more resources, and accumulate greater power to subjugate fellow human beings in today's political and capitalist world. Words like brotherhood, equality, human rights, justice, morality, religion, democracy, nationalism, freedom of expression, and the rule of law are often weaponised to perpetrate atrocities, shed blood, and deceive the masses in service of the ruling elite's partisan interests.

Global organisations such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) were not created to serve the common people, but to protect and advance the interests of a powerful, often ruthless, global elite. This is not cynicism — it is a reality confirmed by history and reinforced by today's political landscape.

The First World War was fought “to end all wars,” yet it ended with 40 million dead. The Second World War promised “to fight fascism,” but it concluded with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the rise of the United States as a global empire. The Cold War that followed claimed millions more lives through proxy wars, interventions, and political repression.

Eric Hobsbawm, a renowned historian, estimated that wars in the 20th century caused around 187 million deaths — roughly 10% of the global population in 1900. According to *The Times*, since 1945 the world has witnessed hundreds of conflicts, with at least 285 distinct wars — a number that continues to rise. In fact, 2024 saw more conflict than any year since the Second World War. Researchers recorded 61 state-based conflicts across 36 countries, surpassing the already high levels of violence from 2020 to 2023. Of these, 11 escalated into full-scale wars, each resulting in over 1,000 battle-related deaths. An estimated 160,000 people were killed in organised violence in 2024 — the fifth-highest annual toll since 1989.

Around 76,000 battle-related deaths have been reported in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. In Gaza, Israel, backed by American weapons, has killed over 100,000 people, including children, women, journalists, doctors, and many UN workers. The International

Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes in Gaza, but they are unlikely to be arrested. The United States has refused to cooperate, threatened the ICC, and continues to supply arms to the perpetrators.

Every American war — from Vietnam to Afghanistan, from Iraq and Libya to Syria, and now the bombing of Iranian nuclear sites — has been justified using words like “liberation,” “democracy,” and “security.” But in reality, these wars have primarily served to destroy and exploit weak, resource-rich nations for profit and access to resources.

Trump pledged to end America's “forever wars” during his 2024 campaign. Yet on June 21, 2025, he launched a bombing campaign against Iran, without congressional approval,



a UN mandate, invocation of the War Powers Act, or allied support. The attack followed two weeks of deceptive diplomacy, during which Trump publicly offered Iran more time to negotiate while US B-2 bombers were being armed in secret. The real goal was not diplomacy; it was to induce regime change and crush Iran under the banner of international peace.

Trump even suggested assassinating Ayatollah Khamenei and threatened Iran with further attacks after bombing its nuclear sites at Isfahan, Fordow, and Natanz. The UN Charter forbids the use of force (Article 2[4]) except in cases of self-defence (Article 51). Yet Israel and the United States invoked “pre-emptive self-defence,” constituting a clear violation of both articles and international law. Trump also admitted he had prior knowledge of Israel's June 13 strike, which killed Iranian generals and scientists. This provides further evidence that the preceding negotiations were merely a ruse to deceive Tehran.

Moreover, in 2013, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists reported that Israel had at least 80 nuclear warheads, making it the Mid-

dle East's only nuclear power. Israel has never admitted this nor allowed IAEA inspections of its Dimona facility. In 2021, signs of expansion emerged at the site. This secrecy and lack of accountability make the US and Israel's bombing of Iran, an NPT signatory, over alleged nuclear ambitions deeply hypocritical and expose a double standard in global nuclear politics.

Jack Rasmus, the author of *The Scourge of Neoliberalism: US Economic Policy from Reagan to Trump*, writes that Trump's decision was unilateral and personal — guided more by Israeli interests and Mossad intelligence than by US national security or the findings of American intelligence agencies, which had concluded Iran had no nuclear weapons. This marks a dangerous break from precedent: a war serving foreign interests, bypassing con-

stitutional checks, and reducing diplomacy to a strategic ploy. Iran is now unlikely to trust future negotiations, and the attack may accelerate its nuclear ambitions. No country will trust Trump—or the USA—to negotiate peace sincerely. Nations like Russia and China see US diplomacy as a tactic, not a solution. Russia learned this in Ukraine; China will likely keep it in mind over

Taiwan and the South China Sea. Negotiation, for the US, is a ruse.

