

WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL

STABILITY WITHOUT GROWTH



LUXURY THAT GLIDES



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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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Stability without growth

Farhan Khan

No doubt, Pakistan's economy is showing signs of stability but underlying structural problems remain unsolved. The stock market keeps going up and up, while the current account deficit has been controlled. In fact, it was USD 2.1 billion surplus for July-June 2025. Inflation too has declined dramatically — from 28.31 percent in 2023-24 to 11.09 percent in 2024-25,

On the other hand, remittances surged by nearly USD 8.299 billion to reach a new record high. What is more, the upward trend continues as evidenced by the latest figures. The foreign exchange reserves have also improved recently — to USD 14,243.2 million in August 2025 from USD 9,153.3 million in August 2024. All these are unmistakable signs of economic stability which is endorsed by the latest upgrade by Moody's from Caa2 to Caal with a stable outlook.

Despite these positive indicators, the fact remains that the stability achieved is not accompanied by growth nor has it been translated into wider economic revival. Poverty is on the rise while employment opportunities are shrinking. The reason for this stagnation is that the core problems of the economy remain unaddressed. A major sign of stagnation is the lacklustre performance of the export sector. For example, there was a rise in the trade deficit — from USD 22.177 billion in 2023-24 to USD 26.785 billion in 2024-25 with the July 2025 deficit at negative USD 2.679 billion against negative USD 2.488 billion in July 2024. The decline in exports is reflected by negative growth in the large-scale manufacturing sector in 2024-25 (1.21 percent).

The same is the case with foreign investment. FDI is not flowing in as expected because the larger picture is not encouraging. Banking and telecom companies which invested during the boom of 2002-07 have either withdrawn or are not pumping in new funds. Hopes of getting tens of billions of dollars of investment from friendly countries

in the Middle East have also now faded. As for the prospects of US investment, it is an open guess as to when it will materialise in view of the see-saw in bilateral relations over the last few decades.

As for the current boom in Pakistan's stock market, it is no indicator of a wider economic turnaround. Buying and selling of shares is a game that a small number of comparatively well-to-do people play. Those who deal in stocks and shares are not members of the general public. It may be added here that the number of companies listed on the PSX constitute just a fraction of the total number of business entities and employers in the country. Foreign exchange reserves are also in a vulnerable position, as the loans from friendly countries alone are USD 16 billion, requiring

job opportunities.

Inflation has come down from a peak of 38 percent in May 2023 to 3.2 percent by June 2025. But price stability has been achieved by depressing economic activity and slowing growth which has brought little relief for the common man. Inflation is reported to be in single digit, but for the average man there is little difference in the market situation. Fuel, electricity and the daily essentials remain unaffordable for the common run of people.

Government spokesmen keep taking credit for reserves rising to \$14.5 billion and a current account surplus for the first time in 14 years. But these improvements have nothing to do with any change in economic fundamentals. The rise in forex reserves is due to remittances, which reached \$38.3 billion, and import



a yearly request to roll over till the IMF programme duration which is scheduled to end on 15 September 2027.

The real economic situation is defined by the fact that poverty levels in Pakistan today are as high as 44.7 percent as reported by the World Bank and other international agencies. Unemployment is also on the rise which is proved by the increasing migration figures over the last three years. According to media reports, more than a million Pakistanis, including doctors, engineers and IT professionals, left the country last year in search of better

restrictions. On the contrary, exports remain depressed which reflect the real situation of an economy.

Needless to say, without rapid export growth, the country's external sector remains exposed to external shocks and sudden shifts in global capital and labour markets. The long-term remedy to our economic weaknesses lies in boosting value-added exports, industrial growth and bringing down energy costs which are exorbitantly high. Comprehensive reforms in these sectors are the need of the hour to put the economy on a sustainable growth path.

Pakistan's youth unemployment crisis

Nasim Ahmed

According to the most recent report, more than one million Pakistanis, both skilled professionals and unskilled workers, left the country last year in search of better opportunities abroad. The primary reason highlighted in the report is the acute shortage of adequate employment options within the country. With the economy suffering prolonged recession and near-depression conditions, unemployment continues to rise steadily.

A recent study conducted by Gallup Pakistan shows that youth unemployment in Punjab stands at 7.69%. The findings reveal a clear gender gap, with female unemployment higher than that of males. Moreover, urban centres reflect a sharper problem with unemployment at 8.94%, compared to 7.11% in rural areas. When examined division-wise, the variations become starker, ranging from as low as 6.45% in south Punjab to as high as 17.78% in some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Another survey highlights that the highest unemployment rate, 20.01%, is found among young people with education up to matric or below intermediate level. What is even more disturbing is that over 23% of unemployed women in Punjab possess Master's degrees, a figure seven times greater than that of unemployed men with the same qualifications. This points to a glaring gender disparity within the country's employment distribution system.

It has also been observed that the unemployment rate among educated youth is significantly higher than among their less educated peers. This indicates that the education system is not aligned with the requirements of the nation's industrial, agricultural, and service sectors and remains largely disconnected from the labour market realities.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics in 2021 confirmed a rising trend in unemployment, with educated youth in particular struggling to secure jobs. A key factor behind this is underemployment, where highly educated and skilled individuals are compelled to accept low-paying work due to the unavailability of positions matching their qualifications.

Earlier, a report by PIDE had revealed that a surprisingly large proportion of the working-age population is not part of the labour force at all. Many of these individuals

are either previously employed workers who lost their jobs or people relying on other means of income. The report also pointed out that despite repeated policy announcements, the female labour force participation rate (LFPR) continues to remain critically low.

What is especially alarming is the very high rate of unemployment among new entrants into the labour force. More than 31% of degree holders, including those with professional qualifications, are jobless. Among these, 51% are women, while only 16% are men. Unemployment among graduates in rural areas is notably higher than in urban ones, raising concerns over issues such as poor mobility and limited access to opportunities.

Among the many economic challenges

shortages, low investment in research and development, and chronic political instability.

Another serious issue lies in the skills mismatch that prevents many young people from finding suitable employment. A considerable number of youths lack access to quality education and practical skills needed to thrive in today's competitive market. This highlights the urgent need to integrate formal education with internship programmes and hands-on training, thereby preparing graduates for the realities of professional life. For this purpose, government authorities, in partnership with industry representatives, must design and introduce a reformed curriculum aimed at enhancing the employability of future generations.

In recent decades, the services sector has



Pakistan faces, youth unemployment stands out as one of the gravest. It not only hampers the nation's economic growth but also drives brain drain, depriving the country of valuable intellectual capital. Unfortunately, employment creation has long been neglected in both short-term and long-term policy frameworks. Public sector jobs are widely perceived as more desirable and better paid, yet their numbers remain very limited.

