

WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL



FIXING PAKISTAN'S BROKEN TAX SYSTEM

FBR



TRY IT FOR **Rs. 499** ONLY

Also available in 400ml for Rs. 699



Mreet[®]
Elevate your routine!

ٹریٹ شیونگ فوم

Index

CUTTING EDGE

4

Economics
Fixing Pakistan's broken tax system

5

Opinion
Flood disaster and climate change

6

Economics
Business optimism flatlines

7

Economics
Inflation eases but food prices spark fresh worries

8

Economics
Reform risks in Pakistan

9

Governance
The urgency of Afghan refugee return

10

Opinion
Diabetes: Pakistan's silent crisis

11

Dialogue
The Alaska summit was a spectacular distraction

12

War
Gaza is no anomaly: Hunger and hoarding are the West's oldest weapons

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.

Founding Editor
Dr Niloufer Mahdi
Sub-Editor
Rizwan Ahmad
Communication Manager
Usman Riaz
Webmaster
Imran Shoukat

Editorial Office:
Treet Corporation Limited
2-H, Gulberg-II, Lahore
Phone +92-42-35817141-47,
Fax: +92-42-35817138
weeklycuttingedge@gmail.com
editor@weeklycuttingedge.com
info@weeklycuttingedge.com
Printed by Creative Vorks,
Plot# 203, Green Light Street,
Mughal Park, Bund Road, Lahore.

For subscription, please contact
info@weeklycutting.com

Fixing Pakistan's broken tax system

Farhan Khan

The government has once again announced new measures to raise the tax revenue which is much below the country's economic potential. Pakistan's taxation system is riddled with inefficiencies and corruption that hinder fair distribution of resources. When compared to nations with high tax-to-GDP ratios, the gaps in Pakistan's fiscal policies become glaringly exposed.

Countries with high tax-to-GDP ratios have progressive tax systems that ensure equitable distribution of resources. Many Western countries with tax-to-GDP ratios exceeding 40 percent, utilise social security contributions and tax money to fund comprehensive welfare programmes.

Against an estimated tax revenue potential of around 20-22 per cent of GDP, government revenue totals 12.5pc of GDP, significantly below the average for low- and middle-income countries. Pakistan's current tax-to-GDP ratio of 9.2 percent, is significantly below the global average of about 30 percent. Almost all Asian countries are far ahead of Pakistan in this regard, including Japan (34.1 percent), Korea (32.0 percent) and Mongolia (24.6 percent). Even India and Bangladesh are ahead of Pakistan in collecting taxes relative to GDP.

The Federal Board of Revenue has historically failed to meet its revenue collection targets, exasperating fiscal deficits. In the fiscal year 2023-24, the FBR collected Rs 9,306 billion, falling short of the original target by Rs 109 billion. The revenue shortfall of Rs 344 billion in the first five months of FY 2024-25 exemplifies the challenges in meeting these targets. As pointed out by experts, Pakistan's tax regime is unfair, unjust and regressive, putting disproportionately large burdens on the salaried class and small businesses. New amendments were announced recently removing tax benefits for export sectors and increasing levies on salaried individuals. Reform measures aimed at broadening the tax base do not address the underlying issues of tax evasion by wealthy individuals and open-ended concessions for the rich and the powerful.

Pakistan's reliance on indirect taxes under the garb of direct taxation through numerous withholding provisions, which constitute over 60 percent of total tax revenue, disproportionately affects low-income groups. Direct taxes account for a larger share of revenue in developed economies, promoting equity. For example, personal income taxes represent 23.7 percent of

total tax revenue in OECD countries, compared to 15.9 percent in Asia-Pacific and even less in Pakistan. Moving away from indirect to direct taxation is essential to achieve equity.

While the poor people bear the burden of heavy taxation, Pakistan's elites ruthlessly exploit state resources. Successive governments have failed to curb tax evasion, exemptions, and corruption, worsening inequality and poverty levels. In the past efforts have been made to reform the tax system with borrowed funds from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank etc., but to no avail. The elite classes use the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) as a tool to get tax breaks and exemptions. The Bureau has been rendered powerless to tax the enormous assets owned by the elites. Worse still,

effectively utilise tax revenues to enhance public services and improve living standards.

The agricultural sector in Pakistan, which contributes 24 percent to the GDP, remains largely untaxed, perpetuating a fiscal imbalance. Recent initiatives by some provincial governments to impose income tax on agricultural earnings, have failed to yield the desired results. Comprehensive laws, effective implementation and equitable enforcement are essential steps towards reforming the taxation system. In the given situation, Pakistan needs to adopt a multi-pronged approach to reform its taxation system. First, we need to broaden the tax base by integrating the informal economy and eliminating exemptions and concessions to various groups. Second, we must



high officials enjoy a life of luxury at taxpayers' expense, with free utilities, perks, perquisites, plots, clubs, golf courses, travel allowances and medical treatments abroad.

Inefficiencies, incompetence and corruption in the FBR hinder effective tax collection. The absence of a comprehensive tax database and reliance on manual processes exacerbate revenue leaks. Advanced economies employ technology-driven solutions, such as electronic invoicing and data analytics, to enhance compliance and minimise evasion. One reason for low tax compliance is that Pakistan's taxation system fails to translate revenues into tangible benefits for citizens. The lack of investment in health, education, and infrastructure exacerbates socioeconomic disparities. In comparison, countries with high tax-to-GDP ratios

invest in technology and capacity building to ensure efficiency and transparency. There is also a need to promote a culture of voluntary compliance through incentives and public awareness campaigns. At the same time, tax policies must be reoriented to promote exports and attract investments.

The reform measure should be accompanied by equitable tax policies and efficient utilisation of resources. The introduction of digital tax platforms and simplification of procedures can ease compliance burdens and attract more investments. Pakistan's taxation system should be completely recast to address its anomalies and align it with global best practices. If need be, we should consider hiring well known international tax experts to help us in the matter.

Flood disaster and climate change

Nasim Ahmed

Torrential rains and sudden cloudburst have caused widespread damage to life and property in the northern regions of Pakistan. Last week Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was battered by severe flash floods, with the toll rising to 323 people dead and 156 injured, with 217 deaths recorded in Buner alone. The KP government declared an emergency as heavy rains ravaged homes, displaced families, and left a trail of destruction across Buner, Swat, Shangla, Mansehra, and beyond.

Last Sunday, the PDMA released an updated damage report detailing casualties and property damage: "The dead include 273 men, 29 women and 21 children, while the injured include 123 men, 23 women and 10 children." The PDMA's figures also show that 320 cattle heads were killed in the flooding, while 336 homes, 57 schools and 23 other structures were damaged or completely destroyed. In Swat, 219 homes were affected, with 177 partially destroyed and 42 fully destroyed. Around 163 cattle heads also perished in the district, affecting people's livelihoods. According to the PDMA, thousands of people have been displaced in Buner district, which has borne the brunt of recent floods.

As per the NDMA report, Pakistan's cumulative death toll since June 26 from rain-related untoward events has surged to over 645. KP has reported the highest number of deaths at 383, followed by Punjab with 164, the northern Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Sindh with 28 deaths each, Balochistan 29, Azad Kashmir 14 and Islamabad eight casualties.

The ravage caused by the recent rain-fed floods is a stark reminder of the cataclysmic floods of June 2022, where unusually heavy rains and the melting of glaciers triggered flash floods in several parts of the country. In that year, Pakistan reported at least 1,700 people dead and losses of over \$30 billion, with large swathes of crops and infrastructure destroyed by ravaging waters. NDMA Chairman Lt. Gen. Inam Haider Malik has stated that Pakistan was receiving 50 to 60 percent more rain this year compared to 2024.