According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), at least 92 of the world's 195 countries have been involved in cross-border conflicts in recent years. Each war creates new arms industries, strengthens military ties, and spreads more lies.

The world's largest arms makers—Lockheed Martin, Raytheon (RTX), Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems, Boeing, and General Dynamics—have earned hundreds of billions of dollars from ongoing deception, bloodshed, and devastation. In 2023 alone, the top 100 weapons firms collected more than \$630 billion. These corporations do not prosper in peace; they flourish on perpetual war. They wield global influence, and expecting peace to prevail under their watch is wishful thinking. Until all nuclear-armed states dismantle their arsenals and limit atomic energy to civilian use, non-nuclear nations will keep pursuing bombs for protection. Until people take back justice from the powerful, war will keep pretending to be peace, and injustice will keep hiding behind the law.

Tackling child labour through education, protection, and reform

Dr. Fatima Khan

In Pakistan, the crisis of child labour continues to rob millions of children of their childhood, education, and dignity. Driven by entrenched poverty and a lack of accessible education, families often see no option but to send their children to work—sometimes in dangerous and exploitative conditions.

While laws exist on paper to curb the practice, enforcement remains weak, and practical alternatives for vulnerable families are few and far between. To truly protect the rights of children, the country needs more than legislation—it needs bold, sustained action across all levels of society. Child labour remains one of Pakistan's most persistent and heartbreaking challenges, deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life. From fields and factories to markets and households, countless children are forced to work from a young age—robbed of their right to an education and a chance at a better future. The root of this crisis lies in widespread poverty, which pushes families to rely on their children's income for survival.

The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), on the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labour, issued a strong call for urgent and unified action. Their message is clear: Pakistan must strengthen the enforcement of child protection laws, expand educational access, and address the systemic issues that drive children into labour in the first place.

One of the biggest obstacles to solving the problem is the lack of up-to-date data. The last nationwide child labour survey was conducted nearly three decades ago, in 1996, when around 3.3 million children were estimated to be working. Since then, estimates from organizations like the ILO and UNICEF suggest that the number may now range between 10 to 12 million—most of them employed in informal sectors where labour laws are rarely enforced.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the only province to have recently carried out a detailed child labour survey. It revealed that out of 8.2 million children, more than 745,000 are working. Other provinces and the federal government have yet to follow suit, leaving significant gaps in knowl-

edge and hindering effective policy responses.

One of the most hidden and disturbing forms of child labour is domestic work. SPARC estimates that at least 264,000 children are employed in homes across the country. Behind closed doors, these children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, with little to no oversight or protection.

Child labour also runs deep through the supply chains of major industries—brick kilns, textile factories, agriculture, construction, and even service jobs rely heavily on underage workers. These children are often exposed to dangerous conditions that endanger their health and strip them of a normal childhood.

This year's World Day Against Child



Labour focused on the urgent need to eliminate child labour from supply chains. It serves as a sobering reminder that meaningful change requires more than just laws—it calls for collective responsibility from the government, private sector, and society as a whole. Only through sustained, collaborative efforts can we hope to end this cycle of exploitation and give every child in Pakistan the chance to grow, learn, and thrive.

At the root of Pakistan's child labour crisis is a harsh reality: deep-seated poverty and a lack of access to quality education leave many families with few choices. For millions living hand-to-mouth, sending their children to work isn't a choice—it's a survival strategy. But this grim compromise only tightens the grip of poverty, denying children the opportunity to learn, grow, and break free from the cycle. Weak social safety nets offer little relief, often forcing parents to depend on their children's earnings just to make ends meet.

While some provincial governments have introduced legislation aimed at curbing child labour—like Punjab's restriction on child workers at brick kilns and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's ban on employing children under 14—enforcement remains a significant hurdle. A lack of institutional capacity, inadequate resources, and the sheer scale of the issue continue to undermine these efforts.