International experience suggests that the private sector is the most viable engine of sustainable job creation. For this to materialise in Pakistan, it is vital to create a conducive environment that enables private industry to expand and generate employment. This requires the removal of infrastructural bottlenecks and regulatory hurdles such as persistent power

grown rapidly to become the country's largest source of employment, with wholesale and retail trade dominating in urban centres, while agriculture and livestock continue to provide livelihoods in rural areas. With 64% of the national population under the age of 30, Pakistan is experiencing a pronounced youth bulge. Unless this demographic is channelled productively, the consequences for the state could be dire.

The pressing issue of rampant unemployment among both educated and uneducated young people must be addressed on a priority basis. Otherwise, it risks fuelling social unrest, exacerbating criminal activity, and even contributing to terrorism. Sadly, successive governments have failed to devote the required attention to this highly sensitive and urgent matter.

Fragilities beneath improvement

Muhammad Ali

Pakistan's economy is facing a delicate balance between encouraging remittance inflows, widening trade deficits, and the conditions tied to the ongoing IMF programme.

While remittances have provided crucial relief, sustaining this momentum against geopolitical uncertainties remains a challenge. At the same time, trade figures reflect both growth in exports and imports, though the swelling deficit underscores deeper vulnerabilities within the external sector.

The Pakistan Stock Exchange is at a record high, attributed to the strengthening of Pakistan-China trade ties, ongoing discussions about CPEC, rising foreign exchange reserves, and government efforts to address circular debt and stabilise the rupee.

There is no doubt that apart from the stock exchange performance the current account deficit has performed well and plunged by 27 percent in July 2025 but is still an improvement when compared to July 2024 — and even more praiseworthy was the \$2.1 billion surplus for July-June 2025.

Inflation too has declined dramatically — from 28.31 percent in 2023-24 to 11.09 percent in 2024-25 as per data on the State Bank of Pakistan website. The plunge in the current account last month is partly attributable to a rise in the trade deficit — from \$22.177 billion in 2023-24 to \$26.785 billion in 2024-25 with the July 2025 deficit at negative \$2.679 billion against negative \$2.488 billion in July 2024.

The decline in exports is mirrored by a rise in negativity of the large-scale manufacturing sector in 2024-25 (1.21 percent) and though credit to the private sector rose to 741.3 billion rupees against 527.3 billion rupees the year before yet reports indicate that the rise was mainly channelled into speculative investment on the stock market rather than in industry.

Pakistan's stock market, with relatively a small number of key players compared to India's, is taxed at a low rate evident from the 15 billion rupees per annum revenue collected from this source as opposed to over a 100 billion rupees in India.

The stock market index has been consistently used by successive governments as an indicator of improved economic performance; however, this claim is easily refuted as

those who deal in stocks and shares are not the general public and certainly not the poor and vulnerable. This is reflected by the fact that poverty levels in Pakistan today are a high of 44.7 percent as per the World Bank. Furthermore, the number of entities listed on the bourse are just a fraction of the total number of business entities and employers in the country.

Remittance inflows surged strikingly, climbing by nearly \$8.299 billion, serving as the principal driver behind last year's current account surplus. This momentum must endure in the present fiscal year, and July's data suggests the pattern persists—remittances rose from \$2,994 million in July 2024 to \$3,214.4 million last month. Yet, shifting geopolitical tides may challenge the sustainability of this vital source in the months ahead.

Within the business sphere, discontent has amplified over the withdrawal of fiscal and

conclude on September 15, 2027. This dependence underscores the fragility beneath the apparent improvement.

Pakistan's trade deficit widened markedly in July 2025, swelling by 10.57 percent month-on-month to \$3.18 billion. Revised statistics from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reveal exports climbing 8.44 percent in dollar terms, reaching \$2.69 billion from June's \$2.48 billion. Imports, however, rose at a sharper pace of 9.58 percent, touching \$5.87 billion compared to \$5.35 billion in June, thus deepening the imbalance.

On a year-on-year basis, the deterioration is more pronounced. The July 2025 trade deficit widened by 29.43 percent over July 2024. Exports did post a robust rise of 16.43 percent, increasing from \$2.31 billion to \$2.69 billion, yet imports surged further—by 23.13 percent—climbing from \$4.76 billion to \$5.87 billion.



monetary concessions in the current budget—measures enforced under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme. Talks between the government and business leaders continue without breakthrough. Meanwhile, taxation on traders, previously deferred amid threats of nationwide strikes and also linked to IMF directives, remains a looming concern, leaving the government's capacity to resist Fund pressure uncertain.

Although foreign exchange reserves appear healthier—climbing to \$14,243.2 million on 8 August 2025 compared to \$9,153.3 million a year earlier—the reliance on rollovers remains an uneasy truth. Commitments from allied nations amounting to \$16 billion must be renewed annually throughout the IMF programme, set to

This dual escalation mirrors global trade currents but also exposes Pakistan's structural frailties. The widening gap emphasizes the urgency of bolstering exports while trimming current expenditure, for these remain the only viable levers to restore a semblance of external stability.

Despite improved reserves and strong remittance inflows, Pakistan's external position remains precarious, tethered to IMF commitments and recurring rollovers from partner nations. With imports consistently outpacing exports, the trade deficit has become an urgent concern. The path forward lies in aggressively expanding exports, curbing unnecessary expenditures, and reducing reliance on borrowed support, if long-term economic stability is to be achieved.

Pakistan's first economic census reveals structural realities

Husnain Shahid

Pakistan's first comprehensive economic census has laid bare the country's institutional and structural fabric, challenging assumptions about the nature of its economy.

The report highlights a dominance of residential infrastructure, Punjab's overwhelming lead in establishments, and the central role of household-based activities such as animal farming and tailoring. With education, healthcare, and religious institutions heavily shaping the national landscape, the census delivers unprecedented insight into how Pakistan's economy functions at both the household and structural levels.

Pakistan's maiden economic census has cast fresh illumination on the nation's occupational landscape, dismantling long-held assumptions. Contrary to the prevalent belief that industry is the principal fountain of employment, the survey unveils that the service sphere alone harnesses 45 percent of the workforce. In stark contrast, Pakistan harbors over 600,000 mosques yet only 23,000 factories — a juxtaposition that underscores the country's structural paradoxes.

The census bridges an informational void that had lingered since 1947. It represents the third analytical cornerstone after the demographic and agrarian enumerations, offering a panoramic portrait of the economic edifice. The findings reveal that of the 40 million permanent establishments across Pakistan, 7.2 million serve as employment structures, collectively hosting 25.4 million workers in 2023. Punjab and Karachi division emerged as epicenters of both enterprise density and manpower. Alongside mosques and religious seminaries — which surpass 36,000 and cluster heavily in Punjab — the landscape bears merely 643,000 small production houses in addition to the scant 23,000 factories.

Among the 25.4 million engaged, 11.3 million find their livelihood within the service sector, dwarfing the production industry, which claims a modest 22 percent, and trailing the social sector's 30 percent, amounting to 7.6 million individuals. Punjab alone marshals 13.6 million laborers, towering above Sindh's 5.7 million, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's 4 million, and Balochistan's sparse 1.4 million workforce.