Needless to say, the climate calamity has been getting worse in Pakistan with every pass-

ing year. Pakistan is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change and is facing extreme weather vagaries with increasing frequency. Among the many factors exasperating climate change is deforestation driven by illegal logging, wildfires, and the conversion of forest land for agriculture, commercial development, and mushrooming housing schemes. Pakistan has the highest deforestation rate in South Asia and now has only five per cent forest cover. In the last 40 years, Pakistan's forest cover has shrunk by 18pc, falling from 3.78 million hectares in the 1980s to a mere 3.09 million hectares in 2025.

The northern region of Pakistan is dotted with numerous glaciers which are fast melting and retreating because of global warming, with

maintain more dams and retention ponds to help regulate water flow and prevent overflowing. Similarly, investing in comprehensive drainage systems in urban and rural areas can help manage excess water. Wetlands act as natural sponges, absorbing excess water and reducing flood peaks. An urgent need is to develop and strengthen early warning systems because timely and accurate flood forecasts can give people ample time to evacuate and move to safer places. Educating communities about flood risks, evacuation procedures, and emergency preparedness can significantly reduce casualties and damage to life and property.

At the same time, the government must pass strict laws to prevent construction in areas at high risk of flooding. Planting trees can help



debris such as rocks, soil, and other materials more vulnerable to being dislodged from their bases. Monsoon rains are now further destabilising the mountains, resulting in landslides that sometimes block rivers and cause them to overflow their banks. Glaciologists say that ice melt is a contributing factor causing landslides.

According to experts, Pakistan can minimize flood damage through a combination of structural and non-structural measures, including improving water management infrastructure, enhancing early warning systems, implementing land use planning, and promoting community-based disaster preparedness. Specifically, reforestation, wetland restoration, and sustainable land management practices can significantly reduce flood risks.

To this end we should plan to build and

reduce soil erosion, slow down water runoff, and improve water absorption. Forests and mangroves act as natural buffers against floods, absorbing excess water and reducing wave energy. To minimise climate change impacts the government should invest more in climate-resilient infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of climate change, such as more intense rainfall.

Similarly, adopting farming practices that are resilient to changing weather patterns can help reduce flood impacts on agriculture. Expert opinion is that by implementing these measures, Pakistan can significantly reduce its vulnerability to floods and minimize the devastating impacts on lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure. And the earlier the suggested remedial measures are taken, the better.

Business optimism flatlines

Muhammad Hassan

The latest Gallup findings reveal that forward-looking confidence among businesses has flattened, with deep-rooted challenges—rising inflation, unreliable energy supply, and governance flaws—continuing to dominate Pakistan’s economic climate. Despite selective signs of recovery, firms report worsening conditions, shrinking workforces, and growing discontent with government policies shaped by IMF requirements.

The freshest Gallup survey unfurls a rather striking revelation: entrepreneurial confidence has climbed to its loftiest altitude in four years. Such a surge is no trifling feat, particularly when one recalls the repeated mantras of successive economic custodians, who—like their forebears—have persistently underscored the private sector as the locomotive of national expansion.

The survey, carried out between July 23 and 27 with responses from 524 businesses in manufacturing, services, and trade, revealed that 46 percent of participants rated the current government’s economic management more positively than that of the previous PTI-led administration — up from only 24 percent a year ago.

Though the index lingered slightly in the red during the second quarter

of 2025, it still towered at its most sanguine threshold since the twilight of 2021. The survey remarked that this signals a tentative lessening of political and financial disquiet from the lens of commerce. Yet, one cannot ignore that comparing today’s terrain with that of 2021 is somewhat lopsided, given that both the homeland and the wider globe were shackled then by recurring waves of Covid-19, throttling economic activity with merciless severity.

Equally pivotal is the observation that a succession of Monetary Policy Statements over the past year foresaw an emergent ascent in production. The communiqué of July 31, 2025, reaffirmed this view, noting that “swift-turn indicators reveal a gradual revival.” It pointed to pronounced year-on-year surges in automobile dispatches, fertilizer uptake, credit to the private domain, inflows of intermediate commodi-

ties and machinery, as well as improvements in the purchasing managers’ index. These stirrings have begun to filter into Large-Scale Manufacturing (LSM), where output recorded annual growth in April and May, breaking a half-year spell of decline.

Yet the Finance Division’s “July Economic Update and Outlook” sketches a less flattering portrait. It registers LSM growth between July and May 2025 at negative 1.21 percent, a deterioration compared with the preceding year’s 0.86 percent. This discordant figure casts a long shadow on the exuberance of a proclaimed four-year pinnacle. Independent economists, aligning with the July MPS, contend that much of the recorded buoyancy in sales stems not from genuine output expansion but from accelerated clearance of stockpiles, thinning inventories rather than swelling production.

Nevertheless, the Gallup poll’s core insights warrant attention. Its findings, albeit

Around one in five businesses (22 percent) reported having to pay a bribe in the past six months which is a decline of 4 percent in the first quarter of 2025. And concerning is the fact that more manufacturers reported having paid a bribe (25 percent) compared to service providers (20 percent) and 43 percent of businesses surveyed claimed that their workforce had decreased in the second quarter of 2025, a 9 percent further reduction from the first quarter data — a concerning statistic for the government. Around 85 percent did not consider last year’s budget as a good budget while reports backed by anecdotal surveys indicate that the numbers who do not consider 2025 budget a good one has probably risen given that the incentives — monetary, fiscal and utility tariffs — have been withdrawn as per the conditions agreed with the International Monetary Fund which is generating considerable criticism within the business community.



tinged with contradictions from official economic digests, sketch the outlines of a business community cautiously rediscovering its confidence—even if the ground beneath remains uneven.

Forward looking confidence of the business community has plateaued and longstanding challenges including inflation, energy reliability and governance remain central to the country’s business climate. Over 55 percent of businesses in the second quarter of 2024 (October to December 2024) found themselves worse off relative to the first quarter of 2024 (July-September 2024) — an observation that is baffling given that the survey was conducted 23 July to 27 July 2024 or well before the start of the second quarter of 2025 and does not include the May and April LSM data that the MPS stated as indicative of an upward trend.

To conclude, granted that surveys have an experimenter bias and the questions simply support that bias yet the economy is clearly not out of the woods yet and the private sector continues to struggle with the IMF insisting on full-cost recovery of state utility companies, ending all incentives, including setting up economic zones, and implementing severely contractionary fiscal and monetary policies that are anti-growth.

While business surveys often reflect inherent biases, the broader economic picture remains clear: the private sector has yet to find stable ground. With IMF-driven austerity—ranging from full cost recovery of utilities to the removal of fiscal and monetary incentives—Pakistan’s growth outlook remains constrained, leaving businesses grappling with uncertainty rather than expansion.

Inflation eases but food prices spark fresh worries

Muhammad Zain

Pakistan's inflationary landscape painted a mixed picture in July 2025. While headline inflation indicators signaled a sharp cooldown compared to last year, the relief was tempered by surging food prices that hit household budgets.

Official data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics revealed that the Consumer Price Index fell dramatically year-on-year, yet essentials such as vegetables, chicken, and sugar continued to strain consumers, keeping inflationary anxieties alive.