One of the most glaring gaps is the absence of a realistic, compassionate path that allows working children to leave hazardous labour behind without plunging their families into deeper hardship. SPARC's proposal to set up education centres at brick kilns in Sindh offers a promising model. If scaled nationwide and

made mandatory, initiatives like this could offer a lifeline—enabling children to learn while easing the burden on families.

However, these steps alone are not enough. Real progress demands more than laws on paper. It requires a comprehensive approach: equipping labour departments and law enforcement agencies to take action against exploitative employers, creating strong social protection programmes that support families, and challenging the societal norms that continue to accept child

labour as inevitable.

True change will only come through sustained, united action—from policymakers and employers to educators, communities, and citizens. The fight to end child labour isn't just a legal or economic challenge—it's a moral one. And it's a fight that must be won for the sake of Pakistan's children and the country's future.

Ending child labour in Pakistan is not an impossible task—but it requires a serious, long-term commitment. Laws must be backed by action, institutions need proper support, and families must be empowered through stronger social protections and access to education. Above all, society must reject the normalization of child labour and view it for what it is: a violation of basic human rights. Only through coordinated efforts—from government and civil society to local communities and industry—can we create a future where every child is in school, not at work.

Iran will pursue all legal avenues to seek redress from its attackers

Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei

The international legal order loses its effectiveness when faced with the unilateralism of hegemonic powers as well as acts that flout universally accepted norms. If such practices remain unaddressed, there is a risk that the order will lose its foundational purpose: the protection of justice, peace, and the sovereignty of nations.

The attack by the United States and Israel on Iran, including the targeted killings of scientists and intellectuals, bombing of IAEA-approved nuclear facilities, and strikes against residential, medical, media, and public infrastructure, is a prime example of illegal, unilateral action that must not remain unaddressed. It is a wrongful act and a clear violation of fundamental norms of international law.

In this context, the principle of state responsibility, which dictates that states are held accountable for wrongful acts, must be applied. This principle was codified by the International Law Commission ILC in its 2001 Draft Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, which have since been widely recognised and cited by international courts and tribunals.

Per their provisions, the commission of a wrongful act – such as the unlawful use of force – constitutes a violation of an international obligation and imposes a binding duty on the responsible state to provide full and effective reparation for the harm caused.

In the case of the illegal acts committed by the United States and Israel, the scope of legal responsibility goes far beyond ordinary violations. These acts not only contravened customary international law, but also breached peremptory norms, the highest-ranking norms within the international legal hierarchy. Among these, the principle of the prohibition of aggression is a core and universally binding rule. No state is permitted to derogate from this norm, and violations trigger obligations, requiring all members of the international community to respond collectively to uphold the law.

There are at least two relevant legal precedents that can guide the application of the principle of state responsibility and the obligation for reparations in the case of Iran.

In 1981, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 487 in response

to Israel's attack on Iraq's nuclear facilities. It unequivocally characterised this act of aggression as a "serious threat to the entire safeguard regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]", which is the foundation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The resolution also fully recognised the inalienable sovereign right of all states to establish programmes of technological and nuclear development to develop their economy and industry for peaceful purposes.

Article 6 stipulates that "Iraq is entitled to appropriate redress for the destruction it has suffered, responsibility for which has been acknowledged by Israel". By mandating that the aggressor compensate the victim for the resulting damages, the resolution provides a clear legal precedent for pursuing redress in similar cases.

Thus, given the fact that the attacks by



the US and Israel were carried out with public declarations confirming the operations and are well-documented, the application of the principles and provisions of Resolution 487 to the Iranian case is not only appropriate and necessary but also firmly grounded in international law.

Another relevant document is UN Security Council Resolution 692, which was adopted in 1991 and established the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC) following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The commission was tasked with processing claims for compensation of losses and damages incurred as a result of the invasion.

The creation of UNCC demonstrated the capacity of international mechanisms to identify victims, evaluate damage, and implement practical compensation – setting a clear model for state responsibility in cases of unlawful aggression.

