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WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL

EXPORT SECTOR IN A MORIBUND STATE

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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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Export sector in a moribund state

Farhan Khan

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics has reported a significant rise in exports of 8.44 percent in July 2025 as compared to June 2025 and 16.43 percent over July 2024 in dollar terms. However, the trade deficit increased by 29.43 percent in July 2025 against July 2024 and by 10.57 percent over June 2025.

The trade deficit has risen to USD 6.013 billion in July-August this year compared to USD 4.661 billion in the same period of last year. This is due to an increase in imports by 23.13 percent in July 2025 as opposed to July 2024 and 9.58 percent against June this year.

As things stand, exports have fallen due to the withdrawal of monetary and fiscal incentives by the government. In the opinion of the IMF, the government's efforts to boost economic activity through fiscal and monetary stimulus have not translated into sustainable growth, as domestic demand has increased beyond Pakistan's sustainable capacity, resulting in inflation.

The unfolding global economic situation shows that new difficulties may arise in the coming days affecting our external sector. The 19 percent tariffs agreed with the US, one of the few countries with which Pakistan has a trade surplus, may not work out as planned due to the Fund's extremely harsh upfront conditions which prohibit any kind of incentives to exporters. Further, high utility charges as compared to the regional average and heavy reliance on petroleum levy as a revenue source stand in the way of any efforts aimed at raising exports.

It may be added here that the GSP+ status extended by the European Union till December 31, 2027, through a unanimous vote by the European parliament in October 2023 has greatly helped increase our exports by over 108 percent over the past decade. But lately there are questions being raised regarding the level of our compliance with the 27 international conventions that are tied to the GSP+ scheme, particularly those relating to human and labour rights.

Export growth is inextricably linked with the efficient working of the industrial sector. But over the years, protectionist measures have weakened the competitive spirit of our industries which have not attained the level of efficiency vital for survival in the world market. On the other hand, bureaucratic control and red-tape have hindered the growth of

business and industry in the country.

Exorbitant energy costs, and rising taxes and borrowing costs have reduced industrial competitiveness. In order to boost exports, we will have to first revitalise the industrial sector and attend to its essential needs. In this connection, the government is said to have formulated a new industrial policy aimed at facilitating the growth of industry. The main elements of the policy include strategic interventions like revival of non-performing units through restructuring with support from the Pakistan Banking Association and enhanced access to credit for the private sector.

The policy also envisages tax reforms and rationalisation of the tax regime and lowering energy and financing costs for business ven-

sharpest decline, near a quarter, while Punjab has also contracted. It is clear that if mills cannot get domestic lint in sufficient quantity and quality, they will have to import the commodity at higher cost, with a negative impact on price competitiveness.

For years we have neglected to invest sufficiently for the modernisation of the cotton economy, including development of better quality seed, rigorous certification, modern irrigation systems and technology adoption across the entire value chain. On-farm water use remains inefficient, seed markets are rife with inconsistency, and mechanisation is sloppy and half hearted. As a result, productivity has shown no improvement. Our per acre yield is much below that of our competitors.



tures. Some innovative steps have been also planned to attract foreign investment, especially from overseas Pakistanis. In this context, it is important to note here that Pakistan's large-scale manufacturing (LSM) sector registered negative 1.21 percent growth in July-May 2025. This means that we have to pay special attention for better health of the LSM sector.

Textiles are the backbone of our exports but the news from the cotton sector is not encouraging. Cotton production is in decline, signalling disruption along the entire production and supply chain. In an economy where textiles are the main foreign exchange earners, a shortfall in cotton is not a sectoral problem, but a larger macroeconomic threat. According to the latest reports, cotton arrivals in the processing units are down by more than 17 percent compared to last year. Sindh has suffered the

Climate change has also negatively impacted our cotton sector. Recurrent bouts of heatwaves, heavy rain and floods have greatly damaged cotton production, accompanied by inordinate growth of viruses and insects affecting plant health. There is an urgent need to develop climate resilient, pest resistant varieties, timely husbandry, and put in place an integrated pest management system. But no timely action has yet been taken. The remedy lies in providing urgently needed funds for research institutions so that they can deliver seeds suited to local conditions, along with improved field level extension that supports integrated pest management and climate smart practices. As cotton anchors the main export industry and is a source of livelihood for the rural population, its problems call for attention at the highest level.

SCO Summit: towards a new world order

Nasim Ahmed

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin was a landmark event marking a tectonic shift in the existing international order in the context of emerging realignments among groups of nations. Formed as a security cooperation group over two decades ago, the SCO has evolved into a multilateral forum for trade and economic development with a strong focus on strengthening the unity of the Global South.

Described as 'SCO-Plus', the conference was attended by more than 20 heads of state and government, as well as leaders of international organisations. The SCO comprises China, India, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus, with 16 more countries affiliated as observers or "dialogue partners." The organisation covers approximately 24 per cent of global land area and 42pc of the world's population, with member states accounting for roughly one-quarter of global GDP. China's trade with SCO members, observers and dialogue partners totalled \$890 billion in 2024 or 14.4pc of its total foreign trade.

The annual Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Tianjin signalled, among other things, a closing of ranks among its members at a time of quickly shifting relations on the global chessboard. The two-day event ended with a joint declaration, pledging a deepened strategic alliance in the Global South and advocating 'fairness over dominance' and a commitment to maintaining an open global economy. The Tianjin Declaration said: "The member states, while reaffirming their firm commitment to the fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism, stress the inadmissibility of attempts to use terrorist, separatist and extremist groups for mercenary purposes. They recognise the leading role of sovereign states and their competent authorities in countering terrorist and extremist threats."

The declaration said the SCO members were committed to ensuring sustainable international peace and called for joint efforts to counter traditional and new security challenges and threats. They also signed the Agreement on the Universal Centre for Countering Challenges and Threats to the Security of SCO Member States and the Agreement on the SCO Anti-Drug Centre. The declaration said

the SCO members would continue to actively implement the Programme of Cooperation of SCO Member States in Countering Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism for 2025-2027. The leaders further adopted a 10-year SCO Development Strategy until 2035, which "defines the priority tasks and main directions for deepening multifaceted cooperation in the interests of ensuring peace and stability, development and prosperity in the SCO space".

Regarding the situation in the Middle East, the SCO leaders reiterated their deep concern over the continuing escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and strongly condemned actions that led to numerous casualties among the civilian population and a "catastrophic humanitarian situation" in the Gaza Strip. They stressed the need to ensure an immediate, complete and sustainable ceasefire, access to humanitarian aid, and intensified efforts to achieve peace, stability and security for all residents of the region. They also strongly



ly condemned the military strikes by Israel and the United States against Iran in June, saying that such aggressive actions against civilian targets, including nuclear energy infrastructure, which resulted in the death of civilians, were a "gross violation of the principles and norms of international law and the UN Charter, and an infringement on the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

On Afghanistan, the SCO members reaffirmed their commitment to the country's establishment as an independent, neutral and peaceful state, free from terrorism, war and drugs, and expressed their readiness to support the efforts of the international community to ensure peace and development in the country. The Tianjin Declaration of the SCO Council reaffirmed commitments to strengthen artificial intelligence cooperation, underscoring "equal rights of all countries to

develop and use AI." It pledged to cooperate on reducing risks and improving the security and accountability of AI for the benefits of humanity, while committing to implement a roadmap for joint AI cooperation and development.