Pakistan's yearly inflation spiraled to 4.07 percent in July 2025, edging higher from 3.2 percent a month earlier, marking its steepest ascent since December 2024. By contrast, the corresponding month of July in the previous year had witnessed a markedly sharper inflationary pulse at 11.09 percent. This renewed surge was primarily driven by a rekindling of housing and utilities tariffs, which vaulted 3.56 percent after a prior slump of 3.28 percent in June. Likewise, transportation expenses surged by 2.7 percent, an uptick from the modest 0.6 percent recorded the month before.

Yet, the upswing was somewhat cushioned by subdued increments in food and non-alcoholic consumables, which slackened to 0.9 percent from 2.6 percent, alongside a fall in recreation and cultural activities, where prices tumbled by 1.5 percent. Other segments such as attire and footwear, intoxicants and tobacco, household furnishings and maintenance, healthcare, hospitality services, and miscellaneous commodities also reported gentler ascensions in July.

This intensified inflationary readout arrived shortly after the State Bank of Pakistan cautioned of a deteriorating price outlook and resolved to maintain its policy rate steady at 11 percent. The central bank's monetary committee underscored that energy tariffs, particularly natural gas, had ascended more abruptly than anticipated. It emphasized that the real policy rate must remain positive if inflation is to be tethered within the targeted 5 to 7 percent corridor.

Meanwhile, Pakistan continues to navigate stringent fiscal adjustments under a \$7 billion IMF arrangement, which includes a contractionary budget unveiled in June, designed to pare down public expenditures and shrink the fiscal chasm. However, independent economists contend that such elevated borrowing costs could obstruct fiscal maneuverability, complicating deficit management and amplifying the weight of debt servicing. Presently, nearly three-fourths of national revenues are being siphoned into

interest payments, predominantly on domestic obligations secured from commercial banks.

At present, the real interest rate—calculated as the prevailing benchmark rate minus inflation—stands at 6.93 percent. Sustaining such an elevated positive real rate imperils fiscal durability, as it inflates borrowing costs and magnifies the burden of debt servicing, tightening the government's already strained financial straits.

In fiscal year 2024-25, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) settled at 4.49 percent, a steep descent from the staggering 23.41 percent witnessed in FY24.

Core inflation—stripped of the volatile swings in food and energy—nudged upward to 7 percent in July, slightly above June's 6.9 percent, yet still well below the 11.7 percent recorded in July 2024. Urban inflation was reported at 4.4 percent, while rural regions posted a softer 3.5 percent, both markedly lower compared with last

commodities continued their upward march. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported weekly inflation climbing 0.31 percent, while annual inflation edged to 2.21 percent. Out of the tracked items, 17 saw price hikes. Tomatoes jumped by Rs10.42 per kilogram, live broiler chicken by Rs19.67, a dozen eggs by Rs6.19, and a 20-kilogram flour sack surged by more than Rs21. Other staples such as onions, garlic, black gram, and jaggery also registered increases. Conversely, bananas, potatoes, rice, and LPG cylinders became cheaper. Prices of 24 items held steady, while 9 slipped downward.

The government's attempts to peg sugar at Rs173 per kilogram have largely faltered. Retailers in Islamabad, Karachi, and Peshawar continue to defy official directives, demanding up to Rs190 per kilogram.

According to PBS data, the average sugar price crept upward by 0.52 paisas per kilogram



year's 13.2 percent and 8.1 percent, respectively.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) continued its downward trajectory, dipping 0.5 percent in July after June's 0.6 percent decline. This stands in stark contrast to July 2024, when WPI was soaring at 10.4 percent.

Still, volatility was evident in the food basket. Fresh vegetables rocketed by 45.76 percent in July. Chicken followed with a sharp 29.73 percent rise, tomatoes surged 19.9 percent, potatoes climbed 10.97 percent, onions 9.36 percent, sugar 6.11 percent, gur 3.48 percent, and rice 1.46 percent. Yet some relief appeared: eggs slumped 14.5 percent, fresh fruits slipped 7.17 percent, and wheat flour fell 1.03 percent.

For the second consecutive week, essential

during the week. In Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Sialkot, and Bannu, sugar traded at Rs185, while in Quetta it sold for Rs182. Hyderabad and Larkana marked Rs181 per kilogram. Only in Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sargodha was sugar found at the prescribed official rate.

Though broader inflation metrics suggest Pakistan has stepped back from the brink of last year's double-digit turbulence, the persistence of price hikes in everyday essentials underscores a lingering fragility in the economy. Unless corrective measures rein in food inflation and ensure compliance with official price caps, the respite from falling CPI and WPI may prove short-lived for ordinary households already stretched by rising costs.

Reform risks in Pakistan

Shahid Hussain

Despite a modest upgrade in Pakistan's sovereign rating, Moody's has underscored persistent vulnerabilities in the country's external and fiscal outlook.

The agency cautioned that foreign exchange reserves remain fragile and far below the level required to meet looming external obligations, while debt affordability continues to rank among the weakest of all rated sovereigns. It further warned that any slippage in reform implementation or delays in IMF reviews could once again erode external stability, placing Pakistan at heightened risk.

The global credit evaluator still elevated Pakistan's sovereign credit standing by a notch, advancing it from Caa2 to Caal, while simultaneously moderating the outlook from "positive" to "stable." The agency underscored Islamabad's fortifying external buffers as the principal catalyst behind this decision. Moody's operates one of the most authoritative grading frameworks for measuring the creditworthiness of states, corporations, and debt securities. In its communiqué, the New York-based ratings house declared: "Moody's Ratings has elevated the Government of Pakistan's local and foreign currency issuer and senior unsecured debt ratings to Caal from Caa2." The institution further amended the country's trajectory to "stable," reflecting a leveling of risks in the foreseeable horizon. The agency simultaneously revised upward the grade of Pakistan's senior unsecured medium-term note programme, assigning it (P) Caal in place of the earlier (P) Caa2.

According to Moody's, the rationale for the elevation is intertwined with Pakistan's improving external posture, underpinned by its incremental compliance with reforms outlined in the International Monetary Fund's Extended Fund Facility (EFF). Yet, the report tempered optimism by cautioning that the sovereign remains hamstrung by fragile governance and persistent political flux. It projected that foreign exchange reserves are poised for further accretion, though Pakistan's reliance on well-timed disbursements from multilateral and bilateral patrons would persist. Parallel to this, the country's fiscal complexion — once enfeebled — has shown tentative rejuvenation, aided by widening taxation streams. Nevertheless, debt affordability continues to languish among the weakest globally.

By ascribing a "stable" outlook, Moody's signaled equilibrium: upside prospects rest in accelerated relief in debt-servicing pressures and a sturdier external ledger; conversely, hazards

linger in potential deferrals of reform execution, which could unravel hard-won gains in financial steadiness.

The ratings house clarified that the upgrade to Caal also extends to the backed foreign currency senior unsecured notes under the Pakistan Global Sukuk Programme Co Ltd, with its outlook equally reset to "stable." Additionally, Moody's adjusted Pakistan's country ceilings, lifting the local currency ceiling to B2 from B3, and the foreign currency ceiling to Caal from Caa2. The two-notch divergence between the sovereign rating and the local currency ceiling was attributed to Islamabad's oversized economic footprint, institutional frailty, and heightened exposure to both domestic and external volatilities.

"Pakistan's external position has continued to strengthen over the past year,"



Moody's said, adding it expected further gradual improvements as progress in reform implementation under the IMF programme supports financing from bilateral and multilateral partners. "In turn, this contributes to continued increases in the sovereign's foreign exchange reserves, albeit from still fragile levels," it noted.