The report discloses that Pakistan's economy breathes largely through small-scale endeavors. Roughly 7.1 million outfits employ between one and fifty individuals. Enterprises boasting workforces of 51 to 250 scarcely exceed 35,000, while true industrial leviathans — units

hosting more than 250 employees — barely touch 7,000 in number.

Disaggregated by classification, 2.7 million retail shops dominate the commercial tapestry, trailed by 188,000 wholesale vendors, 256,000 hotels, and 119,000 hospitals. Educational outposts encompass 242,000 schools, 11,568 colleges, and 214 universities, while spiritual structures remain unmatched with 604,000 mosques. The financial scaffolding comprises 19,645 banks, complemented by 29,836 public offices and 10,452 semi-government departments.

Sectoral parsing demonstrates that of the 7.2 million geo-tagged entities, over 3.2 million gravitate towards wholesale and retail trade, inclusive of vehicle and motorcycle repair. Manufacturing accounts for 696,000 establishments, while educational institutions reach 326,000. Services command the lion's share at 58 percent, production secures 25 percent, social endeavors hold 14 percent, and a negligible 3 percent languish in the undefined "other" category.

This census, thus, sketches an intricate tableau: a country where mosques overwhelmingly outnumber factories, where livelihoods are tethered not to the clang of machinery but to the hum of services, and where small enterprises are the true backbone of an economy still in search of its balance.

The economic census reveals a vast network of social, educational, and health institutions alongside household-level economic activities that shape the country's livelihood patterns. The report documents 242,616 schools, primarily government-operated, alongside 11,568 colleges, where the private sector holds a modest edge. In higher education, Pakistan hosts 214 universities, while its religious sphere is marked by 36,331 madrassas. Healthcare infrastructure comprises 119,789 hospitals, where private facilities outweigh public provision. Across these domains, Punjab emerges as the clear leader, dominating in both public and private establishments.

At the household level, the census underscores that 5.6 million households engage in economic activity. Among them, animal farming reigns supreme, accounting for 51.4% of household involvement. Roughly 41% pursue miscellaneous or unspecified activities. Tailoring provides sustenance for 3.9% of households, embroidery supports 1.4%, and poultry farming covers 1.3%. Smaller segments participate in home-based food preparation, beauty salons, and digital services, each representing less than one percent of households — modest yet significant in their contribution to localized economies.

Geographically, Punjab contains 58% of all establishments, underlining its dominance in the national landscape. Sindh follows with 20%, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) with 15%, while Balochistan and Islamabad trail with 6% and 1% respectively. The figures highlight Punjab's dense economic and structural presence, while Balochistan and Islamabad remain thinly developed by comparison.

When examined structurally, residential buildings constitute 79.4% of Pakistan's total constructions, revealing a housing-centric infrastructure. KP leads this segment, with 81.6% of its buildings designated for residential use. Mixed-use and purely economic structures make up a far smaller portion, underscoring the limited emphasis on non-residential construction. Out of 114,148 multi-story structures, nearly two-thirds (64.4%) are purely residential, 29% combine residential with economic functions, while a slim 6.7% serve exclusively as economic units. Sindh carries the largest share of Pakistan's multi-story residential buildings.

The census is intended to deliver a comprehensive portrait of the economy — documenting the scale, character, ownership, and employment patterns of establishments. While neighboring nations have pursued economic censuses regularly since the late 1970s, Pakistan's efforts faltered. An attempt in 2003 collapsed after activity-based queries were entangled within the population census framework. By contrast, India has already completed seven economic censuses, while Bangladesh has managed three since its independence in 1971.

This latest exercise not only closes a long-standing gap but also lays bare the reality of Pakistan's economy — heavily household-driven, predominantly residential, and disproportionately concentrated in Punjab. It highlights both the country's untapped opportunities and its structural imbalances, offering policymakers the data needed to finally anchor economic planning in evidence rather than assumption.

The findings present a portrait of an economy rooted in small-scale, household-driven endeavors, with infrastructure tilted towards housing rather than commerce. Punjab's dominance underscores regional imbalances, while the prevalence of informal and home-based occupations reflects untapped economic potential. By filling a decades-long void in data, the census equips policymakers with the evidence needed to steer planning and reforms — a vital step if Pakistan is to rebalance its economy and align with the systematic approaches long practiced by its neighbors.

Tribalism and challenges of counterterrorism in Pakistan

Raza Khan

As the government launches a fresh military operation against militants belonging to Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, strong resistance is emerging from local tribes who oppose another offensive in the region.

Authorities argue that pockets of support for militants still exist among local populations, while residents maintain that they are often forced by terrorists to provide shelter and assistance. Many locals also believe that previous operations, ongoing since 2005, have failed to completely dismantle terrorist networks and hideouts—making renewed offensives appear futile.

While both perspectives carry weight, it is undeniable that groups like the TTP enjoy certain levels of tribal support in Bajaur and other tribal areas. Yet holding ordinary residents solely responsible is unfair; a deeper examination suggests that the underlying issue is tribalism itself. Transformed under globalization, tribal structures now serve as a breeding ground for militant and criminal groups not only in the tribal belt but also in Balochistan, Sindh, and South Punjab.

Tribalism has long shaped Pakistan's social order, influencing institutions, attitudes, and behaviors. In such systems, people are bound by strong kinship ties within tribes, sub-tribes, and clans, with allegiance to tribal norms and values taking precedence over state or civic obligations. This entrenched system resists social change and perpetuates a rigid status quo.

These dynamics vary across provinces: deeply rooted in Balochistan and the former FATA, but also visible in interior Sindh and rural Punjab. Though referred to by different names—Biradri in Punjab or Pakhtunwali among Pakhtuns—the tribal framework operates similarly across regions.

Historically, tribalism played a useful role in organizing communities. But in modern times, its features are largely incompatible with development, urbanization, and democratic governance. Decisions are often taken by tribal chiefs or a small circle of elders, with little input from ordinary members—who nonetheless must bear the consequences.

This structure not only hampers modernization but also creates spaces where extremist groups exploit loyalty networks, making counterterrorism efforts far more complex.

Tribalism, characterized by an apolitical, collectivist, and superstition-driven

social structure, is a root cause of Pakistan's multifaceted challenges, including militancy, democratic failure, and brain drain. A defining feature of tribalism is authoritarian leadership rooted in family or clan structures. Historically, most Pakistani political leaders, excluding the nation's founders, have emerged from prominent tribal families and established political parties to safeguard familial interests rather than the public good. Consequently, both secular and religious political parties in Pakistan often function as familial enterprises, stifling the emergence of genuine leadership capable of driving national development. This tribal dynamic is a fundamental reason for Pakistan's persistent underdevelopment, as it prevents visionary leadership from thriving.