Some member states agreed to set up an SCO development bank, what would be a significant step in the bloc's long-standing goal of establishing an alternative payment system that reduces reliance on the US dollar. Beijing also pledged 2 billion yuan (\$280 million) in free aid for member states this year and another 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) in loans to the organization's members over the next three years.

Pakistan projected a strong presence at the Tianjin summit. It maintained top-level attendance and leveraged the SCO as a forum where it appears alongside major powers. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with world leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkiye's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, on the sidelines of the conference.

He also held informal meetings with Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Turkmenistan's Serdar Berdimuhamedov, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

It is a matter of satisfaction for Pakistan that SCO leaders "strongly condemned" the March 11 Jaffar Express hijacking and May 21 Khuzdar bombing in Pakistan, in addition to the April 22 Pahalgam terrorist attack. The condemnation of violence on Pakistani soil drew attention to Pakistan's security concerns, underlining a broader international consensus against the terrorist activities of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA).

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir held high-level meetings on the sidelines of the SCO summit. The most important of these was with President Xi Jinping during which Beijing reaffirmed its commitment to building Pakistan's military capabilities. Overall, Pakistan's participation in the summit underlined Pakistan's commitment to the SCO's plans and objectives as well as reinforced its bilateral relations with China, Iran, and Russia and other member states.

Pakistan's wheat sector at a crossroads

Muhammad Ali

Pakistan's wheat production in 2025, as detailed in the Food and Agriculture Organisation's recent analysis, reflects both progress and challenges. Bolstered by a \$7 billion IMF bailout in 2024, the government's decision to eliminate the minimum support price (MSP) for wheat has driven a 6.5% reduction in wheat acreage, as farmers shift to more profitable crops like oilseeds and vegetables.

While the harvest exceeded the five-year average by 5%, vulnerabilities in rain-fed regions and market uncertainties highlight the risks of incomplete economic reforms. Pakistan's latest wheat harvest presents a complex picture. The country has recorded a wheat yield 5% higher than the five-year average, yet the area dedicated to wheat cultivation has dropped by 6.5%, signaling a notable shift in farming practices. Farmers are increasingly turning to more lucrative crops, moving away from wheat, a traditional staple.

This change is primarily driven by the government's decision to eliminate the minimum support price for wheat in May 2024, coupled with low market prices during the planting season. According to the Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture (GIEWS), these factors have prompted farmers to pivot toward higher-value crops such as oilseeds, condiments, and vegetables. While this reflects sound economic decision-making, it raises concerns about long-term food security, particularly in regions vulnerable to environmental challenges.

The FAO estimates Pakistan's 2025 wheat production at 29 million tonnes, a solid figure bolstered by above-average yields in irrigated areas. However, rain-fed regions, which make up roughly 20% of wheat cultivation, suffered losses due to drought and water scarcity. Northern irrigated areas also faced challenges from insufficient irrigation water, further complicating the harvest outlook.

Meanwhile, the 2025 paddy crop planting, completed by early August, faced disruptions from severe flooding between June and early August. These floods, along with landslides, impacted northern and northwestern regions, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh,

and Balochistan, causing localized crop damage and affecting agricultural livelihoods.

On the trade front, wheat imports in the 2024-25 marketing year fell well below the five-year average following a July 2024 import ban on wheat grain. Additionally, the government imposed an export ban on wheat flour and related products, including those made from imported wheat, which remains in effect as of August 2025. Rice, a key export crop, is projected to reach 5.5 million tonnes in exports for 2025, while maize exports for the 2025-26 marketing year are expected to hold steady at 500,000 tonnes.

Domestically, wheat flour prices, a cornerstone of Pakistan's food supply, plummeted by nearly 50% from March 2024 to July 2025. This sharp decline is attributed to ample market

prices during the sowing period. Faced with these economic realities, farmers have increasingly shifted to high-value crops like oilseeds and vegetables. While this reflects pragmatic decision-making, it exposes vulnerabilities, particularly for the roughly 20% of wheat farmers in rain-fed regions who faced crop losses due to drought and water shortages. In contrast, irrigated areas, supported by canal systems, achieved above-average yields, highlighting the disparity in agricultural outcomes across regions.

However, the reduction in wheat cultivation does not necessarily indicate that scrapping the MSP was misguided. The reform was a necessary step toward reducing government intervention in agricultural markets. Yet, the FAO's findings serve as a warning: incomplete reforms

can destabilize markets, leaving both farmers and consumers at risk. To ensure wheat farming remains viable, the government must implement complementary measures. These include fostering a transparent and competitive market, improving access to affordable loans for seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, and introducing crop insurance to mitigate climate-related risks. Additionally, training in advanced farming techniques, reducing the influence of exploitative intermediaries, and liberalizing trade to integrate Pakistan's wheat sector into global markets are critical steps.

Without a comprehensive approach to reform, the contraction in wheat acreage could jeopardize food security and the economic stability of rural communities. The challenge lies in balancing market-driven policies with targeted support to make wheat cultivation both sustainable and profitable, ensuring resilience against environmental and economic uncertainties.

The contraction in Pakistan's wheat acreage underscores the complexities of economic reforms in agriculture. While abolishing the MSP was a step toward market liberalization, it must be accompanied by robust support systems—affordable credit, crop insurance, modern farming practices, and fair market access—to make wheat cultivation viable. Without these, Pakistan risks undermining food security and rural livelihoods. A balanced, forward-thinking approach to reform is essential to strengthen the wheat sector and build resilience against environmental and economic challenges.



supply from strong harvests, significant imports in 2023-24, and the government's decision to halt wheat procurement at a minimum support price since 2024. While lower prices benefit consumers, they underscore the challenges farmers face in balancing profitability with the demands of food production.

In 2024, Pakistan secured a \$7 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), contingent on a series of economic reforms, including the elimination of the minimum support price (MSP) for wheat. This policy shift has significantly influenced the country's agricultural landscape. The report presents a dual narrative: a robust harvest exceeding the five-year average by 5%, juxtaposed against a 6.5% reduction in wheat-planted areas as farmers pivot to more profitable crops.

The decline in wheat acreage is largely attributed to the government's decision to abolish the MSP in May 2024, alongside low wheat

Pakistan's trade paradox: Exports stall as import bill soars

Shahid Hussain

The latest trade figures reveal a complex economic situation, marked by strong performances in niche exports alongside swelling import bills that underscore the country's persistent external vulnerabilities. While sports goods, surgical instruments, and cement exports recorded impressive growth, the broader picture shows a troubling rise in imports of petroleum, machinery, food items, and transport vehicles. The numbers, though mixed, provide a telling snapshot of both opportunity and risk for the economy at a time when policy reforms are being set in motion.

Pakistan's commercial imbalance ballooned alarmingly in August 2025, vaulting over 30 percent year-on-year to settle at \$2.87 billion, according to figures released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). The surge, fueled by a revival in imports alongside a punishing contraction in exports, has further burdened the already fragile external account of the nation. Twelve months earlier, in August 2024, the deficit stood at \$2.20 billion. The current swell has been powered by a 6.4 percent elevation in imports, now recorded at \$5.29 billion, while exports withered by 12.5 percent to \$2.42 billion.