"We expect Pakistan to fully meet its external debt obligations for the next few years, contingent on steady progress on reform implementation and timely completion of IMF reviews. Nonetheless, Pakistan's external position remains fragile," Moody's cautioned. "Its foreign exchange reserves remain well below what is required to meet its external debt obligations, underscoring the importance of steady progress with the IMF programme to continually unlock financing," it explained, estimating that Pakistan's external financing needs were about \$24-25bn in FY2026, and similar amounts again in FY2027.

Detailing its rationale for the rating upgrade, Moody's noted that Pakistan fully met its external debt obligations and added to its

foreign exchange reserves in FY2025. "Reserves rose to \$14.3 billion as of 25 July 2025, equivalent to about ten weeks of imports," it said, comparing them to \$9.4bn at the time of the last rating update in August 2024.

The agency also pointed out Pakistan's successful completion of the IMF programme's first review, unlocking a \$1bn disbursement in May 2025, and a \$1bn commercial loan in June 2025 by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Outlining its rationale for the stable outlook rank, Moody's observed that it reflected "balanced risks to Pakistan's credit profile".

On the upside, it said, a building track record of reforms and revenue-raising measures could unlock more financing, which in turn would further boost foreign exchange reserves and the external position. "On the downside, there remains risks of slippage in reform implementation or results, leading to delays in or withdrawing of financing support from official partners," it warned, saying it could lead to renewed material deterioration in the sovereign's external position.

"The current government formed after the February 2024 elections faces a significant challenge to continually implement revenue-raising measures without triggering social tensions," the agency underscored. Pakistan's fiscal position has improved from very weak levels, reflecting progress in implementing revenue-raising measures, Moody's observed.

Citing narrowing budget deficits and widening primary surpluses, the rating agency said the government debt affordability was "also improving, although it remains one of the weakest among our rated sovereigns". Noting strengthened revenue collection, it said: "We expect the government to continue enhancing revenue administration and compliance, alongside the introduction of new tax measures."

Noting new taxes introduced on solar panels and e-commerce businesses in the recent budget, Moody's estimated tax revenues to pick up by another 0.5 percentage points of GDP in FY2026. "However, a decline in SBP dividends will lead to an overall narrowing of government revenue to about 15-15.5 per cent of GDP," it added.

Moody's stressed that Pakistan's fiscal and external improvements remain tenuous, with the government still heavily reliant on timely support from official partners. The challenge of raising revenues without fueling public discontent, coupled with fragile reserves and one of the world's weakest debt affordability profiles, leaves the sovereign exposed to renewed instability if reforms falter.

The urgency of Afghan refugee return

Raza Khan

A significant step has finally been taken by Pakistan, with the federal government deciding to begin the repatriation of all Afghan refugees without further delay. The provinces have been informed that the formal deportation of over 1.3 million Afghans holding Proof of Registration (PoR) cards will commence on September 1, 2025.

This decision follows the interior ministry's July 31 announcement that PoR cardholders — the last category of Afghans legally residing in Pakistan without visas — became unlawful residents after their cards expired on June 30, 2025. To implement this plan, the ministry issued a directive on August 4 to the chief secretaries and police chiefs of the four provinces, as well as to Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, outlining the roadmap for the ongoing Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP).

According to the letter, voluntary returns are to begin immediately, while formal repatriation and deportation will take effect from September 1. The Nadra will handle the deregistration process at transit points and border terminals, while the FIA will assist at designated crossings. Provincial governments and relevant agencies have been tasked with mapping all PoR cardholders, setting up transit areas for deportees, and arranging transportation and financial support.

For over four decades, Pakistan has repeatedly extended the stay of millions of Afghan citizens and refugees. Extensions were often granted every six months by the federal cabinet and the interior ministry, creating the impression among both Pakistanis and Afghans that these refugees would remain in Pakistan permanently. Even after Pakistan's October 2023 announcement that all illegal Afghans must leave within a month, only unregistered Afghans were targeted, while those holding Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs) or PoR cards were allowed to stay. This led many observers to believe that registered Afghan nationals would be permitted indefinite residence.

According to UNHCR figures, by June 30, 2025, more than 1.3 million Afghans remained in Pakistan. Of these, 717,945 lived in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 326,584 in Balochistan, 195,188 in Punjab, 75,510 in Sindh, and 43,154 in Islamabad. Despite hosting the largest share of Afghan refugees, KP's PTI-led provincial government, particularly Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, has opposed

their forced repatriation — a stance that has complicated Islamabad's efforts to enforce its 2023 policy.

It is heartening to note that the PTI-led government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has finally recognized the pressing need to repatriate millions of Afghans due to the involvement of many Afghan nationals in terrorism, subversive activities, and criminal networks across the province. The shift in stance is evident from a series of concrete measures recently taken by the provincial authorities.

A key step was the meeting of the KP Provincial Steering Committee (PSC) on the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP). According to the minutes, the committee directed district administrations, police, and the Special Branch to form teams and hold jirgas with Afghan elders to encourage voluntary repatriation. Deputy commissioners were also tasked with remapping PoR cardholders, while the Commissionerate of Afghan Refugees was advised to de-notify refugee camps as they no longer served any purpose. Following this, the provin-

which is both encouraging and necessary.

By 2023, nearly 4.4 million Afghans were living in Pakistan, legally and illegally. Since November 2023, around 800,000 have reportedly returned. At present, Pakistan still hosts about 0.8 million Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders, 1.3 million PoR cardholders, 0.6 million undocumented Afghans, and an additional 700,000 who arrived after the Taliban takeover in 2021 — a total of more than three million individuals. For a politically and economically fragile country like Pakistan, this is an enormous burden and a grave security risk.

Over the past four decades, Afghan refugees — at one point reaching nearly 4.5 million, the largest refugee population in the world — have enjoyed unrestricted freedom of movement and activity in Pakistan. This has come at a high cost: economic losses, the spread of illegal weapons, the proliferation of extremist seminaries, and deep cultural disruptions. For years, policymakers tolerated this situation under the illusion of pursuing “strategic depth” in Afghanistan. That notion



cial government issued large advertisements in national newspapers urging Afghans to leave voluntarily, as their stay had become illegal after the expiry of PoR cards on June 30, 2025.

These measures underscore that this time Islamabad is unlikely to backtrack on its decision to repatriate Afghan refugees. Interestingly, Pakistan's recent improvement in diplomatic relations with the Afghan Taliban regime — which has shown some willingness to restrain the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — had raised expectations that Islamabad might soften its stance. However, the government has maintained its firm position,

has long proved hollow, while the continued presence of millions of Afghans has created an existential threat to Pakistan. Many refugees have been exploited by hostile intelligence agencies, while others have developed hostility toward Pakistan itself. Their interaction with anti-state groups within Pakistan has only magnified the danger.

In this context, Pakistan's decision to fast-track the repatriation of all Afghan nationals is not only timely but vital for its security, stability, and sovereignty. It marks a long-overdue correction of a policy that has cost the nation dearly for decades.

Diabetes: Pakistan's silent crisis

Dr. Fatima Khan

Diabetes, particularly type 2, has tightened its grip on Pakistan, pushing the country into one of the worst health crises of its time. With over 3.4 million people suffering from diabetic foot and millions more at risk of heart disease, kidney failure, blindness, and disability, the disease has become a national emergency.

The International Diabetes Federation confirms Pakistan now carries the highest adult diabetes rate in the world, underscoring the urgency of prevention and comprehensive care.