Tribal structures vary by region in Pakistan, with traditional authorities known as Chaudhris or Nawabs among Punjabis,

significant industrial progress, and democratic institutions remain weak because elections are dominated by tribal leaders. Democracy, as a cultural phenomenon rather than a mere system, requires a conducive social environment to flourish, which tribalism inherently obstructs. This explains the persistent failure of democracy in Pakistan.

Superstition, fatalism, and narrow religious interpretations are also norms in tribal societies, and Pakistan is no exception. The extremism and terrorism that surged over the past two decades stem largely from the rigid worldviews and decontextualized religious exegeses prevalent in tribal communities.

The collectivist ethos of tribalism severely restricts individual freedom and self-expression. In such societies, personal interests are subordinated to those of the family, tribe, or community, leading to widespread frustration



Khans and Maliks among Pashtuns, Waderas among Sindhis, and Sardars and Wajas among Balochs. These localized power structures reinforce tribal influence across provinces.

Another hallmark of tribalism is institutionalized violence and conflict, inherent to the functionality of tribal societies. With few, if any, political or peaceful mechanisms to resolve disputes, feuds, and enmities, violence becomes pervasive. This entrenched culture of conflict, valued by many in society, has fueled large-scale violence in contemporary Pakistan. The tribal framework also hinders the establishment of modern institutions and concepts like industrialization and democracy. Areas with strong tribal influence struggle to achieve

among individuals unable to realize their talents and ambitions. This frustration manifests in two primary ways: violence or emigration. The pervasive violence and significant brain drain of educated youth from Pakistan reflect this reality.

Tribal societies are also inherently patriarchal, relegating women to marginal roles. This renders half the population economically unproductive, with their primary role often reduced to bearing children, contributing to Pakistan's overpopulation. A recent case in Balochistan, where a woman was killed for marrying of her own free will on the orders of a tribal jirga, underscores the barbaric consequences of tribalism.

Learning lost in the dust of rural Sindh

Rasheed Ali

Sindh, the province already struggling with one of the lowest literacy rates in Pakistan, particularly in its rural heartland, has witnessed a troubling chapter in its education sector. For decades, the Pakistan Peoples Party has ruled the province, promising uplift for the poor and marginalised. Yet, rather than working out comprehensive strategies to bring millions of out-of-school children into classrooms, its government took the controversial step of closing thousands of schools — a move that critics describe as apathy, indifference, and incompetence in dealing with a crisis that needed urgent attention.

In September 2021, the provincial Education Department informed the Sindh Assembly that nearly 7,000 so-called “non-viable” government schools would be shut down. The justification given was that these institutions were in areas where demand was low, where school buildings were in disrepair, or where one-room primaries were being forced to teach multiple grades at once. The announcement drew sharp criticism from opposition benches, who argued that the government should have rehabilitated these schools, ensured teacher availability, and attracted children from underserved villages, instead of shutting the doors on poor families with few alternatives. Haleem Adil Shaikh of PTI called it “a direct assault on the right to education for Sindh’s rural poor”.

But the narrative of closures was more complicated than the government first admitted. In the Sindh High Court, officials confessed that many of the closures had little to do with student numbers. Instead, schools were shuttered because they had no teachers or because their buildings were unsafe for use. In 2021, the court was told that 6,866 schools were closed due to lack of teachers, while another 7,974 were deemed “unviable”. By 2024, the number of teacherless schools was still over 2,700, though the government claimed that 540 viable schools had been reopened during the interim.

For parents in rural Sindh, the closures were more than just a statistic. In a dusty village outside Khairpur, forty-year-old farmer Ghulam Nabi lamented, “Our children now walk three kilometres to the next village. When it rains, they don’t go at all. The government may say this school was empty, but my son studied there every day until they locked the gate.” For families who depend on seasonal labour, sending children to distant schools often becomes impossible, leading to higher dropout rates.

Teachers too felt abandoned. A primary

schoolteacher from Dadu, requesting anonymity, described her frustration: “We had thirty children, but no electricity, no water, and only one broken blackboard. Instead of fixing the building and posting another teacher, they declared the school useless. It is easier for them to call it ‘non-viable’ than to admit failure.”

What makes the closure of these schools so regrettable is the scale of need across Sindh. The province has around 41,000 public schools, most of them in rural districts, with enrolment topping 5.2 million children. Yet, access is deceptive. According to the Annual Status of Education Report, in rural Sindh, only 39 per cent of class 5 children can read a story in their mother tongue, just 22pc can read a simple English sentence, and barely 27pc can solve a two-digit division problem. These figures expose a learning crisis that cannot be solved by locking up classrooms, however under-resourced they may be.

Facilities — or the lack of them — are another crippling factor. In village schools across Sindh, fewer than half have clean drinking water or toilets. Only about 45pc have electricity, and many have no boundary walls, making safety and security a challenge. For girls, these gaps are devastating. In communities where cultural barriers already make it difficult for families to send daughters to school, the absence of basic facilities like toilets or secure perimeters often leads to permanent dropouts. “My daughter stopped going because the school had no toilet,” explained Zahida, a mother of three from Umerkot. “When they closed the school altogether, it felt like the government had closed the door on her future too.”

This is why the closures have been received with such frustration. Rather than investing in improving facilities, training teachers, or mobilising out-of-school children, the government preferred to label schools “non-viable” and take them off the books. It was easier to classify them as dead weight than to undertake the systemic reforms needed to revive them. Critics point out that this attitude reflects the broader governance style of the provincial leadership, where problems are managed through shortcuts rather than resolved through policy and planning.

To its credit, the government eventually attempted to reverse some of the damage. In mid-2024, education authorities announced that nearly 2,889 previously closed schools had been reopened, largely thanks to the recruitment and placement of over 2,500 new teachers. The Teachers Placement Committee, formed to

address chronic teacher shortages, became instrumental in these reopenings. Still, hundreds of schools remain shuttered, caught in legal disputes or left in limbo because no serious effort has been made to restore their facilities.

The larger context makes these failures even more glaring. The 2022 floods devastated Sindh more than any other province, washing away entire school buildings or converting them into makeshift shelters for displaced families. The damage to infrastructure was catastrophic, and years later many children are still studying under tents or in unsafe structures. For the government to close schools against this backdrop, instead of prioritising rebuilding, struck many observers as a tragic miscalculation.

Civil society activists argue that these closures represent a betrayal of children in rural Sindh. “We don’t have a shortage of children, we have a shortage of commitment,” said education campaigner Amar Sindhu. “Every closed school means another generation left behind, especially in the poorest districts.”

Supporters of the policy insist that consolidating “ghost schools” and redirecting resources to viable institutions was a practical necessity. They argue that one-room schools with no teachers and no students were a waste of funds, and that the government had to focus on strengthening functional schools instead. Yet the evidence shows that many of these closed schools did have students — what they lacked were teachers, buildings, and basic facilities. In other words, the state’s absence created the very conditions it then used as justification to walk away.