On a month-to-month comparison, the gulf narrowed modestly, dipping 8.8 percent from July's \$3.14 billion figure, a short-lived relief. Yet, across the first two months of FY2025-26, the cumulative deficit swelled 29 percent, climbing to \$6.01 billion against last year's \$4.66 billion. Imports during July-August spiked 14.2 percent to \$11.12 billion, while exports managed only a hesitant crawl upward by 0.6 percent to \$5.1 billion.

This statistical tableau highlights the looming storm clouds over Pakistan's external financing requirements, as import appetite continues to eclipse sluggish export momentum, intensifying stress on reserves and exchange rate stability.

In contrast, PBS unveiled a brighter chapter in the services trade for July 2025. The services deficit contracted nearly by half, plummeting 48.9 percent to \$125.9 million compared to \$246.4 million in July 2024.

Services exports vaulted upward by 18.3 percent to \$745.5 million, while imports retreated fractionally by 0.61 percent to \$871.4 million. In the same month a year earlier, services exports had been logged at \$630.4 million, while imports rested at \$876.8 million.

Looking at the broader fiscal window, the services trade gap slimmed by 15.84 percent in FY2025, closing at \$2.62 billion against \$3.1

billion in FY2024. The country had availed foreign services worth \$11 billion during FY2025, while dispatching \$8.4 billion worth of its own services abroad. The preceding fiscal year documented \$7.68 billion in services exports alongside \$10.8 billion in imports, showing a 9.23 percent surge in exports and a softer 2.01 percent rise in imports.

Meanwhile, textile shipments painted a more spirited portrait in July 2025. Exports from the sector soared by nearly one-third, clocking \$1.52 billion compared with \$1.27 billion in the previous year's corresponding month. This resurgence was propelled by surging appetite for garments and knitwear. PBS data indicated knitwear exports leapt 43.5 percent to \$513.3 million, while readymade apparel advanced 35.5 percent to \$400.2 million. Bedwear consignments surged 38.3 percent to \$296.3 million, and towel exports climbed 33.9 percent to \$93.87 million. Even cotton cloth, often stagnant, inched ahead by 1.2 percent to \$141.8 million. Collectively, the textile cluster's exports surged 32.1 percent year-on-year in July 2025.

Conversely, the food export ledger bore a bleaker tale. Overall, food exports declined 10.3 percent to \$427 million. Rice, Pakistan's hallmark foreign exchange earner, contracted 18.3 percent to \$168.1 million, with basmati rice plunging nearly 40 percent to \$55.7 million. Vegetable consignments collapsed by 45 percent, shrinking to \$15.9 million. Yet, certain bright spots gleamed—meat exports ticked up 9.8 percent to \$40.56 million, fruit exports soared 43.6 percent to \$58 million, while fish and seafood leapt 18.6 percent to \$22.45 million.

Exports of sports goods flourished, climbing 32.5 percent to \$38.9 million, with football shipments spearheading the surge. Football consignments leapt 44.7 percent, reaching \$25.7 million. Surgical instruments followed suit, expanding by 33.4 percent to \$38.3 million, while cement exports staged a spectacular rise, more than doubling by 141 percent to \$34.9 million. By contrast, chemical and pharmaceutical exports slumped 24 percent to \$102.6 million, a decline largely driven by a steep 40.7 percent contraction in plastic products to \$25 million, alongside a modest 1 percent fall in pharmaceutical goods to \$33.64 million.

On the import ledger, expenditures swelled across multiple sectors. Petroleum imports advanced 6.4 percent to \$1.35 billion, machinery purchases ballooned 29.4 percent to \$927.5 million, and food imports soared 44.9 percent to \$744 million. Within petroleum, refined products climbed 27.4 percent to \$634.7 million, crude oil swelled 10.44 percent to

\$398.3 million, and LPG gained 10.7 percent to \$81.9 million. Conversely, LNG imports dipped heavily by 30.4 percent to \$230.8 million.

Machinery inflows painted a striking picture: textile machinery surged 115.4 percent to \$67.1 million, power generation equipment lifted 62.5 percent to \$56.8 million, while construction and mining machinery rose 8.88 percent to \$11 million. Agricultural machinery nearly doubled and a quarter, soaring 124 percent to \$14.4 million. Telecom-related imports escalated sharply, up 87 percent to \$192 million, with mobile phone consignments skyrocketing 125.6 percent to \$145.3 million. Office machinery, including data-processing gear, jumped 98 percent to \$62.7 million. By contrast, electrical machinery receded 16.46 percent to \$292.4 million.

The food segment exhibited an even sharper tilt upward. Palm oil inflows rose 26.1 percent to \$302 million, tea imports nudged higher by 0.27 percent to \$42 million, and pulses advanced 10.9 percent to \$73.8 million. Infant milk imports nearly doubled, soaring 92.6 percent to \$15 million. Soya bean oil stood out dramatically, vaulting to \$31.8 million compared to a meager \$1.01 million a year earlier.

Transport-related imports also ballooned, surging 167 percent to \$307 million. Within this bracket, inflows of completely and semi-knocked down (CKD/SKD) motor vehicles leapt 143.6 percent to \$271.4 million. Imports of completely built-up (CBU) cars grew 41 percent to \$32.8 million, while CKD/SKD cars rocketed by an eye-catching 292 percent to \$134 million.

In the backdrop of these figures, Pakistan is charting an expansive industrial policy, envisioned as a five-year blueprint. The strategy aspires to pare down production costs, breathe life into moribund units, and galvanize exports, underpinned by cheaper energy, stronger contract enforcement, and investor-oriented reforms.

The trade data paints a dual narrative—exports in certain high-demand categories are showing robust gains, yet the rapid expansion of imports across essential and industrial sectors threatens to erode these achievements. As Pakistan rolls out its sweeping five-year industrial policy aimed at cutting costs, reviving struggling industries, and accelerating exports, the challenge lies in balancing this surge in import dependency with sustainable export-led growth. Success will depend on whether the reforms can deliver cheaper energy, enforce contracts, and build investor trust—turning vulnerabilities into momentum for long-term stability.

Rising waters, soaring prices

Husnain Shahid

Pakistan, a nation perennially at the mercy of its monsoon rhythms, is once again grappling with catastrophe. As of September 2025, relentless rains since late June have unleashed devastating floods across the country, claiming over 700 lives and displacing millions. Provinces like Punjab, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh have borne the brunt, with flash floods wiping out homes, infrastructure, and vast swathes of farmland.

In Punjab alone, the floods have destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of crops, turning the nation's breadbasket into a watery wasteland. While the human toll is heartbreaking—over 1,000 injured and entire villages submerged—the economic aftershocks threaten to exacerbate an already fragile economy.

Chief among these is the specter of surging inflation, driven by food shortages, disrupted supply chains, and mounting fiscal pressures. As experts warn, these floods could push inflation into double digits, unraveling recent gains in economic stability.