This precedent provides a strong legal and institutional basis for asserting the rights

of the Iranian people. It is therefore both appropriate and necessary for the UN to establish a rule-based mechanism, such as an international commission on compensation, to redress Iran.

Such a commission, initiated and endorsed by the UN General Assembly or other competent UN bodies, should undertake a comprehensive assessment of the damages inflicted by the unlawful and aggressive acts of the US and the Zionist regime against Iran. The establishment of reparative mechanisms – whether through independent commissions, fact-finding bodies, or compensation funds operating under international oversight – would contribute meaningfully to restoring trust in the global legal system and provide a principled response to the ongoing normalisation of impunity.

Iran also has another avenue for pursuing justice for the illegal attacks it was subjected to. In the lead-up to them, the IAEA published biased and politically motivated reports about the Iranian nuclear programme, which facilitated the commission of aggression by the US and Israel and breached the principle of neutrality.

This places Iran in a position to seek redress and claim damages from the agency under Article 17 of the IAEA Safeguards Agreement. As a state harmed by the agency's manifest negligence, Iran is entitled to full reparation for all material and moral damages inflicted upon its peaceful nuclear facilities and scientific personnel.

In this context, pursuing accountability for the IAEA, alongside the aggressor states, is a vital element of Iran's broader strategy to uphold accountability within the international legal order. By relying on recognised, legitimate, and binding international mechanisms, Iran will steadfastly defend the rights of its people at every forum.

Ultimately, responsibility for the recent crimes of this war of aggression does not lie solely with the direct perpetrators, the US and Israel, and those who aided them, the IAEA. All states and international organisations bear an undeniable obligation to implement effective legal measures to prevent such crimes. The international community as a whole must respond decisively. Silence, delay, or any form of complicity in the face of aggression and atrocities would reduce the principle of state accountability under international law to an empty slogan.

Gaza's hunger crisis is not a tragedy – it's a war tactic

Fuad Abu Saif

The catastrophe unfolding in Gaza cannot be understood solely through the lens of humanitarian crisis. What we are witnessing is not just a tragic consequence of war, but the deliberate use of starvation as a tool of political and demographic control. This strategy, designed to dismantle Palestinian society, amounts to a form of structural genocide.

The Israeli military and political leadership, in its pursuit of dominance and the erasure of Palestinian national aspirations, has moved beyond the tactics of bombardment and physical destruction. Today, its methods are more insidious: they target the core of Palestinian survival: food, water, and the means to endure.

Breaking the will of a people by denying them the ability to feed themselves is not collateral damage. It is policy. According to reports from independent international bodies, more than 95 percent of Gaza's farmland has been destroyed or rendered unusable. That figure is not just an economic loss; it is the intentional dismantling of food sovereignty, and with it, any hope of future independence.

The destruction is systematic. Seed access has been blocked. Water infrastructure has been targeted. Fisherfolk and farmers – already operating under extreme siege conditions – have been repeatedly attacked. These are not random acts. They are part of a broader plan to re-engineer Gaza's demographic and economic future in line with Israel's long-term strategic goals: absolute control and political submission.

What makes this all the more alarming is the complicity of the international community. Whether through silence or vague diplomatic statements that describe the situation as a "humanitarian crisis", global actors have helped normalise the use of starvation as a weapon of war. The refusal to name these actions for what they are – war crimes committed as part

of a genocide – has given Israel the cover to continue them with impunity.

Even more disturbing is how food itself has become a bargaining chip. Access to essentials like flour, baby formula, and bottled water is now being tied to political and military negotiations. This reveals a grim logic of power. The goal is not stability or mutual security – it is to impose political conditions through the calculated manipulation of civilian suffering.

By making Gaza entirely dependent on outside aid while systematically dismantling local means of survival, Israel has created a

accountability. This is not a famine born of drought. This is not the chaos of a failed state. This is a crime in progress – carried out with eyes wide open, under the protective cover of global indifference.

Let me also add that international civil society organisations and global social movements – such as La Via Campesina – are not standing by in silence. In fact, this September, some of the world's most prominent movements of farmers, fishers, and Indigenous Peoples – many of them from conflict-affected regions – will gather in Sri Lanka for the 3rd



trap in which Palestinians are stripped of all political and economic agency. They are being reduced to a population that can be managed, controlled, and bartered.