Sindh’s experience highlights the profound disconnect between governance and ground realities. While policy documents speak of access, equity, and quality, the lived experience of children in rural Sindh tells a different story — of empty classrooms, missing teachers, and locked school gates. The reopening of nearly 2,900 schools last year offers a faint glimmer of hope, but without sustained investment, transparent recruitment, and a serious commitment to education, this cycle of closure and reopening will continue.

For children in Sindh’s rural districts, education is not just a policy issue; it is their only lifeline to a better future. Every closed school is not just a shuttered building, but a broken promise — a reminder that while politics churn in Karachi, the fate of millions of poor children in the province remains tied to the indifference of those in power.

The persistent shadow of polio in Pakistan

Dr. Fatima Khan

The recent confirmation of two more polio cases—one in Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and another in Shikarpur, Sindh—has pushed Pakistan's 2025 tally to 21, serving as a grim reminder that the fight against this debilitating disease is ongoing and fraught with obstacles.

Just weeks earlier, a case in Lakki Marwat, also in KP, had already heightened concerns, underscoring how polio continues to lurk in vulnerable pockets despite concerted efforts. This ancient virus, which can cause irreversible paralysis in children, remains a public health scourge in Pakistan, one of only two countries—alongside Afghanistan—where wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) is still endemic. As we mark over three decades since the launch of global eradication initiatives, Pakistan's struggle highlights the complex interplay of social, security, and logistical challenges that have allowed the virus to persist.

Polio, or poliomyelitis, has plagued humanity for centuries, but the advent of effective vaccines in the mid-20th century transformed it from a widespread terror to a near-eradicated threat. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI), established in 1988 by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Rotary International, and other partners, aimed to wipe out the disease worldwide. At its peak in the 1980s, polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children annually across 125 countries. Today, thanks to massive vaccination drives, that number has plummeted by over 99%, with cases confined largely to Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Pakistan, the journey began earnestly in the 1990s, with the government launching the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and supplementary campaigns to reach every child. Billions of dollars in international aid, including from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, have flowed in, supporting door-to-door vaccinations and surveillance systems.

Yet, despite these investments, Pakistan reported 99 cases in 2024, a sharp rise from just one in 2021, before climbing to 21 so far in 2025. The virus thrives in under-vaccinated areas, particularly the tribal regions of KP and Balochistan, where environmental samples from sewage often detect poliovirus circulation even when no clinical cases are apparent. This "silent transmission" allows the virus to spread undetected, infecting children who miss out on routine immunizations. Factors like poor sanitation, high population density, and cross-border movement with Afghanistan exacerbate the problem, creating a

vicious cycle that's hard to break.

At the heart of the resistance lies a web of misinformation and distrust. In many communities, especially in conservative tribal belts, rumors persist that polio vaccines are a Western plot to sterilize Muslim children or contain harmful substances like pork derivatives, which clash with religious beliefs. These conspiracy theories gained traction during the early 2010s, partly fueled by the CIA's fake vaccination campaign to track Osama bin Laden, which eroded public confidence. Religious misconceptions, often amplified by local clerics, portray vaccines as un-Islamic, leading to outright refusals. In some areas, parents demand bribes or infrastructure improvements before allowing their children to be vaccinated, viewing campaigns as leverage for unmet needs.

Security threats compound these issues, turning a health mission into a high-stakes operation. Over the past decade, more than 200 polio workers and their security escorts have been killed in targeted attacks by militants, including the Taliban, who view vaccination teams as spies or symbols of government intrusion. Women, who make up a significant portion of the vaccination workforce due to their ability to access households, bear the brunt of this violence. These "lady health workers" traverse rugged terrains, often on foot, to administer oral polio vaccine (OPV) drops, but the constant fear of ambushes has led to hesitancy. In high-risk zones like North and South Waziristan, campaigns are frequently suspended, leaving gaps in coverage. Tragically, some vaccinators resort to "finger-marking" without vaccinating—inking a child's finger to simulate completion—to evade confrontation, perpetuating the virus's spread.

The human cost is heartbreaking. Polio primarily affects children under five, causing fever, fatigue, and in severe cases, permanent limb paralysis. Survivors like young Ahmed from Bannu, KP, who contracted polio in 2023, face lifelong disabilities, relying on crutches and facing social stigma. Families endure emotional and financial burdens, with limited access to rehabilitation services in rural areas. Nationally, the disease drains resources, diverting funds from other health priorities and tarnishing Pakistan's global image. Brain drain among health professionals, wary of the dangers, further weakens the system.

Despite these hurdles, Pakistan's Polio Eradication Programme has achieved notable successes. Case numbers have dropped dramatically from over 300 in 2014 to the low double digits in recent years, thanks to innovative strategies. High-quality vaccination campaigns, known as Supplementary Immunization Activities (SIAs),

target millions of children multiple times a year. The introduction of the injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) alongside OPV has bolstered immunity. Environmental surveillance, monitoring sewage for the virus, has improved early detection, while rapid response teams investigate and vaccinate around every new case. International partners provide technical expertise, funding, and vaccines, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE contributing significantly.

Community engagement has been pivotal in turning the tide. Programs like the Sehat Muhafiz (Health Protectors) initiative recruit local influencers—tribal elders, imams, and teachers—to advocate for vaccinations. In Punjab and Sindh, where cases are fewer (one in Punjab and six in Sindh this year), higher literacy and urban access facilitate better coverage. Success stories abound: Districts once rife with refusals now boast near-100% acceptance after sustained dialogue. In Gilgit-Baltistan, a single case in Diamer this year prompted an intensified drive, demonstrating proactive measures.

Looking ahead, eradicating polio requires a multifaceted approach. Prioritizing worker safety through enhanced police protection and community-led security is essential. Addressing "zero-dose" children—those never vaccinated—demands mobile clinics and integration with routine health services. Combating misinformation calls for media campaigns in local languages, leveraging social media and radio to share testimonials from polio survivors and religious endorsements. Cross-border collaboration with Afghanistan, where 27 cases have been reported in 2025, is crucial to stem importation.

Moreover, tackling root causes like poverty, malnutrition, and weak infrastructure will build resilience. Investing in sanitation and clean water reduces transmission risks, while empowering women through education enhances health outcomes. With political will, as seen in Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent pledges, Pakistan can accelerate progress. The GPEI's goal of a polio-free world by 2026 is ambitious but achievable if the "last mile" challenges are met head-on. In conclusion, the shadow of polio over Pakistan is persistent but not insurmountable. The 21 cases in 2025, including 13 in KP, reflect setbacks, yet they also galvanize action. By protecting health workers, fostering trust, and sustaining momentum, Pakistan can protect its children and join the ranks of polio-free nations. Every vaccinated child is a step toward victory, ensuring no more families endure the pain of this preventable tragedy. The world watches and supports, but ultimate success lies in unified national resolve.