The immediate pathway from floodwaters to inflationary pressures lies in agriculture, which accounts for about 20% of Pakistan's GDP and employs nearly half its workforce. The 2025 deluge has ravaged key crops like rice, cotton, wheat, and vegetables, particularly in Punjab where flooding has submerged fertile lands and killed livestock en masse. Historical precedents, such as the 2022 floods, illustrate the pattern: those disasters led to a 2.2% GDP loss and forced 9 million more into poverty, with food prices skyrocketing due to supply disruptions. In 2022, inflation hit 27.3% amid shrinking reserves and food scarcity, as destroyed harvests triggered shortages that rippled through markets. Fast-forward to today, and similar dynamics are at play. With over 29,000 people displaced and agricultural output decimated, food inflation is poised to spike. Pakistani traders and economists predict that damages to crops and logistics could drive up overall inflation in the coming

months, reversing the cooling trend seen earlier this year when rates dropped to 4.1% in July from 11.1% the previous year.

Consider the mechanics of this inflationary surge. Floods don't just destroy produce; they erode the entire supply ecosystem. Roads, bridges, and railways in affected regions have been washed away, hiking transportation costs and delaying deliveries. In northern Pakistan, where cloudbursts have caused rapid flooding, villages report losses in seconds, leaving markets isolated and prices inflated by scarcity. For staples like onions, tomatoes, and grains, prices could rise by 20-50% in urban centers like Lahore and Karachi, as imports become necessary to fill gaps—but at a premium, given Pakistan's depleted foreign reserves. The International Rescue Committee has projected

2022's floods contributing to a slowdown in growth while inflation rose amid catastrophic damages. In 2025, with climate change intensifying monsoon rains—making heavy downpours more likely—these events could become recurrent, embedding structural inflation. Urban areas, already facing health crises from contaminated water and disease outbreaks, may see higher medical costs, further fueling core inflation. Experts from the Brookings Institution highlight how floods like these threaten global security by destabilizing economies, with Pakistan's \$43 billion in estimated 2022 losses underscoring the scale.

Yet, the inflation outlook isn't uniformly grim; it hinges on response efficacy. If recovery is swift—through international aid from bodies like the UN and Red Cross, which have

already mobilized for over 1.5 million displaced in Punjab—supply chains could stabilize. The government might subsidize imports or rebuild infrastructure rapidly, capping short-term spikes at 5-7% above baseline. However, delays could prolong the crisis, with food insecurity driving inflation to 15-20%



economic losses from such events at \$12.5 billion, with inflation exacerbated by widespread hunger and job losses in rural areas. Moreover, livestock deaths—estimated in the hundreds of thousands—will inflate dairy and meat costs, hitting low-income households hardest. This isn't mere speculation; in the 2022 aftermath, some costs climbed by 500%, pushing the poverty rate up by 4-4.3 percentage points.

Broader economic ripple effects amplify the risk. The floods arrive at a precarious juncture for Pakistan, which has been navigating high debt, energy shortages, and IMF-mandated reforms. Government spending on relief—rescuing over 25,000 people and providing aid—will strain budgets, potentially leading to increased borrowing or money printing, both inflationary catalysts. The World Bank notes that such disasters disrupt fiscal stability, with

by year-end, as seen post-2022. Climate attribution studies link these floods to warming, urging investments in resilient agriculture and early warning systems to mitigate future risks. Without such measures, Pakistan risks a vicious cycle: floods erode growth, inflation erodes purchasing power, and poverty erodes stability.

In conclusion, the 2025 floods pose a multifaceted threat to Pakistan's economy, with inflation as the sharpest edge. While immediate relief is crucial, long-term strategies—flood-resistant crops, better drainage, and diversified economies—are imperative. As villagers in Punjab lament, "Everything is gone," the nation must act to ensure prices don't follow suit. Otherwise, rising waters will herald not just displacement, but an economic deluge that could submerge progress for years.

Between militants and missteps

Raza Khan

The security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, which has been deteriorating since 2022, shows no signs of improvement. In recent weeks, the violence has intensified, with terrorist incidents becoming both more frequent and more deadly. These attacks are claiming the lives of both civilians and members of the security forces.

Three recent incidents highlight the severity of the situation. On September 3, a rally of the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) in Quetta, which was also attended by leaders of the opposition Tehreek-Tahaffuz-e-Ain-e-Pakistan (TTAP), was targeted in a terrorist attack. At least 17 workers of various political parties were killed, with BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal believed to be the intended target.

A day earlier, on September 2, six soldiers were martyred and five terrorists killed when security forces foiled an attack on the Frontier Constabulary (FC) Headquarters in Bannu, KP. On the same day, at least six people were killed when terrorists ambushed a passenger vehicle in Kurram district, KP.

In August, a grave situation unfolded in northern Balochistan's Zhob district, which borders KP's Dera Ismail Khan. More than 50 militants, reportedly from the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) — described by the military as an “Indian proxy” — were killed in operations. Around two dozen civilians and security personnel also lost their lives. The militants were attempting to cross the Pakistan-Afghanistan border on the night of August 7 and 8.

According to the Global Terrorism Index 2025, Pakistan now ranks second among the countries most affected by terrorism, with deaths rising 45 percent compared to the previous year. Responsibility for the recent attacks has been claimed by different groups: the Quetta rally bombing by Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K), the Bannu assault by the TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur faction, while the Kurram incident remains unclaimed. However, since all six victims were Shia, it may have been carried out either by a local sectarian group or IS-K, given its history of anti-Shia violence.

These developments show that multiple terrorist groups remain active in KP and Balochistan, posing a severe threat to the people of these provinces. While Balochistan has long suffered from such violence, KP has also witnessed a surge in attacks, particularly in Bannu, Peshawar, Karak, Lakki Marwat, and Bajaur, with police personnel frequently targeted.

The attacks in Quetta, Bannu, and Kurram underline a disturbing reality: terrorist groups are regrouping and regaining strength, enabling them to strike civilians and security forces at will.

The argument put forward by the authorities—that terrorist attacks occur despite their “best arrangements,” and that without such measures the casualties would have been far greater—is unconvincing. This line of rea-



soning implies that terrorists are stronger than the state, and that the state has only limited capacity to contain them. Such statements risk emboldening terrorists while discouraging security personnel. The persistence of terrorist attacks is partly fueled by this defeatist rhetoric from officials. For example, after the Quetta attack, the authorities nearly admitted that preventing such incidents was beyond their capacity, and instead advised political parties to limit their democratic activities. This is a troubling suggestion: rather than acknowledging their failure, officials sought to restrict constitutionally protected political freedoms. It exposes the Balochistan government's lack of preparedness in dealing with the escalating terrorist threat. This should be a matter of grave concern for federal authorities, particularly as the government anticipates the launch

of CPEC's second phase (CPEC-II), expected to bring billions of dollars of Chinese investment, especially in Balochistan.

In addition to the incidents already mentioned, several significant security developments have unfolded in KP and Balochistan over the past month. Chief among them is the launch of a military operation in certain areas of Bajaur district. This offensive was initiated despite resistance from the local population and the PTI-led provincial government. The military justified the move by arguing that dialogue between local notables and civil society representatives with the TTP leadership had “failed,” as the TTP refused demands to relocate to Afghanistan. According to military authorities, this is not a new comprehensive operation but a targeted effort to clear terrorist strongholds

in Bajaur. The effectiveness and outcomes of this offensive remain to be seen.

There has long been strong opposition to fresh military operations in KP. Authorities themselves have refrained from launching large-scale offensives, mindful of widespread anti-operation sentiment among Pakhtuns. This opposition stems from the fact that Pakistan's heaviest human and material losses from the war on terror—more than 100,000 deaths and

over \$126 billion in economic costs—have been borne disproportionately by KP and the Pakhtun-inhabited areas of Balochistan. The TTP continues to exploit these grievances, making counterterrorism offensives difficult to achieve without generating local backlash.