Nearly one-tenth of Pakistan's diabetic population endures the grim ordeal of diabetic foot, exposing more than 3.4 million citizens to the peril of festering ulcers and, in countless cases, eventual amputations. Medical voices caution that this affliction is not an isolated concern but rather the visible scar of a much larger epidemic silently eroding lives.

The nation, already bearing the stigma of the world's steepest diabetes prevalence rate, is watching the disease unfurl a silent war—triggering heart seizures, brain strokes, kidney ruin, blindness, and lifelong disablement. What once seemed a manageable illness has transfigured into one of Pakistan's most ruthless and financially draining maladies.

According to the International Diabetes Federation's Diabetes Atlas 2025, the country's financial hemorrhage on diabetes care has swollen from \$2.6 billion to \$2.7 billion over four years. This translates into an almost unthinkable Rs760 billion strain on the nation's already fragile health infrastructure and broader economy.

The grim statistics are staggering: 34.5 million Pakistanis between the ages of 20 and 79 now live tethered to diabetes, earning the country the fourth spot globally—surpassed only by China, India, and the United States. Worse still, projections are ominous. If decisive prevention remains absent, the diabetic tide is set to engulf 70.2 million Pakistanis by 2050.

Despite such overwhelming numbers, the nation's investment in patient care is shockingly meagre. With barely \$79 allocated annually per sufferer, Pakistan ranks among the world's lowest spenders on diabetes. This paltry figure leaves millions untreated or under-treated, deepening not only the risk of physical ruin but also pushing countless families into economic catastrophe.

The IDF report lays bare another distressing truth: Pakistan harbours the highest age-standardised prevalence rate of diabetes on the globe—31.4 percent, a cruel contrast to the far gentler global average. Even more alarming, roughly 26.9 percent of diabetics—

some 9.3 million individuals—are undiagnosed, unknowingly marching toward devastating outcomes such as organ collapse, amputations, and irreversible blindness.

Each year, diabetes extinguishes nearly 230,000 Pakistani lives. And the crisis stretches beyond adults: one in every five births is now shadowed by hyperglycemia during pregnancy, a condition that quietly sows long-term health hazards for both mothers and their newborns.

In a nation where the disease is spreading like wildfire, the silence around its true cost is deafening. Without urgent intervention, Pakistan risks a generational health calamity of proportions yet unseen.

Pakistan's battle with diabetes — driven largely by type 2 cases — has reached a crisis point. Health specialists caution that more than 3.4 million people in the country live with diabetic foot, a condition that can progress

in a country where many cannot access even the most basic diagnostic screening.

While the disease is unrelenting, it is not unpreventable. Prevention begins in daily life — through balanced meals instead of sugar-laden diets, regular physical activity, and prompt attention to early warning signs. Simple, consistent lifestyle habits can delay or even avert the onset of diabetes. But prevention must extend beyond households. Communities, schools, and workplaces must foster healthier living. Children should grow up playing in open playgrounds rather than staring at locked gates; offices should integrate movement into routine; and grocery shelves should display transparent and truthful food labels. Societies that normalize wellness make it harder for disease to take root.

Still, grassroots changes cannot succeed without strong state involvement. Pakistan urgently needs a national diabetes control strate-



into painful ulcers or even amputations. Millions more remain vulnerable to the disease's devastating complications: heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure, blindness, and long-term disability. According to the International Diabetes Federation, Pakistani adults now face the highest diabetes rates in the world, even after accounting for global age differences. This is nothing less than a public health emergency.

A recent development in Karachi offers a rare glimpse of what comprehensive care should look like. The Baqai Institute of Diabetology and Endocrinology has opened a multidisciplinary facility that brings together cardiac, neurology, nephrology, and ophthalmology clinics under one roof, ensuring patients are treated for both diabetes and its cascading complications. Yet, such centres remain scarce

gy that prioritises preventive screening, equips healthcare workers to detect cases early, and holds the sugar industry accountable through taxation and clear labelling. Left unchecked, diabetes will continue to claim thousands of lives each year while draining national resources. But if confronted with determination, it can be controlled — and many of its most severe consequences can be avoided. The choice lies with us.

Diabetes may be relentless, but it is not inevitable. With healthier lifestyles, transparent food practices, and a robust national diabetes control plan, Pakistan can slow the tide of this growing epidemic. The disease will either continue to claim countless lives and drain resources — or, if tackled head-on, be managed effectively to protect future generations.

The Alaska summit was a spectacular distraction

Belén Fernández

Say you are the president of the United States and the relationship with a significant chunk of your political base has become less than blissfully harmonious. What do you do?

Well, one option is to stage a summit, accompanied by much fanfare, with the president of Russia, ostensibly in order to end that country's war in Ukraine. And this is precisely the manoeuvre that was pulled by US President Donald Trump, who on Friday rolled out the red carpet in Alaska for his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin. The short-lived encounter was ultimately anticlimactic, with Trump offering the incisive assessment that "There's no deal until there's a deal."

Fox News reported that Trump had rated the much-anticipated meeting with Putin a "10" out of 10 and that he particularly "appreciated the Russian president's comments when he claimed he would not have invaded Ukraine had Trump won the 2020 presidency".

Fox went on to add that neither head of state had bothered to specify the "reasoning behind these comments". At any rate, the no-deal talks constituted a convenient distraction from current intra-MAGA strife, which owes to a couple of factors. There is, for example, the matter of the files relating to the late Jeffrey Epstein, the financier and convicted sex offender who died in prison in 2019.

When US Attorney General Pam Bondi briefed Trump in May on the Justice Department's review of the content of the so-called "Epstein files", she reportedly informed the president that his name appeared therein. Despite having pledged while on the campaign trail to declassify the Epstein files, Trump changed tack earlier this year and angrily dismissed the investigation as a "hoax". He went as far as to insult many of his Republican followers as "stupid" and "foolish" for continuing to insist that the Epstein details be released.

On July 12, the president took to social media with his signature preference for manic capitalisation to berate those demanding declassification: "We have a PERFECT Administration, THE TALK OF THE WORLD, and 'selfish people' are trying to hurt it, all over a guy who never dies, Jeffrey Epstein."

And yet this is not the only headache facing the "PERFECT Administration" from within Trump's own MAGA base, many of whose prominent members have become vocally critical of Israel's genocide in the Gaza Strip, which Trump persists in aiding

and abetting.

The genocide, which will mark its two-year anniversary in October, has officially killed nearly 62,000 Palestinians thus far – although the true death toll is undoubtedly many times higher. Apparently, Israel's behaviour was entirely palatable to much of the US political establishment when it simply consisted of unending massacres, slaughtered and mutilated babies, bombed hospitals, and razed neighbourhoods.

Now that mass starvation has been visibly added to the genocidal mix, however, Israel seems to have crossed a red line even among formerly staunch devotees. As per Gaza's Ministry of Health, the death toll from malnutrition has hit 251, including 108 children. Images of skeletal Palestinians have flooded the internet, and the United Nations World Food Programme has categorised food shortage in Gaza as "catastrophic".

ly chided Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on the disagreeable optics of the whole spectacle, it has not been sufficient to appease the scrutiny of the likes of right-wing US Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, a traditional ally of the president known for such antics as wearing a hat imprinted with the words "Trump Was Right About Everything!"