Every statistic coming out of Gaza must be read through this lens. That 100 percent of the population now suffers from food insecurity is not simply tragic; it is a marker of the strategy's progress. This is not about feeding the hungry. It is about breaking the spirit of a people and forcing them to accept a new reality on the occupier's terms.

And yet, Gaza's resilience persists. That defiance, under siege and starvation, has exposed the moral collapse of an international order that prefers managed crises to political

Nyeléni Global Forum. There, we aim to build a unified global response to the widespread indifference that turns a blind eye to the dispossession of entire communities. From the ground up, we are working to develop concrete proposals to ensure that food is never weaponised and that starvation is never used as a tactic of war. At the same time, countless acts of solidarity are unfolding across the globe, led by people of conscience who are demanding that their governments take action.

History will remember what is happening in Gaza. It will also remember those who chose to remain silent. Justice may be delayed, but it will come, and it will ask who stood by as starvation was used to try to break a people.

Delays in BEEF scholarships

The Balochistan Education Endowment Fund (BEEF) is a scholarship programme managed by the government. Recently, many students reported delays in receiving scholarship funds. These delays have caused serious challenges to the students, such as difficulty in paying tuition fee or buying books. As a result, deserving students have been forced to drop out or face unnecessary academic pressure. Another related issue is the lack of follow-up. Once the scholarship is awarded, there is no way to monitor whether the funds are reaching the recipients on time, or if they are facing any problems. To truly fulfil the mission, it is essential to improve the process and ensure transparency and efficiency.

Noreen M. Saleem
Turbat

Polio eradication efforts

According to the Emergency Operations Centre in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), militants have carried out 23 attacks against polio teams and security escorts in Pakistan this year. The safety of polio workers is a major concern, as these attacks put their lives at risk and hinder efforts to immunise children against the crippling disease. The recent abduction of polio workers is a stark reminder of the security challenges faced by frontline workers in Pakistan's polio eradication programme. The incident has sparked widespread condemnation, and has underscored the need for increased security measures to protect all our polio workers active in high-risk areas.

Bakhtiyar Phullan
Turbat

Breast cancer awareness

A few years ago, I lost my aunt to breast cancer. The family did not know she was suffering from the deadly disease because she chose to suffer in silence. By the time the family came to know of it, things had gone too far. In Pakistan, cases of breast cancer are rising at an alarming rate, but women do not feel confident about sharing their health problems. Close family members should play their role, and make communication stronger to have bonds of trust among them. More awareness and timely diagnoses can save precious lives.

Fizzah Kafeel
Lahore

Hydropower project threatens Swat river

The hydropower projects underway in Swat have put the valley, once known for its unmatched beauty, on the edge of an ecological and cultural disaster. The beautiful Swat River, which gives life to the valley and its people, is being pushed into tunnels as part of

a government hydropower project from Kalam to Madyan.

This plan will dry up over 50 kilometres of river, especially during winter, and destroy the natural beauty, culture and economy of the region. The government says this is for electricity, but Pakistan already makes more electricity than it consumes. The real problem is not power shortage — it is corruption, bad management, and power theft. So, why should the people of Swat lose their river, their income, and their future for a mistake they did not commit? Many people in Swat depend on the river for farming, fishing and tourism. If the river disappears, thousands will lose their jobs, hotels will shut down, the famous trout fish will be extinct, and more people will be forced to leave their homes. It is already happening. Reports say 12,000 people have left the area due to lost opportunities.

Even worse, these projects were planned without taking the local people into confidence. There were no public meetings, no environmental checks, and no fair compensation. In a place where people already struggle for schools and hospitals, this 'development' feels more like a punishment. The Swat River should not be sacrificed for cities that do not even know it exists. Let the river flow. Let Swat live.

Azmat Ullah
Swat

Lavish Gulf receptions for Trump

During his recent tour to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar, United States President Donald Trump was accorded receptions and given gifts that were outlandish even by the standards of oil-rich Gulf states. Everything during the entire tour was marked by pomp and glitter.