Given this context, the state urgently needs a revised counterterrorism strategy. A revival and strict implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP), adopted in 2015 to combat extremism and terrorism, is imperative. Moving forward, the trajectory of the Bajaur offensive will be critical to monitor, as well as the potential launch of military operations in Khyber and Waziristan districts. The outcomes of these offensives, their impact on local populations, and the response of the TTP will shape the security landscape in KP and Balochistan in the months ahead.

Pakistan's vanishing classrooms in floodwaters

Rasheed Ali

When the monsoon finally loosened its grip, the children of Baiji Katcha returned along a path bleached gray by silt. Where their school once stood — two rooms and a verandah painted the colour of a mango peel — there was only a rectangle of cracked mud and the remnant of a swing set jutting like a rib from the ground. The headmistress, Madam Zahida, carried the school register in a plastic bag and set it on a brick. “We will hold class here,” she told the students. “Until the building comes back, learning must not stop,” she added.

That promise has been repeated across Pakistan for three decades, spoken after the flash floods of the 1990s, after the catastrophic 2010 inundation and again after the unprecedented 2022 monsoon. And the country is facing a huge deluge again in 2025, and school buildings are again being swept away across Pakistan. The scale has been staggering. According to international assessments, the 2010 floods damaged or destroyed thousands of schools across the country. Twelve years later, the 2022 deluge submerged entire districts, leaving over 20,000 schools damaged or destroyed. Some counts put the figure closer to 27,000 institutions, disrupting education for millions of children.

“The school was our shelter in every storm, but when the walls fell, it felt like we lost our second home,” recalled Arif, a teacher in Sialkot who held classes under a peepal tree for two years after a flash flood hollowed out the foundations of his school.

Floods rarely discriminate, yet the burden falls hardest on children. Girls are often the first to drop out when families are displaced or when temporary classrooms prove unsafe. “My daughter stopped going,” said Fatima, a mother in Khairpur, Sindh. “The boys could walk to another school, but for her it

was not safe. She still asks me when her own school will come back.”

Tent schools, often erected by donors, bring temporary relief. But they are far from ideal. In winter, the canvas sweats in the morning and freezes by noon; in summer, it is an oven. “We are grateful for the tents, but no child should grow up thinking education belongs under a sheet of plastic,” said a local NGO worker in Dera Ghazi Khan.

The institutional reasons behind stalled reconstruction are well-known. Budgets crawl through approval stages, land disputes linger,

not expensive,” noted a civil engineer involved in post-flood recovery. “It is cheaper than rebuilding again and again.”

But the silence of missing schools continues to accumulate. A UNICEF official warned in 2022 that Pakistan faced not only an infrastructure crisis but a learning emergency, with millions of children’s education suspended indefinitely. “When a school collapses, it is not just walls that fall — it is the future of a whole generation that cracks,” he said.

Communities, tired of waiting, improvise. In rural Sindh, bamboo frames with tin roofs



and responsibilities split between education, works and services, and disaster management authorities. The result: promises without buildings, years without classrooms.

Still, some areas have shown what resilience looks like. In Swat, schools rebuilt after cloudbursts were elevated on raised plinths, with stronger walls and proper drainage. In Dera Ghazi Khan, rain gardens were introduced to divert hill torrents away from classrooms. These modest engineering choices — higher floors, tied-down roofs, washable finishes — proved their worth when the next flood came.

“The irony is that building back safer is

shelter makeshift classes. In Balochistan, volunteers clear debris from mud-plastered rooms so children can sit on salvaged mats. These solutions are fragile, but they keep hope alive.

For Zahida, the headmistress in Baiji Katcha, the day the new building finally rose was bittersweet. It stood three steps higher than the last, with latched windows and a small store for books. The children cheered as ribbons were cut, but Zahida’s eyes wandered to the waterline stained on a tamarind trunk at the edge of the compound — a reminder of where the river had stood. “We cannot forget the flood,” she said quietly. “If we forget, it will return to teach us again.”

Pakistan's poverty and unemployment storm

Dr. Fatima Khan

Pakistan grapples with a socioeconomic storm that threatens to undermine its progress. As of 2025, nearly 45% of the population lives below the poverty line, a stark increase driven by economic shocks, inflation, and sluggish growth. Unemployment, meanwhile, hovers around 8%, affecting millions and exacerbating inequality. Amidst political instability and global pressures, these issues not only stifle economic potential but also risk social unrest in a nation of over 240 million people.

Pakistan's poverty rates have surged in recent years, reflecting a reversal of earlier gains. According to the World Bank, the lower-middle-income poverty rate stood at 42.3% in fiscal year 2024, with an additional 2.6 million people slipping into poverty due to recent economic pressures. By 2025, revised thresholds from the World Bank have pushed the national poverty rate to 44.7%, up from 39.8% previously, while extreme poverty has jumped to 16.5%. This means approximately 100 million Pakistanis are now struggling below the \$3.65-a-day benchmark for lower-middle-income countries.

Urban areas like Karachi and Lahore face acute challenges, where inflation erodes purchasing power, but rural regions bear the brunt. Floods in 2022 and ongoing climate vulnerabilities have displaced communities and destroyed livelihoods in agriculture, which employs 42% of the workforce. The Asian Development Bank reports that 4.2% of the employed population earns below \$2.15 PPP daily, highlighting persistent vulnerability. Compounding this, military spending diverts funds from social welfare, leaving poverty alleviation programs under-resourced.

Unemployment in Pakistan has climbed steadily, reaching forecasts of 8% in 2025, with 6.81 million people out of work. Official figures from the Ministry of Planning indicate a surge to 7% from a decade-low of 1.5%, though independent estimates suggest it could hit 7.5%,

adding 5.6 million to the unemployed ranks. Youth unemployment is particularly alarming, with rates among the highest globally, as per the World Bank.

The labor market's woes are evident in sectors like manufacturing and services, where job creation lags behind population growth. Pakistan's GDP growth is projected at a modest 2.7% for fiscal year 2025, below the 3% needed to absorb new entrants. The International Labour Organization pegs mid-2025 unemployment at around 6%, but this masks underemployment, where many work informal jobs with meager wages. Women and rural youth face disproportionate barriers, with limited access to education

regulatory burdens, further hampers progress. Global factors, such as IMF-mandated austerity under bailout programs, have raised taxes and cut subsidies, hitting the poor hardest.

The repercussions are multifaceted. Economically, rising poverty reduces consumer spending, stifling growth and perpetuating a vicious cycle. Unemployment contributes to brain drain, with skilled workers migrating abroad, depleting human capital. Socially, it breeds inequality, with mental health issues surging among the jobless—studies link prolonged unemployment to depression and anxiety in rural areas.

Families face food insecurity, child labor rises, and education suffers, entrenching intergenerational poverty. In regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, unemployment fuels extremism and unrest. Climate anxiety among youth, amid job scarcity, adds psychological strain, with rates hitting 10.3% in some estimates. Overall, these issues threaten social cohesion, potentially leading to protests or migration crises.