In a social media post last month, Greene – a leading figure in Trump's MAGA movement – was unexpectedly explicit in her condemnation of "the genocide, humanitarian crisis, and starvation happening in Gaza". Other MAGA fixtures like far-right influencer Laura Loomer – a self-defined "proud Islamophobe" and general bona fide sociopath – wasted no time in responding to Greene's post: "There is no genocide in Gaza."

Anyway, political tensions and infighting were at least temporarily removed from



Furthermore, according to the UN, the Israeli military has killed at least 1,760 Palestinians since late May alone, as they sought aid, including at sites run by the nefarious so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). Backed by the US and Israel, the GHF has not only served Israel's plans for mass displacement and forced eviction of Palestinians; the aid distribution hubs have also functioned as a sort of one-stop shop for indiscriminate killing – which, after all, is the whole point of genocide.

And while Trump has intermittent-

the spotlight by the Trump-Putin extravaganza in Alaska. It's hardly the first time the old art of distraction has come in handy – Trump's pal, Netanyahu, is the master of this trade. His commitment to waging genocide in Gaza has more than a little to do with his desire to stave off domestic opposition and avoid dealing with the assorted corruption charges in which he is presently embroiled.

And while the Alaskan red-carpet stunt provided little to write home about, distraction may yet prevail as folks ponder what the hell that was all about.

Gaza is no anomaly: Hunger and hoarding are the West's oldest weapons

Donald Earl Collins

For all the West's lofty claims about spreading freedom, prosperity and progress, the world remains scarred by chronic instability and mass hunger.

Last month, as part of its wind-down of international food and medical aid, the United States destroyed 500 metric tonnes of emergency food aid in the United Arab Emirates. Over 60,000 tonnes of emergency food aid have remained stockpiled in warehouses around the world due to the shutdown of USAID. Meanwhile, Israel – with US and European Union support – has been systematically starving the nearly two million remaining Palestinians in besieged Gaza, part of the almost 300 million people globally who are malnourished or at risk of starving to death in 2025.

It's part of a much larger pattern of hoarding and starvation that has its roots in Western norms around capitalism and settler-colonialism, a crime against humanity that rarely faces meaningful international repercussions. This is not an isolated atrocity: The rise of the West and the US was built on the massive hoarding of food resources for profit and the deliberate use of starvation to cow those already living under oppression.

It is difficult to miss, in both the international news reports and the desperate social media posts of starved Palestinians begging for money, food and clean water, with many showing reduced to emaciated bodies. It should shame us all, yet Westerners and their allies have all committed themselves to genocide, with ample food mere kilometres away. A recent poll by the Viterbi Family Center for Public Opinion and Policy Research at the Israeli Democracy Institute shows that 79 percent of Israeli Jews are “not so troubled” or “not troubled at all” by the reports of famine and suffering among the Palestinian population in Gaza.

Gaza, though, is hardly alone in facing mass starvation as part of a genocidal campaign, whether in 2025 or in recent world history. What has been all too easy for the West to miss are famine-level crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and in Sudan. As of March, “a record 27.7 million people are in the grip of acute hunger ... amid ongoing conflict linked to massive displacement and rising food prices” in the DRC, according to the United Nations. The two-year-long conflict in Sudan, which has killed an estimated 150,000 people, many of whose deaths were linked to

famine, disease and starvation, has also left nearly 25 million in need of food assistance, including nearly 740,000 in North Darfur's capital, el-Fasher, where the population faces starvation while under siege.

To be sure, nearly every major power in human history has attacked or withheld food and water supplies in the process of conquering other nation-states and plundering their resources at one time or another. But the West, as the world knows it today, began its quest for global dominance with the First Crusade in the 1090s, and with it, perfected its tactics for siege warfare and the deliberate starvation of Muslim and Jewish populations in the Holy Land (present-day Syria, Lebanon and Palestine), all in the name of Catholicism. Those first Crusaders, short on food supplies themselves, also died in their thousands from hunger or committed acts of mass cannibalism to survive.

Denying food and water in this Western-dominated world has always been a politi-

and ensuring famine and massive Indigenous population decline. Growing heaps of cash crops such as tobacco, indigo, rice, sugar and cotton left little land for enslaved Black folk to cultivate food for themselves. Enslavers often provided the enslaved with meagre rations such as corn mush and salted pork fatback, hardly enough to sustain life.

Even when the United States became an agricultural juggernaut, the “work or starve” song remained the same, its classist and racist message only evolving with the times. For the past 40 years, US presidents and Congress have enacted multiple bills requiring the nation's poor to work for minimal food benefits or go without, including new work requirements for SNAP (food stamps) benefits enacted under the One Big Beautiful Bill earlier this year. In 2015, then Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell summed up the thinking of US business leaders and the Western world towards those living with food precarity: “They're doing too good with food stamps, Social Security and all the rest.”

I can attest to the impact of malnourishment and working just to eat. From the end of 1981 until I went off to college in 1987, one-third of every month at home in Mount Vernon, New York, was spent with little or no food in my belly, often with massive intestinal gas pains bloating my abdomen. It did not matter whether my mother worked full-time for Mount Vernon Hospital or relied on the US welfare system for food aid. Once, I dropped from 83 to 76 kilogrammes on my 188-centimetre frame in the 18 days after finishing my undergraduate degree, while working

for Pitt's Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic in 1991. I walked the five kilometres each way to and from work for those three weeks because I only had \$30 to get me through. Fantasies of hoarding food and controlling access to resources were definitely part of my experiences with moderate hunger and malnutrition.

Today, the United States produces enough food to feed more than two billion people, and the world produces enough to feed more than 10 billion every year. Yet the quest for profit and markets for agribusinesses, and the continued deliberate denial of access to food for vulnerable and marginalised populations, all to subjugate them for their land, their resources and even the very food they grow, continues largely unabated. Hunger remains one of the West's most enduring weapons of control and domination. Geopolitically, there can be no peace in a world full of people whom the West has deliberately helped starve.



cal and capitalistic weapon of imperialism, colonialism and nationalism. Western Europe's plundering of the Western Hemisphere not only formed the foundation of capitalism and the never-ending pursuit of profit worldwide, it also entrenched the use of famine, malnutrition and deprivation as tools to control and exploit subject peoples. From the 16th through the 19th century, the transatlantic slave trade, African chattel enslavement and forced labour of Indigenous peoples helped fill royal coffers in Europe and build great wealth for landowners across the Western Hemisphere. As for the United States, the nation that began as the Jamestown colony in 1607 has operated under John Smith's words for the past 400 years: “The greater part must be more industrious or starve. He that will not work, shall not eat.” America's own colonial history and post-independence expansion also involved stealing land from Indigenous groups, burning crops

The upcoming elections will not help stabilise Syria

Jasim Al-Azzawi

In early August, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) exchanged fire with Syrian government forces near Manbij in Kurdish-majority northeastern Syria. The tensions in the north came just weeks after bloodshed in the south's Suwayda governorate killed more than 1,400 people and displaced nearly 175,000. The violence between Druze and Sunni Bedouin groups continued for more than a week and has still not fully abated.

In March, groups loyal to former President Bashar al-Assad clashed with government forces and allied armed factions in the coastal governorates of Latakia and Tartus, dominated by the Alawite community. From 1,400 to 1,700 people were killed in the bloodshed, most of them civilians; 128,500 people were displaced.

The recurring violence has exposed the raw sectarianism that al-Assad once manipulated to maintain power. Now, in his absence, those divisions are metastasising, fuelled by a decade of unresolved grievances, land disputes and the proliferation of armed groups.