Yet, these countries, and, indeed, others in the Islamic world, have not been able to feed their brethren undergoing unprecedented sufferings in Gaza for the last more than 20 months. This is as embarrassing as it is criminal. During the trip, even Trump was quoted in international media as having noted that the people in Gaza were starving amid critically serious shortage of food and healthcare supplies. But the gracious — unnecessarily gracious — hosts could not take up the matter with their mighty guest.

Mansoor ul Haque Solangi
Karachi

Global hypocrisy over Gaza

In an age where human rights are paraded as pillars of global civility, Israel's recent strike on Iranian sites amid sensitive nuclear negotiations has laid bare the staggering hypocrisy of world powers. At the heart of this aggression is not a state defending itself, but a desperate Benjamin

Netanyahu who is gambling with regional peace to salvage his crumbling political future.

Netanyahu, under fire for corruption and global outrage over his Gaza genocide, is weaponising just about everything to distract a disillusioned public and to placate ultranationalist factions. This is not strength; it is fear-fuelled provocation. His regime has unleashed a relentless campaign in Gaza for nearly 20 months now. Over 56,000 Palestinians, more than half women and children, have been slaughtered, 135,000 have been wounded, and civilian infrastructure has been obliterated. Aid is blocked, journalists have been silenced, with about 180 of them having been killed, and yet the world continues to look away.

This is not war; it is annihilation. And it continues because Israel is shielded by the United States and its Western allies, who cloak barbarity under the banner of 'self-defence'. International law is mocked. And, institutions like the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nations Security Council have been rendered impotent by double standards and veto politics. Now under Donald Trump's second term in the White House, America's duplicity has become its foreign policy, with open warfare masquerading as diplomacy. While calling for de-escalation, the White House continues to supply arms worth billions of dollars to Israel, including bunker busters and precision missiles, ensuring that Tel Aviv's path of destruction remains well-paved.

Trump may sound more measured in this term, but his foreign policy remains as transactional as ever, supporting allies based on strategic value, not moral principle. Abstentions at the UN, refusal to condemn Israeli war crimes, and the use of veto when nothing else works reflect a policy that enables atrocity while preaching peace. Where is the Muslim world? Apart from Pakistan's commendable and consistent stance, others have largely retreated into silence. Statements mean little unless followed by sanctions, boycotts and coordinated diplomatic offensives. Solidarity cannot remain symbolic; it must be strategic.

As Gaza lies in ruins and Iran is pulled into the storm, the deeper tragedy is the shrinking soul of global conscience. The world watches desensitised as the Middle East is pushed towards catastrophic collapse. The road to hell is paved not just with bombs, but with the hypocrisy and silence of those who could stop them.

This is not merely a Palestinian crisis; it is a collapse of global moral order. If multipolarity cannot check madness, it is nothing but a myth. Let this be clearly said: the choice before the world is no longer between peace and war, but between justice and complicity in genocide.

Majid Burfat
Karachi

Tentacled 'jellyfish' galaxy swimming through deep space discovered

Perri Thaler

Astronomers have discovered what seems to be a new "jellyfish" galaxy about 12 billion light-years away from Earth using high-resolution imaging from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).



The galaxy appears to have tentacle-like trails of gas and stars jutting off from one side, likely making it a jellyfish galaxy — a class of galaxies that drip tendrils of star-forming material as they swim through space. Though more analysis is needed to confirm whether the newfound galaxy truly falls into this category, all signs so far indicate that it does.

Ian Roberts, an astronomer at Waterloo University, found the unique galaxy while sifting through images taken by JWST. His team's research is available to read on the preprint server arXiv, but has not yet been peer reviewed. "The fact that an interesting galaxy such as this one could be found in such a cursory way suggested that there would be real value in doing a truly systematic search for these sorts of objects," Roberts told Live Science in an email.

Jellyfish galaxies develop their tentacles as they undergo a phenomenon called ram pressure stripping, which happens when a galaxy moves through the dense medium between other closeby galaxies within a galaxy cluster. This movement eventually pushes some gas and stars out of the roaming galaxy, leaving them to trail behind.