The government, under IMF guidance, pursues structural reforms like tax broadening and energy sector improvements. Programs like Ehsaas and Benazir Income Support provide cash transfers to 9 million families, but coverage remains insufficient. The 2025-26 budget navigates

IMF demands amid fragility, aiming for sustainable growth.

Looking ahead, experts urge investment in education, vocational training, and green jobs to combat climate impacts. Boosting exports and FDI could create employment, while digital economy initiatives might absorb youth. However, without political stability and anti-corruption measures, progress will falter. The World Bank projects modest recovery, but inclusive policies are essential to reverse trends.

Pakistan's rising poverty and unemployment represent a humanitarian and economic imperative. With 45% in poverty and 8% unemployed, the nation stands at a crossroads. Addressing root causes through bold reforms and international support could unlock potential, fostering a resilient economy. Failure risks deeper division. As Pakistan navigates 2025, prioritizing people over politics is key to a brighter future.



and skills training perpetuating the cycle.

Several intertwined factors fuel this crisis. Economic slowdown under recent administrations has been the longest in Pakistan's 78-year history, with average GDP growth trailing population expansion. Inflation hit a 10-month high in 2025, driven by rising commodity prices and energy costs, eroding real incomes. The 2024 floods alone contributed to 2.5 million 'new poor,' as weak growth and high unemployment compounded vulnerabilities.

Political instability, including frequent government changes, has deterred investment. Foreign direct investment grew 20% in early 2025, but overall inflows remain low due to security concerns and bureaucratic hurdles. Structural issues like inadequate education—over 22 million children out of school—and skill mismatches leave graduates unemployable. The private sector's limited role in job creation, amid

Distraction 101: Blow them up

Belén Fernández

On September 2, the United States conducted a sensational military strike on a speedboat in the southern Caribbean Sea in violation of both international and US law. The extravagant attack killed 11 civilians on board, whom US President Donald Trump had magically intuited to be drug traffickers affiliated with Venezuela's Tren de Aragua gang.

The spectacle was staged amid the ongoing deployment of US warships off the Venezuelan coast under the pretence of fighting “narcoterrorists” whose ringleader, according to the current Trumpian narrative, is Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro – no surprise given the country's lengthy role as a thorn in the side of US imperialism.

Warning that such attacks would continue, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio explained that the interdiction of alleged drug boats simply does not work: “What will stop them is when you blow them up, when you get rid of them.” Trump, meanwhile, remarked on the ensuing decrease in boat traffic near the site of the strike, perhaps due to the fact that people

who fish for a living now fear for their lives: “I don't even know about fishermen. They may say, ‘I'm not getting on the boat. I'm not going to take a chance.’”

As with most situations in which the US claims to be fighting terror, then, this episode appeared to be rather terroristic in nature – particularly given the president's own insinuation that fishermen or anyone else on a boat could be indiscriminately targeted at any time. On September 5, the global hegemon's enlightened commander-in-chief signed an executive order renaming the US Department of Defense the “Department of War”. This from a president who campaigned on, you know, keeping the US out of wars.

With his signature eloquence, Trump announced that the name change would wrest

the US out of a supposedly “woke” orientation that precluded decisive victories and usher in an era of military triumph: “We could have won every war, but we really chose to be very politically correct or woke-y.” Never mind that “politically correct” is not exactly the first descriptor that comes to mind when considering the mass US military slaughter of civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq and beyond. US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, who will henceforth be referred to as the “secretary of war”, concurred that the rebranding is necessary for “restoring the warrior ethos”.

But why the sudden need on Trump's part to project a warrior image by blowing up

ty of recognising Juan Guaido, the little-known right-wing character who had spontaneously declared himself interim president of Venezuela, hypothetically replacing Maduro.

Things didn't go quite as planned and Guaido ended up in Miami – but perhaps US warships surrounding Venezuela will help speed regime change along. Nor, to be sure, is this the first time the US has used the old drug war as an excuse to kill civilians abroad, a hypocritical arrangement of particularly sinister proportions given that the US itself has been up to its ears in the global drug trade since pretty much forever.

As for the concept of “narcoterrorism” presently being invoked by Trump, this dates back to the 2006 renewal of the Patriot Act after the US Drug Enforcement Agency, fearful of losing its relevance in the whole “war on terror” era, proposed the new crime as a “pre-eminent threat” to the homeland. So while Trump's Caribbean showdown is not exactly a deviation from past US policy, his quest to perfect the art of total derangement does make for a somewhat unique display.

Thus far, the Trump administration has refrained from offering any evidence of Maduro's alleged narco-trafficking ties. But, hey, evidence is just

a speedboat in the Caribbean? To put it briefly, it serves as a convenient distraction from the president's dismal failure on other fronts to live up to his super-tough-guy vision of himself. His ultimatums to Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the war in Ukraine, for example, have proved fruitless. Ditto for intermittent pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to wrap up the genocide in the Gaza Strip, where in less than two years Israel has officially killed more than 64,000 Palestinians, most of them women and children.

So why not hone the “warrior ethos” against easier targets – which may or may not include Caribbean fishermen? Of course, this is not the first time Trump has put Venezuela in his crosshairs. In 2019, during his first presidential term, his administration took the liber-

ty of recognising Juan Guaido, the little-known right-wing character who had spontaneously declared himself interim president of Venezuela, hypothetically replacing Maduro. It's about Trump's need to project power by blowing stuff up. In August, Trump staged a summit in Alaska with Putin, ostensibly to end the war in Ukraine but really to distract from MAGA infighting – including on the subject of Netanyahu's insistence on continuing to blow stuff up in Gaza. Now, Venezuela is serving as the chosen distraction from the president's weak showing against both Putin and Netanyahu as well as a venue for the general recuperation of a testosterone-fuelled “warrior ethos”.

And as the new Department of War proceeds to blow up international and domestic law along with a Caribbean motorboat, it's more than just the fishermen who need to worry.



How India is weaponising immigration control to silence its diaspora

Raul Lai

Professor Nitasha Kaul, an academic specialising in politics and international relations at the University of Westminster, has been in the United Kingdom since she came to the University of Hull for postgraduate study in 1997. In the years since, she has published several books and more than 150 articles on topics like democracy, right-wing politics, Indian politics and Kashmir.

A British citizen, Kaul retained her connection to the country of her birth as an overseas citizen of India (OCI) until recently. The OCI is a special status granted to individuals of Indian origin who have acquired foreign citizenship. It grants them a multiple-entry, lifelong visa for visiting India, allowing them to travel and stay without restrictions. OCI status is held by more than 4 million people worldwide.

In May, Kaul's OCI was summarily cancelled. OCI cancellation is allowed under Section 7D of the Citizenship Act 1955 in circumstances of (1) fraud, (2) "disaffection towards the Constitution of India", (3) communication or trade with an enemy India is engaged with during a war, (4) imprisonment for more than two years or (4) if 'it is necessary so to do in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of India, friendly relations of India with any foreign country, or in the interests of the general public'.

Although the government is not breaking the law, its actions raise serious legal and human rights concerns. Its actions often blur the line between lawful revocation and punitive censorship. The revocations frequently lack transparency and procedural fairness – thus risking violation of legal norms. Overall, this trend raises significant concerns about freedom of speech, proportionality and adherence to the rule of law. It should be noted that domestic courts are resisting government actions.