There is something worse than starvation in Gaza

ShougMukhaimar

I woke up one morning in July to a flurry of messages lighting up my phone. Every news channel, every social media post, every conversation buzzed with cautious optimism. “Negotiations progressing well”, the headlines declared. “Truce imminent”, “Massive aid convoy preparing to enter”.

At that moment, we were deep in the throes of famine; some days, we ate nothing at all. You can imagine the cautious joy that flickered in our hearts, the way hope travelled through our messages. Friends wrote to me, their words trembling with tentative relief. “Could this really be the end?” one asked. “Will we remember what safety feels like? Will there finally be bread?”

We dared to dream. We imagined the silence of the ceasefire, the taste of warm bread, the comfort of a full meal. Some shops tentatively reopened. Prices dipped slightly. For the first time in months, bread seemed almost within reach. For a fleeting moment, life seemed to return to the streets.

In Gaza, even the most battered communities breathe differently when hope appears – even if it is for a few hours. My neighbour – a war widow raising seven children alone, including an infant who cries endlessly from hunger – told me how her children weep from empty stomachs while she cries from helplessness. When the truce rumours spread, she dreamed of feeding them properly, of ending their suffering. Like all of us, she watched that hope disintegrate.

By the next morning, everything had collapsed. A new headline, cold and final, sealed our fate: “Negotiations fail. No truce.” Shops that had barely reopened were shuttered. Flour vanished once again. Prices soared beyond reach. Outside Gaza, the media still spoke of aid convoys “on their way”, but on the ground, there was nothing. Empty words. Empty trucks. Empty hands.

You can imagine how hearts broke that day. How the spirit of a people dreaming simply of bread was crushed. How mothers searching desperately for food for their children felt. The fragile hope that had lit our eyes vanished, leaving only hunger, fear, and silence.

This was not the first time it happened. It had happened many times before. And it happened again afterwards. Just last week, we found ourselves waiting, this time for a single word from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after Hamas reportedly accepted

a ceasefire proposal. The uncertainty was unbearable. After several days of silence, the Israeli government made impossible demands, effectively killing the latest attempt at negotiations. The news plunged us back into yet another cycle of despair as hunger, displacement, loss and grief take their toll.

I believe these repeated bouts of ceasefire headlines are not unintentional — they are another form of punishment for the people of Gaza. Another form of torture. We are bombed, starved, displaced and then the news finishes us off. Hope is dangled in front of us, only to be ripped away, leaving us weaker each time.

It is a deliberate, systematic policy aimed to wear off a defenceless population. It is designed to break our spirit, to make us live

only to be left with nothing when it fails to arrive. This repeated devastation breeds more than mistrust of governments and the media; it erodes the very concept of hope. Many here no longer ask, “When will this end?” but “How much worse can it get?”

According to the World Food Programme, 100 percent of people in Gaza now suffer acute levels of food insecurity, with all children aged below five years facing acute malnutrition. Famine has been officially announced. Israel continues to claim that its blockade measures prevent supplies from reaching Hamas, even though the US government – its biggest ally – and Israeli officials themselves say there is no evidence of resistance fighters looting aid. Amnesty Interna-



in constant uncertainty, to strip us of the basic human right to hope for tomorrow. This cycle – hope raised then shattered – leaves deeper scars than starvation.

While we wait for the news, the hunger tightens its grip. Walk outside and you see it etched on faces: men wiping tears, women collapsing in the streets from exhaustion, children too weak to play. Hunger is not just a physical state – it is an unbearable weight that crushes the soul.

Mothers stop planning meals because they cannot promise they can put something on the table. Children learn early that good news often sours by morning. Families sell their last possessions when aid is announced,

tional calls the Israeli siege of Gaza “collective punishment” and “a war crime”. The Geneva Conventions explicitly prohibit collective punishment and forced starvation.

And so, I cannot help but ask: Where is the world in all of this? How can an entire planet watch two million people be starved, bombed, and stripped of dignity, and still do nothing?

This silence is heavy; it crushes the spirit as much as hunger does. It tells us that our suffering is acceptable, that our lives can fade away without consequence. History will condemn those who committed these crimes, but also those who stood by and allowed them to happen.

Trump, send your deportees to Europe not Africa

Tafi Mhaka

On August 5, Rwanda announced it had agreed to accept 250 migrants under the Trump administration's expanding third-country deportation programme.

Speaking from Kigali, government spokesperson Yolande Makolo said Rwanda would retain the right to decide which deportees to admit for "resettlement". Those accepted, she added, would receive training, healthcare, and housing to help them "rebuild their lives".

The programme forms part of President Donald Trump's controversial pledge to carry out "the largest deportation operation in American history." It also marks the third deportation agreement of its kind on the African continent. On July 16, the US sent five convicted criminals from Vietnam, Jamaica, Laos, Cuba, and Yemen to Eswatini, formerly known as Swaziland.

Described as "barbaric and violent" and rejected by their countries of origin, they are confined to isolated units at the Matsapha Correctional Complex, near the capital Mbabane, pending eventual repatriation. Eleven days earlier, on July 5, eight men convicted of murder, sexual assault, and robbery were deported to South Sudan. Reports differ on whether any deportee was South Sudanese.

The deportations have already provoked widespread outrage – from civil society groups in Eswatini, to lawyers in South Sudan, who denounce them as illegal. South Africa's government has even lodged a formal protest with Eswatini. Nigeria, meanwhile, has rebuffed US pressure to accept 300 Venezuelans, with Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar saying the country already has "enough problems" and "over 230 million people" to care for.

The US is strong-arming others at the expense of vulnerable people. Trump's established brutality is horrifying. His family separations in 2019 left children terrified and alone, all in the name of policy. The US is now sending people to Rwanda, Eswatini, and South Sudan – countries already struggling to care for their own citizens.

This truth exposes Trump's Victorian view of Africa: a desolate, irredeemable continent unworthy of respect or equal partnership. His vision echoes a Western tradition, crystallised in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where Africa is portrayed as "dark" and "primeval" – a land deemed oppressive and violent, its people cast as incapable of understanding, feeling, or compassion.

That is not who we are. Yes, Africa has

challenges.

Nonetheless, we do not turn the marginalised into pawns, nor do we disguise exile as policy. Our humanity is unshakable and beyond reproach. Today, Uganda hosts about 1.7 million refugees, making it Africa's largest refugee-hosting country. This figure exceeds the combined refugee populations under UNHCR's mandate in the UK, France, and Belgium today.

Europe must assume a far greater share of responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees. These third-country deportation deals are not credible policy.

They are colonialism reborn. No self-respecting African leader should ever agree to participate in an organised atrocity – not when Africa still bleeds from the wounds inflicted by the West: Sudan's civil war, civic unrest in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, environmental devastation in Nigeria's Delta, and the continuing reach of French monetary imperial-



ism through the CFA.