President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who took power after al-Assad's ouster, has so far failed to build trust across all factions, as his main focus has been international normalisation and economic development. His Islamist leanings are causing alarm among minorities, including the Druze, Alawites, Christians and Kurds, who fear that his inability to rein in the various armed factions may result in more violence.

September's elections may offer procedural legitimacy to al-Sharaa's government, but without genuine security and reconciliation, they risk deepening the existing divides and reinforcing a power structure that benefits a select few at the expense of a truly unified nation. Since coming to power, al-Sharaa has signalled that his national strategy is overwhelmingly focused on reconstruction and economic development. This is where his provisional government has concentrated its efforts.

In May, al-Sharaa spoke at an event in the country's second biggest city, Aleppo, urging Syrians to join in the reconstruction effort. "Our war with the tyrants has ended, and our battle against poverty has begun," he declared in his speech.

To unlock the economic potential of the country, al-Sharaa has sought to gain international recognition. With the help of Gulf states, the Syrian president has been able to achieve a

major diplomatic victory: the lifting of sanctions and the removal of the armed group he headed, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, from the list of "foreign terrorist organisations" by the United States government.

US President Donald Trump's administration also backed the potential integration of the SDF into the new security apparatus. From Washington's perspective, engaging with the new authorities in Damascus can help reduce Iranian influence and prevent Syria from becoming a corridor for Hezbollah and other proxies. From al-Sharaa's perspective this is a chance to secure international recognition and legitimacy.

Syria's neighbour Turkiye is also an important player in al-Sharaa's national strategy. It is providing noncombat military support – training, advice and technical assistance – to help rebuild Syria's security infrastructure. It also is looking at a major role in the reconstruction effort.



This month, Turkiye began supplying Syria with natural gas, helping to address the country's energy crisis in the north. Meanwhile, Gulf states have pledged to invest heavily in Syria to help stabilise its economy. In July, Saudi Arabia announced \$6.4bn in investments in real estate and infrastructure projects. Two weeks later, the Syrian government signed deals worth \$14bn with Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and other countries in the fields of public transport and real estate.

However, many critics would argue that while economic support is essential for rebuilding, it cannot alone guarantee stability. The danger is that money and development may paper over deep-seated resentments and divisions that could reignite into future conflicts. The real challenge for the new Syrian government is to find a way to balance the urgent need for economic

recovery with the equally crucial need to address people's grievances.

One way to address tensions is to gain public trust through a democratic electoral process. Al-Sharaa has called for national elections in September, but ordinary Syrians will not be able to cast their votes. That is because 140 of the 210 seats will be chosen by local electoral committees while 70 will be appointed directly by the president. There will be no seats filled by popular vote.

This format is a straightforward political calculation. It provides the new leadership with the assurance of a controlled outcome and avoids the challenges of organising a nationwide vote at a time when Damascus does not have full control over all territories and security cannot be guaranteed.

But this electoral process is likely to be met with mistrust from some Syrians, especially from minority communities, as they will see

it as favouring the Sunni majority. Some may choose to boycott the elections, declare them illegitimate or find alternative ways to express their profound displeasure with a system that denies them a meaningful voice.

The US and the European Union will monitor the election carefully and will likely take a critical stance if it fails to establish a truly inclusive and representative parliament. This will likely complicate the new regime's budding

international relations and hinder its efforts to gain full diplomatic recognition and support.

The more pressing problem for Damascus will be that the elections will not help heal the country's deep wounds at a time of continuing sectarian tensions. That is why Syria needs a nation-wide reconciliation process.

Syria's interim government has yet to articulate a compelling vision for justice and accountability. War crimes under al-Assad – which include mass detentions, torture and chemical attacks – remain unaddressed. There have been promises to hold people accountable for sectarian massacres, but no concrete steps have been taken.

The absence of accountability is not just a moral failure. It's a strategic one. Without a legal framework to hold perpetrators accountable, Syria's wounds will fester.

Babool trees threaten biodiversity

The babool trees, also known as acacia nilotica, have become a serious ecological concern in Turbat and other parts of Balochistan. They consume a large amount of underground water, which is already low in the region. Moreover, these trees release less oxygen compared to native species, and prevent the growth of other useful plants and trees by dominating the soil. This disturbs local biodiversity, and threatens agriculture and natural vegetation. The authorities concerned should control the rising growth of all such harmful trees, spread awareness among the people, and plant beneficial trees like Neem, Peepal and Moringa.

Zareef Baloch
Turbat

Politeness paves the way

During a recent visit to a housing society in Karachi, my friend mistakenly attempted to park the car by turning the wrong way. From a fair distance, a security guard calmly waved his hand, asking us to take the correct path. There was no shouting, no unnecessary confrontation, just a polite and effective reminder to follow the right course. Sadly, such moments are often met with chaos, anger or total neglect. This brief experience shows that with the right attitude and a sense of responsibility, we can build a more orderly, respectful and liveable city.

Safia Razi
Karachi

AI as a learning partner for students and teachers

In today's world, artificial intelligence (AI) plays an essential role as it provides relevant information to students within seconds, saves their time, and improves their communication skills, thinking abilities and confidence. This innovative technology increases students' knowledge, helps them complete their assignments on time, and prepares them for the future. With improved skills and confidence, students can perform better in classrooms and during job interviews. Additionally, AI helps teachers set up tests for students according to their levels to check their individual performance. Thus, it is beneficial to both students and teachers.

Mohsin Rustamani
Wahi Pandhi

The fading bonds of village life

In the picturesque valley of Namal, nestled in Punjab's Mianwali district, a small village named Dhibba Karsial embodied simplicity and sincerity till the 1980s. The village relied on three wells, which were the lifeblood of the community. Women would fetch water in pitchers, one balanced on their head and the other on their side, a labour-intensive task

that was made bearable by the beauty of life in many other domains. As they fetched water, the women would engage in lively conversations, sharing laughter and good-natured gossip that strengthened social bonds, fostered empathy, and conveyed love silently. The arrival of hand pumps brought a change, as some households gained access to piped water, while others visited these homes to collect water, building relationships and deepening connections. However, the pace of progress soon disrupted the social bonding. With water motors installed in every home, the need to visit the neighbours vanished, while the wells had already been abandoned. The conversations, connections and sincerity that once thrived began to fade with time. Today, the same village, the same people and the same land exist, but the emotions have evaporated. Love seems to have been confined to memories, sincerity has become a relic of the past, and materialism has taken root. Once, empty water pitchers coexisted with full hearts; now homes have an abundance of water, but relationships are parched. This is not the story of Dhibba Karsial alone.

Muhammad Iqbal Awan
Mianwali

Deforestation in Sindh: A crisis beyond 'personal property'

I posted a picture of a tractor trolley laden with trees on a social media platform recently. A man commented that trees are people's personal property, and there was no point raising a hue and cry about tree-cutting. This mindset of treating living things as personal property is problematic. For instance, when men commit violence against their wives or children, should people be told not to interfere as it was supposedly their personal matter? Sindh is witnessing unprecedented deforestation. From river forests to the fields, the menace of tree-cutting is spreading like wildfire. The provincial Forest Department, police and other relevant authorities either act as silent spectators, or appear helpless against the powerful timber mafia and encroachers of forest lands. In any case, the official machinery is complacent. Environmental activists and journalists resisting the crisis are dubbed blackmailers. The farmers need to realise that in addition to environmental benefits, standing trees make a lot of economic sense. The leaves and pods of the trees provide fodder for livestock; branches of pruned tree provide fuel for cooking, and work as hedges around the homes or the fields.