In Kaul's case, she was informed that her OCI status had been revoked with an official notice saying she has been "found indulging in anti-India activities, motivated by malice and complete disregard for facts or history" without referring to any particular such incident. Kaul has been a strong advocate for democracy in India and has often criticised the government for its minority bashing and the right-wing Hindu organisation RSS for its divisive politics.

An examination of global democracy indicators shows that Kaul's analysis disregards neither facts nor history. Freedom House's global freedom index ranks India as "partly free" and describes how "the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Hindu

nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has presided over discriminatory policies and a rise in persecution affecting the Muslim population." This trend can also be seen in relation to religious and press freedoms. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said: "India's media has fallen into an 'unofficial state of emergency' since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014."

Kaul is not alone in facing retribution for her outspokenness. In the past nine years, the OCIs of more than 120 individuals have been cancelled by the Indian authorities. According to the independent Indian outlet The Wire, this is a trend that is ramping up. Nearly half (57) were revoked in 2024 alone, and a further 15 were cancelled in the first five months of 2025. Most of those who have had their OCIs cancelled are journalists, activists and academics who have criticised the ruling party and challenged the



rhetoric of Hindutva (Hindu nationalism).

In 2022, Ashok Swain, a Sweden-based academic, had his OCI cancelled over his social media posts. The authorities accused him of "hurting religious sentiments" and "destabilising the social fabric of India" but provided no specific evidence. Swain successfully challenged the cancellation in the Delhi High Court in 2023, an example of domestic courts resisting government actions.

In December 2023, Raphael Satter, a United States-based journalist for the Reuters news agency who covers cybersecurity, espionage and abuse of power, lost his OCI after critical reporting and is now suing the Indian government. In recent years, India has witnessed relentless attacks on its democratic institutions. Those who criticise or question the ruling party – whether they are politicians, NGO representatives, campaigners, journalists or community leaders – have often been silenced.

Every week brings new reports of imprisonment, intimidation, physical assault, defamation or deplatforming of critics. This silencing has intensified particularly after India

launched Operation Sindoor against Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir in response to an attack in Pahalgam in India-administered Kashmir that killed 26 tourists. In its aftermath, the government ordered X to block nearly 8,000 accounts, many of them belonging to journalists and media outlets, such as Free Press Kashmir, BBC Urdu and The Wire. As critical voices are being silenced at home, the Indian government is turning its attention to the country's diaspora.

The Indian authorities' weaponisation of immigration controls is part of a growing pattern, designed to create fear among diaspora members and stifle criticism. A 2024 report by the RSF found that Indian authorities use the OCI to "effectively blackmail" journalists into silence. A survey conducted last year by the Platform for Indian Democracy revealed that 54 percent of British Indians are concerned about India's current trajectory.

From my interactions with members of our community, I can clearly see that many are reluctant to speak out about India's violations of human rights, fearing it might stop them from travelling to India. As British Indians – many among us OCI card holders – we must push back against these misuses of immigration controls. British Indians remain deeply connected to India through our families, friends, culture and community. The current treatment of diaspora members by the BJP and the curtailment of their freedoms goes against the values enshrined in India's post-independence constitution, which guarantees justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

The UK, despite being home to more than 2 million British Indians, recently concluded a significant trade deal with India without any reference to issues of democratic backsliding in the country. Given the UK's unique relationship with India and the size and sentiments of its British Indian population, it is in a strong position to ask challenging questions of the current political regime. Silence serves only to strengthen the position of the BJP.

As Modi calls for Indians abroad to contribute to the country's development, this must include the right to criticise and question without fear of retribution. If the increasing hostility and repression of those who challenge the Indian government continues, we will only be allowed to visit our homeland on the terms of the ruling party, and our ability to be part of India's progress will diminish. The roots that connect the diaspora to home are key to India's democratic fabric. Chipping away at them only leaves India's democracy diminished.

Sewage nightmare

The road from Habib University in Karachi's Pehalwan Goth area to Safoora Chowranghi has turned into a sewage cesspool. The road is broken, waterlogged and impossible for vehicles to pass safely. Every day, people suffer. Students cannot reach classes on time, ambulances are forced to avoid the road, and the local residents have no choice but to wade through water. It feels like the government has completely forgotten this important route. The authorities concerned should repair the road on an urgent basis, and make proper drainage so that people may travel safely.

Dr Syed Tariq
Karachi

Hesco fails Hyderabad again

The recent heavy rains have proved that the Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) cannot keep the city running in the face of a rainstorm lasting a mere few hours. More than 200 feeders tripped and large areas remained without power all night when it rained. Families were left to wonder in humid darkness what to do as water started entering their homes. Drainage pumps stopped working as there was no power supply. This is what happens every monsoon season. Hesco collects bills, but provides no reliable service when people need it the most. It is high time the provincial government took strict action against such large-scale and persistent mismanagement.

Qasim Khan
Hyderabad

Karachi's annual blame game flooding

Every time rains in Karachi expose the sub-standard construction and lack of planning on the part of the provincial government and city administration, blame-game starts. This year has been no different. The city mayor claims to have provided funds to the town administrations, while the town administrators blame the city administration for holding funds meant for development work. There seems to be no accountability and no quality checks. No action is ever taken against these contractors who carry out substandard work. The federal government is least interested in the affairs of the city.

Arsalan Faruqi
Karachi

Pakistan's punctuality crisis

Despite its profound impact on society and economy, the trait of ignoring the significance of punctuality and discipline remains irritatingly common in Pakistani society. As a nation, we are known for our weakness regarding timekeeping, frequently missing deadlines, and failing to adhere to stipulated times for nearly all events; from social gatherings to mass pub-

lic events. This lax attitude is, arguably, our biggest crisis, keeping the system disorganised and disorderly. From official conferences and government projects to family and social gatherings, delays are rampant.

It is common for official meetings and ceremonies to start and end late, and government projects frequently experience significant delays, leading to cost escalation. The culture of indiscipline prevents us from utilising our full potential. Businesses often open late and remain open until midnight, consuming energy instead of leveraging daylight. This attitude spills over into workplaces, contributing to a lack of professionalism where all employees delay their assigned tasks almost endlessly.

Studies on work-related stress indicate that prolonged work hours, often involving taking unfinished work home, have a negative impact both on personal life and office productivity. But we clearly accord little value to such studies even though we know for sure successful individuals, regardless of their field of life, are the ones who value time. The transformation must begin at home. Parents must instil in children the value and importance of time, teaching them that time is a precious asset; once lost, it can never be recovered.

Our educational institutions also have a role to play in equipping students with essential life skills, including time management. It is imperative for us to break free from our deeply ingrained habit of procrastination, and adopt punctuality and discipline in all spheres of our lives.

Muhammad Faizan Ali
Karachi

Disrespectful AI content

For years, I have been disappointed by the negative use of social media platforms in the name of creativity and entertainment by people who post content that is dis-respectful and offensive.

In essence, making fun of religious beliefs and respected personalities in search of 'reach' and 'likes' is neither creative nor entertaining.

On the occasion of Aug 14, our Independence Day, I came across multiple videos where vulgar music was used in the background of videos generated with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) showing Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah making funny gestures to match that music. This was a horrible sight.

Unfortunately, these videos were not created by foreigners, but by our own people who claim to be patriotic. What is even more regrettable is that instead of reporting such content, many of us ended up promoting them. This practice has to stop right here and now.