"Uncle Sam" now plans to send both convicted criminals and desperate asylum seekers to Africa's shores, instead of the warships of old. Both groups deserve support at home in the US, with extensive rehabilitation for offenders and safe sanctuary for the vulnerable. If not, Europe can be the only alternative.

Let the architects of the empire face the heat. Let the wealthy, politically obnoxious allies of Washington carry the burden for once.

Rwanda, Eswatini, and South Sudan are among the poorest nations in the world, with per capita incomes just a tiny fraction of their former colonial rulers in Europe. Expecting them to carry the burden of America's deportees is not only unjust – it is absurd.

A May 2025 study, *Unequal Exchange and North-South Relations*, undertaken by Gaston

Nievas and Thomas Piketty, analysed foreign wealth accumulation over more than two centuries. It shows that by 1914, European powers held net foreign assets approaching 140 percent of GDP, underscoring how colonial transfers, artificially low commodity prices, forced labour, and exploitation fuelled Europe's enrichment.

From Juba to Kigali, colonial plunder still drives global inequality. A return to the systemic brutalities unleashed after the disastrous Berlin Conference of 1885, when European powers carved up Africa, cannot be accepted.

No matter what officials in Rwanda, South Sudan, or Eswatini claim in public, sending America's cast-offs to Africa is colonial exploitation repackaged for today.

This is not a new strategy. Beginning in the 19th century, many European colonies were reduced to offshore extraction centres and dumping grounds. France banished convicts and political exiles to territories such as present-day

Gabon and Djibouti. Spain used Bioko Island in Equatorial Guinea as a penal settlement for deportees from Cuba.

The US has revived that same imperial entitlement, delivering a fresh blow to both Africa and the Americas. Most irregular migrants in the US come from Venezuela, Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Haiti – nations scarred by centuries of European colonialism and US imperial interference.

These countries embody the ongoing impact of colonial legacies and geopolitical meddling that propel migration. Yet the West, and Europe above all, denies and disowns the consequences of its crimes, past and present. European nations have certainly prospered through centuries of colonial exploitation. The UK, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, for instance, boast robust welfare systems, public health networks, and prison rehabilitation programmes – magnificent structures built on centuries of colonial extraction.

They have both the means and the institutions to absorb deportees. They also have the record. These same powers have eagerly joined the US in targeting and destabilising sovereign nations across Africa, as well as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya – in wars widely condemned as violations of international law.

FBR portal faces glitches

The Integrated Revenue Information System (Iris) portal of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is suffering from slow loading and frequent access errors. At times, it is impossible to even log in. For many tax filers, this means repeated failed attempts and wasted hours. With taxation deadlines nearing, such issues have raised serious questions in the minds of the people. If the system cannot handle normal traffic, it is hard to imagine it running smoothly when the final days near. The authorities should fix the system, or, else, extend the deadline.

Abdul Qadeer Chachar
Karachi

Unjustified hike in MDCAT fee

The sudden hike in the Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT) enrolment fee is unjustified. It was Rs3,000 not too long ago. Last year, it shot up to Rs8,000, and now it has been set at Rs9,000. Despite the fee hike, students still take the exam in open grounds under the blazing summer sun without proper seating, fans or even basic arrangements. From paper leaks to the controversial re-totalling of marks, the management of this crucial exam has been a disaster. We need a fair fee, facilities, and an honest, transparent process.

Emad Khan
Peshawar

Security and safety lapses

The recent explosion and derailment of six bogies of the Jaffar Express in Mastung are alarming. This is not the first time such an incident has happened. These incidents show both a security lapse and poor maintenance of railway tracks. It is the responsibility of the government to increase patrolling in sensitive areas, modernise infrastructure, and ensure the safety of passengers.

Khudija Sakhawat
Wah Cantt

Neglect of chess

Pakistan has not been able to promote the culture of chess to the level the game deserves. The roots of chess lie in this region, and neighbouring India now has several grandmasters. The government should promote the culture of chess, allocate funds by establishing dedicated chess schools.

Waliullah Magsi
Dadu

Fake encounters and justice

Punjab encounters are mostly fake and against humanity. The fact is that such encounters are damaging the soft image of the country. There are times when we see a

confirmed incident involving some arrogant political figure crushing down an innocent traffic policeman under the wheel of a four-wheeler in broad daylight. The incident is even caught on camera, but the man goes scot-free because of his position and power. When something like that happens, I tend to change sides.

And, when hardened criminals cannot be punished because no one dares to come forward and stand witness against them, what should the state do? Just stay put to save the soft image of the country? When no action can be taken against criminals involved in honour killings, and they are pardoned by the victims' families under duress or against some money, should it be accepted as fait accompli? Also, when members of jirgas, having no legal standing, issue verdicts involving rape and killings, but remain untouched because of their tribal position, what should the state do? Should it just watch helplessly and save its soft image?

I can go on and on, but, to make a long story short, for me, the lives of innocent people are more important, and all actions taken to ensure their safety seem rather justified.

Malik ul Quddoos
Karachi

India's democratic decline

Even Indian jurist and social reformer Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who worked against social discrimination and chaired the committee that drafted the Indian Constitution, and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi would have been embarrassed had they been alive today on the bellicose and acrimonious political culture that is now prevalent in Indian society. The Constitution, which was known for its secular approach, has been tarnished by the extremist Hindutva proponents, with the Kashmiris being its greatest victims.

During the fascist government led by Narendra Modi, occupied Kashmir has lost two critical elements of safety and protection within the Indian Constitution. The revocation of Articles 370 and 35A was an attack on a democratic covenant that had been formalised by previous Indian governments with the people of occupied Kashmir. As a matter of fact, these are the only violations that are apparent. The other humanitarian violations by the Modi-led government against the Kashmiris mostly remain unreported.

Modi clearly does not realise that his actions are dragging the country into an abyss of democratic ignorance. It is time the world community took notice of these violations by India, which has been for long involved in bullying neighbouring states and destabilising the entire region.

Ausaf Hyder Sial
Hyderabad

Uniting men and women Against patriarchy

Men in society have always been blamed for 'gender-based violence' by the grief-stricken individuals, especially by grieving women in Pakistani society. In response to some gruesome, barbaric tragedy involving harassment or honour killing of women, this is a very natural and primal reaction. While the intention behind such outbursts may be benign, it is grave oversimplification of a much broader and deeply rooted issue within society.

The broader picture suggests that while men do commit these crimes, they make up a smaller portion of the crimes committed overall. According to a report in The Guardian, men account for around 80 per cent of all homicide victims globally. Only 12pc of male homicides occur within domestic or family settings, whereas 60pc of female homicides do. A broader narrative may help us delve into the matter.

First, the crimes committed by men have no sole correlation with 'gender-based' violence. It is not in the innate nature of men to target women based on their gender alone. The problem has its roots in a weak law and order system, and the situation gets worse with sub-standard education. This leads to the principal argument that men are not the enemies; illiteracy, poor legislation and incompetent institutions are. Crime has no face, no faith, and no gender. Blaming all men for the crimes of a few is like blaming Islam for the unacceptable acts of hardcore terrorists. We condemn Islamophobes for taking such a stance, and should, logically, take a similar stance against those propagating the notion that 'all men are the same'.