Gulsher Panhwar
Johi

NHA losses vs. revenue claims

According to the bi-annual report on state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the National

Highways Authority (NHA) posted the largest loss at Rs153.3 billion, bringing its total accumulated losses to Rs1,953.4 billion due to an unsustainable toll revenue model.

Despite such a disappointing report, however, there was a glaring half-page four-colour advertisement in newspapers about NHA's record breaking revenue generation of Rs108.25 billion during the same period of 2024-25, which, as per the advertisement, was more than 62 per cent of the Rs66.79 billion revenue generated during 2023-24.

Nobody knows which report on NHA's profit-and-loss balance sheet is correct. Will somebody in a position of authority shed light on the rather critical matter?

Khawaja Tajammul Hussain
Karachi

Donkey meat scandal

Recent reports suggest donkey meat was being clandestinely processed and potentially introduced into the human food chain within the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). While the prompt intervention by the Islamabad Food Authority is commendable, the very occurrence of such an act within the ICT jurisdiction reflects a gross failure of the regulatory vigilance and enforcement mechanism.

Let us not mince words; this is not merely an incident of illegal slaughter or commercial deception. It constitutes a deliberate endangerment of public health, a fraud upon unsuspecting consumers, and a serious breach of the statutory and regulatory framework governing food safety and hygiene.

It is imperative that those responsible are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, and are not allowed to exploit procedural delays or institutional inefficiencies within the justice system. This incident is not an isolated act, but a symptom of deep-rooted institutional apathy and a disconnect between policy formulation and regulatory enforcement. The unwitting public is being exposed to severe health risks, including the transmission of zoonotic diseases that could spread rapidly if such meat is consumed without detection.

The criminal insertion of donkey meat into the human food chain is criminal negligence, and may lead to charges of culpable homicide owing to potentially harmful consequences. It is an act of sheer recklessness that undermines the very essence of food safety governance. Continued silence and inaction on the part of competent authorities amount to tacit complicity, which must be called out and addressed without fear or favour.

The relevant federal and provincial departments should take coordinated legal action immediately. The public has a legitimate expectation of due accountability and the protection of their rights.

Riaz Ali Panhwar
Hyderabad

Scientists have finally made an elusive meteorite diamond

Victoria Atkinson

Scientists have created the first sizable meteorite diamond — also known as lonsdaleite or hexagonal diamond — a material predicted to be even harder than the diamonds normally found on Earth.



The high-pressure, high-temperature technique created tiny disks of this ultrahard diamond which could ultimately replace conventional diamonds in applications such as drilling tools and electronics, the scientists reported in the journal *Nature*. Diamonds hold the record for the world's hardest naturally occurring substance. Each carbon atom in the infinitely repeating molecular structure forms four equal-length bonds to other carbon atoms, each separated by a 109.5 degree angle, to create an endless array of perfect tetrahedra. Viewed from the side, this structure appears to contain three repeating layers of carbon atoms (labeled A, B, and C), and this gives diamond what crystallographers call a face-centered cubic crystal structure. In the 1960s, however, a subtly different structure of diamond was proposed, with small impure crystals of this structure subsequently discovered in the Canyon Diablo meteorite, which crashed in the Arizona desert around 50,000 years ago. Unlike in cubic diamond, this form contains two different bond lengths — one slightly longer than in normal diamond and one slightly shorter. The carbon atoms are still organized into endless planes of tetrahedra. But this time, when viewed from the side, the structure contains only two repeating layers (labeled A and B). This slight shift in the carbon layers gives meteorite diamond a hexagonal structure, which scientists theorize should boost the solid's hardness by 58%.

Do weighted vests really help with bone health and weight loss?

Sarah Garone

Weighted vests have become a trendy fitness accessory, spotted on celebrities and promoted on social media for purported benefits like weight loss and muscle gain.

They've become particularly popular among older women, said Kristen Beavers, PhD, professor of gerontology and geriatrics at Wake Forest University School of Medicine—largely due to the belief that they can boost bone strength that may be lost during physical changes.



But that claim—and the broader health benefits attributed to weighted vests—isn't as strongly supported by evidence as the hype around them might suggest. One recent study conducted by Beavers and her colleagues, for example, found that wearing a weighted vest for seven hours a day for a whole year did not reduce hip bone loss among 150 obese adults actively trying to lose weight. Participants did, however, lose about 10% of their body weight—but so did two other groups (one that focused on calorie cutting and another that combined calorie restriction and resistance exercise training).

Though the findings, which were published in *JAMA Network Open*, may be disappointing for fans of weighted vests, researchers say they aren't necessarily the final word on their benefits. "This study's findings are counter to some research, and consistent with others," Colin Haines, MD, board-certified spine surgeon and director of research at the Virginia Spine Institute, told *Health*. "What's clear is that the broader body of evidence includes both neutral and positive results."

Trying to get 10,000 steps a day? New study pinpoints the number you really need

Julia Ries Wexler

New research is challenging the long-standing belief that you need to walk at least 10,000 steps—or about 5 miles—a day to stay healthy.



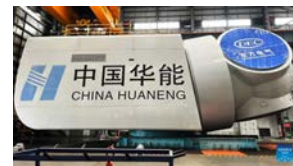
The meta-analysis, published in *The Lancet Public Health*, found that walking just 7,000 steps a day may provide protection against a range of diseases, including cancer, dementia, and heart disease. These findings come at a time when one in three adults worldwide is physically inactive, a public health crisis that's estimated to contribute to 8% of non-communicable diseases each year. The new paper adds to a growing body of evidence that any movement is better than none—and that even shorter bursts of activity can keep your heart, brain, and lungs strong and healthy. "Every step counts, especially when it comes to reducing risk for all adults from cardiovascular disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes, and depressive symptoms," Mladen Golubic, MD, PhD, a professor of clinical family and community medicine and medical director of the Osher Center for Integrative Health at the University of Cincinnati, told *Health*.

To understand how daily steps impact various health outcomes, researchers analyzed 57 studies including more than 160,000 adults located around the world.

China builds record-breaking floating wind turbine

Rory Bathgate

Chinese engineers have created a prototype floating wind turbine that they say has broken power generation records — potentially ushering in a new generation of renewable power generation.



The turbine is the result of research by Chinese energy giant China Huaneng Group and power generator Dongfang Electric Corporation, both of which are state-owned enterprises.

Each turbine would be capable of generating 17 megawatts (MW) of clean electricity, or 68 million kilowatt hours (kWh) over the course of a year. This is enough to power approximately 6,300 US households per US Energy Administration data. To generate this power, the nacelle — the central component within a wind turbine that contains the actual generator — sits atop a 489-foot-tall (152-meter) tower, with blades that add up to a diameter of 860 feet (262 m).

Each "sweep," or 360-degree rotation, of the blades encompasses an area of 53,000 square meters, or almost eight soccer fields' worth. Increasing the amount of electricity a single turbine can generate is important in encouraging greater adoption of wind power, as it reduces the overall number of turbines that have to be installed in each wind farm. This drives down the cost and reduces the time before turbines begin generating power.

Of course, the further out to sea turbines are, the more extreme wind conditions they may be forced to withstand. China Huaneng Group has stated that the test turbine can endure waves in excess of 78 feet (24 m) high, as well as typhoon-speed winds — those in excess of 64 knots (73 miles per hour). The manufacturers will test the turbine off the coast of Yangjiang, China, in the coming months.



POWERING THE **FUTURE**