The authorities concerned should take strict measures against the menace of rapidly spreading meme culture, ridiculing respected national personalities. In many ways, the practice is as dangerous as misinformation, fake

news and hate speech.

Mian Muhammad Salla
Miro Khan, Sindh

Tharparkar loses a friend

Tharparkar lost a dear friend with the recent death of Zain Alavi, the brother of well-known scholar Hamza Alvi. During his affiliation with the Layton Rahmat-ullah Benevolent Trust (LRBT), a Karachi-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), Alavi visited Tharparkar often, and established primary eye care clinics in Mithi, Chachro, Islamkot and Diplo. He later arranged a referral facility for the locals to have surgeries at a tertiary care centre in Tando Bago.

Belonging to the family of Tayyab Ali Alavi, he went to a primary school in New Chali that had been established by his grandparents. He later went abroad for higher studies. On return to the country, he became a respected name among progressive circles, especially students, in the early 1950s. As a professional, he rose to be the chairman of a leading multinational logistics, sales and distribution company specialising in pharmaceutical and hospital-care sectors.

Alavi raised funds for the marginalised communities of Tharparkar during drought years, and even arranged books for local libraries. He touched lives with his humane approach. Alavi will be sorely missed.

Dr Khataumal
Mithi

A call for practical patriotism over rhetoric

Proud nations, being imbued with the spirit of patriotism, celebrate their independence day with zest and zeal. However, our enthusiastic celebrations on Aug 14 every year tend to lose their very soul when we fail to imbibe the real essence and purpose of this day.

We make lofty claims and emotional speeches, expressing our love and devotion for the motherland in high-sounding and flowery words, and make pledges to sink our differences and be united. We vow to work harder than ever to help the country make progress. We should actually be focusing on things that we really mean to do. Let us avoid high-flown vocabulary and do more practical work for the country.

It is our individual and collective responsibility to own our dear homeland and work honestly and diligently in our various capacities to make this beautiful country strong and proud in the comity of nations. It is imperative for us to use the occasion as an opportunity for soul-searching and self-introspection so that we may move ahead with pride and dignity to achieve our desired goal — a safe, secure, stable and prosperous Pakistan.

Khadim Hussain Subhpotto
Hyderabad

Iconic winged lion statue in Venice may actually be from China's Tang dynasty

Kristina Killgrove

A bronze statue of a winged lion that has long graced the center of Piazza San Marco in Venice is from a faraway land, according to a new study. It was made in China as a tomb guardian over 1,000 years ago and may have been imported to Italy by Marco Polo's father via the Silk Road in the 13th century, the researchers found.



"Venice is a city full of mysteries, but one has been solved: the 'Lion of St. Mark is Chinese, and he walked the Silk Road,' study co-author Massimo Vidale, an archaeologist at the University of Padua, said in a statement.

In the study, published in the journal *Antiquity*, Vidale and colleagues identified the source of the bronze used to create the iconic lion, which became an official symbol of Venice in the early 1260s but whose exact origins are murky. The researchers examined a series of nine samples from different parts of the lion and used mass spectrometry to identify the ratios of lead isotopes in the metal. Metal alloys like bronze — which is a mixture of copper and tin — contain small amounts of lead, the researchers wrote in the study, and the variations in lead atoms can indicate the geological source of the copper. By comparing the lead isotope ratios from the Venetian lion to worldwide reference databases, the researchers narrowed down the origin of the bronze to the Lower Chang (Yangtze) River in what is now China.

Fishers discover first-of-its-kind bright orange shark

Patrick Pester

A first-of-its-kind bright orange shark with white eyes has been caught and released in the Caribbean, a new study reveals.

The nurse shark (*Ginglymostomacirratum*) had a mysterious condition called xanthism, or xanthochroism, which increases yellow pigmentation in the skin. Researchers have recorded xanthism in several animals, but this is the first definitive case of a nurse shark with the trait. The shark also appears to have albinism, making it even more unusual.



Sports fishers discovered the shark by chance off the east coast of Costa Rica in 2024. Garvin Watson, owner of the Parismina Domus Dei hotel in the village of Parismina, reeled in the shark, which was around 6.6 feet (2 meters) long and swimming 120 feet (37 m) below the surface. "We could not believe what we had in front of our eyes," Watson told *Live Science* in an email.

"That orange shark shining with the sunlight was something out of the ordinary," he said. "We did not know that it was going to be a discovery worldwide, recognized by all the biologists of the world." The fishers photographed the shark, then removed the hook from its mouth and released it back into the Caribbean Sea. Researchers described the event and its significance in a new study published Aug. 1 in the journal *Marine Biodiversity*.

Scientists have documented xanthism in a variety of species, including frogs, birds and fish. While some animals are normally yellow and orange, these colors are more prominent in xanthic individuals of these species.

Skipping breakfast and late-night eating can hurt your bone health

Simon Spichak

Could routinely skipping breakfast or eating a late dinner actually affect your bones? According to a new study, it's certainly possible.

The research in the *Journal of the Endocrine Society*, is the first to suggest a specific link between these eating patterns and a higher risk of osteoporotic bone fractures, according to the authors.

Osteoporosis occurs when bone mineral density decreases, making bones weaker and more prone to fractures. The disease affects 10 million Americans and is four times as likely to affect women, especially after menopause. While scientists have long established smoking, alcohol use, and lack of exercise as risk factors for osteoporosis, the role of broader dietary patterns has been less clear—prompting the researchers to investigate the effects of daily eating habits. "The study does strengthen the idea that lifestyle patterns may affect bone health, beyond just individual nutrients," said Theresa Gentile, MS, RD, CDN, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, who was not involved in the research, told *Health*. To understand how dietary habits and other lifestyle factors impact risk, scientists analyzed data from 927,130 Japanese adults over age 20 enrolled in a medical database called DeSC.



Omega-3s may protect women against Alzheimer's

Brian Mastroianni

Women are disproportionately affected by Alzheimer's disease—making up nearly two-thirds of the 7.2 million Americans living with the condition. Now, new research suggests omega-3 fatty acids—long tied to better brain health—may offer women a unique form of protection.



For the study, researchers analyzed blood lipid levels in more than 800 people. Women with Alzheimer's—unlike men with the disease—had lower levels of unsaturated fats that carry omega-3s in the bloodstream, the team reported in the journal *Alzheimer's & Dementia*. Omega-3s are a type of polyunsaturated fat that helps build and strengthen brain cells. Because the body doesn't naturally produce them, you need to get them through supplements or foods like fatty coldwater fish. According to Cristina Legido-Quigley, PhD, the study's lead author and a reader in the Institute of Pharmaceutical Science at King's College London, the findings not only mean that omega-3s may play a unique role in Alzheimer's progression, but also highlight broader sex-based differences in how the disease develops.

"This suggests we need sex-specific approaches to understanding, diagnosing, and potentially treating Alzheimer's disease," she told *Health*. The new study was inspired by recent research showing that up to 45% of dementia cases may be preventable—with 7% linked to high LDL cholesterol (the "bad" kind). That finding underscored how important it is to understand the role of lipid metabolism—or how the body manages fats—in brain health, Legido-Quigley noted. To explore this connection, she and her colleagues analyzed blood samples from 841 people, screening for 700 different lipids. The participants were enrolled in ANMerge, a European study to better understand biomarkers for Alzheimer's.



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