In combating the totally undeniable patriarchal norms, society needs united movements with clearly defined and actionable goals. Recent movements, such as the 'Ni Una Menos' in Argentina, 'Black Protests' in Poland and 'Together for Yes' in Ireland, have achieved tremendous success in their way of proving that targeted activism can bring serious social change. Lamenting the actions of a few and blaming all men for them will actually be a deterrent to the common masses joining any such movement, especially in developing countries. We are in dire need of such movements that target a collective approach to the task of putting an end to patriarchy in society. We need men to be frontrunners alongside women. Men need to go beyond gestures. They need to show solidarity as well as companionship and camaraderie. It is the basic duty of every father, every brother and every husband to be the actual flag-bearer of equal rights, fair treatment and compulsory education for one and all. By eradicating the outdated patriarchal system, improving education and overall law-enforcement, we can do wonders. Blaming an entire gender will only deprive such a movement of half its strength.

Arslan Mirani
Daharki

Uranus has a new, hidden moon

Ben Turner

The James Webb Space Telescope has spotted a never-before-seen moon orbiting Uranus, bringing the planet's count of natural satellites to 29. The moon, for now dubbed S/2025 U1, is just 6 miles (10 kilometers) in diameter, which is why it was invisible to other telescopes and the Voyager 2 spacecraft when it made its 1986 flyby of the icy planet. Now, the James Webb Space Telescope's (JWST) Near-Infrared Camera (NIRCam) has detected glints of sunlight in a series of 10 40-minute long-exposure images of Uranus, which revealed the elusive moon's presence. The discovery hints that much more remains hidden around Uranus, the astronomers who found the moon say. "No other planet has as many small inner moons as Uranus, and their complex inter-relationships with the rings hint at a chaotic history that blurs the boundary between a ring system and a system of moons," Matthew Tiscareno, a senior research scientist at the SETI Institute in Mountain View, California, and a member of the research team, said in a statement. "Moreover, the new moon is smaller and much fainter than the smallest of the previously known inner moons, making it likely that even more complexity remains to be discovered." First spotted in 1781 by the German-British astronomer Frederick William Herschel, Uranus is the seventh planet from our sun and orbits it at a distance of 1.8 billion miles (2.9 billion km), nearly 20 times farther than Earth, according to NASA. This extreme distance means that much of what we know about the far-flung, icy and lopsided planet comes from data gathered by NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft, which zipped past the ice giant 40 years ago — yet even this information has been revised.



Your household gadgets could soon be battery-free

Ross Kelly

An array of personal and home devices could one day function battery-free following the development of pioneering new solar technology.

These new solar cells are capable of harvesting energy from indoor light. Researchers said the discovery has broad applications and could enable consumers to power devices such as keyboards, alarms and sensors using only indoor ambient light.

In the study, published in the journal *Advanced Functional Materials*, researchers used the perovskite to gather light in solar cells. This material is already in use in other solar cells and offers distinct advantages to traditional silicon-based solar panels. In particular, perovskite absorbs lower-power, ambient light more efficiently than traditional methods, according to the study, making it ideal for indoor use. The researchers' new perovskite cells were six times more efficient than silicon-based solar cells, the researchers found.

In the long term, perovskite-derived solar cells represent a more sustainable and cost-effective alternative to batteries, said study co-author Mojtaba Abdi Jalebi, associate professor in energy materials at University College London' Institute for Materials Discovery. "Billions of devices that require small amounts of energy rely on battery replacements — an unsustainable practice. This number will grow as the Internet of Things expands," Jalebi said in a statement.

"Currently, solar cells capturing energy from indoor light are expensive and inefficient. Our specially engineered perovskite indoor solar cells can harvest much more energy than commercial cells and is more durable than other prototypes.



The surge in type 1 diabetes, and the new ways to fight it

Sara Novak

Cases of type 1 diabetes — an autoimmune condition where the body attacks insulin-producing beta cells — are rising faster than ever, climbing about 42% since 1990. That's a huge increase in a disease that's expensive, incurable, and still shortens lifespan by more than a decade. But the number of new and emerging treatments is surging too, and experts say we're in the most promising era of type 1 diabetes treatments in history, with new medications that slow the disease's progression, advanced insulin delivery systems, inhalable options, and drugs that improve insulin resistance. It's a shift in the management of a chronic lifelong disease for patients who are often diagnosed in childhood. "These patients are living much longer than they used to with an improved quality of life," said Kupper A. Wintergerst, MD, a pediatric endocrinologist and executive director of the Wendy Novak Diabetes Institute. Experts attribute the rise in type 1 cases to a few factors. Genetics play a role in who will get type 1 diabetes, increasing a patient's risk by about 40%. And in people with an increased risk, certain environmental factors may serve to nudge them toward getting the disease. For example, infections in early childhood like mumps, rubella, and influenza B as well as childhood obesity and certain environmental factors like antibiotics overuse, vitamin D deficiency, and the hygiene hypothesis — which suggests that kids who aren't exposed to enough microorganisms in childhood may end up with an overactive immune system — may also be playing a role.



The real risks of turning to AI for therapy

Mary Brophy Marcus

Whenever Luke W Russell needs to work through something, they turn to ChatGPT. (Luke uses they/them pronouns.) "I've used as I've navigated things," said the Indianapolis filmmaker, who uses the chatbot to pick apart intrusive thoughts or navigate traumatic memories. "I've had numerous times when what ChatGPT is saying to me is so real, so powerful, and I feel so deeply seen."

Russell's experience reflects a broader, growing reality: Many people are turning to chatbots for mental health support — for everything from managing anxiety and processing grief to coping with work conflicts and defusing marital spats. More than half of adults ages 18-54 — and a quarter of adults 55 and up — say they would be comfortable talking with an AI chatbot about their mental health, according to a 2025 survey by the Harris Poll and the American Psychological Association (APA). The catch: OpenAI's ChatGPT and other chatbots — like Anthropic's Claude and Google's Gemini — are not designed for this. Even AI products promoted as emotional health tools — like Replika, Wysa, Youper, and MindDoc — were not built on validated psychological methods, said psychologist C. Vaile Wright, PhD, senior director of the APA's Office of Health Care Innovation. "I would argue that there isn't really any commercially approved, AI-assisted therapy at the moment," said Wright. "You've got a whole lot of chatbots where there is no research, there's no psychological science, and there are no subject matter experts."

Critics warn that AI's potential for bias, lack of true empathy, and limited human oversight could actually endanger users' mental health, especially among vulnerable groups like children, teens, people with mental health conditions, and those experiencing suicidal thoughts.





POWER BEHIND **PRESTIGE**