Is 'razor blade throat' really a sign of the newest COVID variant?

Jenna Anderson

By now, you may have seen headlines linking an alarming new COVID symptom dubbed "razor blade throat" to NB.1.8.1, the variant currently surging in the United States.



The term originated in China, where the strain was first detected, according to the Los Angeles Times. On social media, patients have also described experiencing a scratchy, severe sore throat they attribute to NB.1.8.1, which was first discovered in the U.S. in March. Since then, NB.1.8.1 has become the nation's dominant strain, accounting for an estimated 43% of cases in June, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Now that NB.1.8.1 is circulating more than any other variant, just how worried should you be about catching it and developing an unusually intense sore throat? Here's what experts had to say about the much-talked-about symptom. Experts say it's certainly possible for COVID patients to experience a very painful sore throat, but there's no evidence to suggest that's unique to NB.1.8.1. "There may be some slight variation to the symptoms, but not enough to be able to hang your hat on and say this is really distinctive, like the loss of smell was early on in COVID," Geeta Sood, MD, ScM, an assistant professor of medicine and hospital epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center, told Health. "I'm not really hearing a lot about, 'Oh my God, my throat has been killing me,'" she added.

Sood did point out that the low COVID vaccination rates this season may make patients more susceptible to severe illness. But this variant is likely not an outlier. "We don't have any reason to believe that this variant would have different symptoms than any other," Shira Doron, MD, chief infection control officer for Tufts Medicine and hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center, told Health.

Drinking sugar could be worse for your health than eating it

Brian Mastroianni

You probably know that too much sugar is bad for your health, but a new analysis suggests that how you consume sugar might matter just as much as the amount you take in. The review of nearly 30 studies,



published in the journal *Advances in Nutrition*, found that drinking sugary beverages like soda may increase your risk of type 2 diabetes more than eating sugary foods like cookies and cakes. "This research fills an important gap by emphasizing the context in which sugar is consumed," lead study author Karen Della Corte, PhD, an assistant professor of nutrition, dietetics, and food science at Brigham Young University, told Health. "Rather than making blanket statements to 'cut all sugar,' we now have strong evidence that the source, form, and surrounding nutrients are key determinants of risk," she said. In what Della Corte called the first large-scale analysis of how the type of sugar intake affects health, researchers reviewed 29 studies analyzing the habits of more than 500,000 people across multiple continents. Their surprising conclusion: Sugar from non-liquid sources wasn't linked to a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, but consuming sugar-sweetened drinks was. With every additional daily 12-ounce serving of a sugary beverage like energy and sports drinks, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes went up by 25%. Even fruit juice had an effect, with every added 8-ounce serving raising the risk by 5%.

125,000-year-old 'fat factory' run by Neanderthals discovered in Germany

Perri Thaler

Neanderthals were running a potentially lifesaving "fat factory" around 125,000 years ago in what is now Germany, a new study finds.



The research, published in the journal *Science*, reveals that these archaic human relatives had a process for extracting grease from animal bones — and it may have saved them from a lethal condition. The condition, known as protein poisoning or rabbit starvation, happens when humans eat too much protein and don't get enough fat or carbohydrates. Neanderthals would have likely been at high risk of protein poisoning, as they largely ate meat.

The "fat factory" discovery suggests that hominins, or humans and our close relatives, were practicing resource intensification — getting more utility out of the materials they had available — much earlier than previously thought. Before this analysis, the earliest evidence for resource intensification dated to 28,000 years ago, long after the Neanderthals' extinction, according to the study. Scientists found the Paleolithic factory after uncovering the fragmented remains of 172 large animals, including horses, deer and cattle, as well as Neanderthal-made anvils and hammerstones. After analyzing the bones, the team found that Neanderthals had first smashed the bones to get to the marrow — a soft, edible tissue inside of some bones — before boiling them to extract the fat. It appears that Neanderthals ate both the marrow and the fat, which would have maximized the amount of food and nutrients they got from an animal carcass.



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