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WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL

POST-FLOOD: A GRIM ECONOMIC SCENARIO





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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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Post-flood: a grim economic scenario

Farhan Khan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB), in its latest report, has warned that the economic stability achieved recently is at risk from emerging internal and external factors, especially in the absence of structural reforms.

The development agency says that policy inertia could weaken business confidence, leading to a rise in borrowing costs. This in turn would increase external finance risks. The ADB forecasts GDP growth of 3 percent in FY26, compared to the government's target of 4.2 percent, while the IMF also expects the growth to be lower than the government's target.

Another report by the World Bank says that poverty has increased by 7 percent over the last three years, reaching 25.3 percent in FY24. This is because lowering poverty and inequality has never been on the agenda of successive governments. The massive damage inflicted by the floods on the livelihoods of millions of people has further exacerbated the situation. The damage to crops, livestock, housing and infrastructure is likely to be larger than the floods of 2022-23.

There is a risk that food prices, in particular, will start rising rapidly once again. The latest weekly Sensitive Price Index reveals that on a year-to-year basis, prices of wheat flour, sugar, tomato and pulse moong have gone up by 18.6 percent, 29.3 percent, 90.1 percent and 15.2 percent, respectively. The rise in the overall SPI is estimated at 5 percent. There is also likely to be a fall in real per capita income in 2025-26.

The sudden suspension of the wheat support price mechanism has drastically reduced the income of small farmers. Climate change is taking its own toll in rural areas, where floods have wiped out assets in the form of livestock, in addition to crop losses. In the given circumstances, the government should direct funds and seek support to build climate-resilient infrastructure to minimise the impact of future disasters. The WB report has also warned against the alarming pace of informal urbanisation and emphasised the need for improving living and economic conditions in rural areas.

The government boasts about achieving economic stabilisation in the form of falling inflation, stable currency, primary fiscal balances, and building SBP reserves. But these are momentary and transitional gains, not a result of reform measures. It must be noted that inflation declined due to demand suppression and import restrictions, not because of an improve-

ment in the economic conditions as a whole.

Similarly, the primary fiscal surpluses for the last two years did not stem from fiscal austerity and prudence in the form of taxation reform or reducing the size of a bloated administration. The tax-to-GDP ratio grew by imposing a higher tax burden on those already in the tax net. The imposition of a higher rate of super tax on corporations has negatively affected their operations. Exporters' income tax in Pakistan is the highest in the region. This is impacting productivity and investment. Also, the achievement of higher SBP reserves is due to the State Bank buying dollars from the interbank market: it bought USD 8.3 billion

lift people out of poverty. This is important as the latest figures show that almost half of the country's population is facing economic insecurity. As the long-term trend of poverty is dependent on the trend in food prices, level of per capita income and unemployment, it is essential that the government should specially focus on these areas in future planning. The poverty line is defined as the cost of ensuring the intake of the minimum nutritional requirement by an individual of 2,350 calories per day. The cost of other necessities like shelter and clothing are added to the cost of food to yield the poverty line.

To lift people out of poverty and build



from the market in FY25, which has helped SBP reserves rise to USD 14.5 billion. This has been done by choking imports and keeping the growth momentum low.

At the same time, higher taxation has undermined the process of capital formation. According to media reports, well known business groups are not making any new investment. One reputed company recently exited from apparel exports, a sector crucial to our economy. Another unpleasant development is that professional and skilled persons are moving overseas for a better life.

It is a grim economic scenario which calls for new efforts to kickstart the economy, generate new employment opportunities and

a vibrant human capital, more investment in education, nutrition, and the environment is vital. Around 40 percent of children are stunted, 25 percent of school-going children are out of school, and 75 percent of those enrolled in primary education. New schemes should be launched to provide training and employment to 37 percent of youth between the ages of 15 and 24, who can be a national asset. We need to change our present approach to managing the economy. We cannot subsist on loans and grants for long.

We must learn to develop and depend on our own resources for long-term economic growth and stability. IMF bailouts are no answer to our problems.

Gaza peace plan does not guarantee Palestinian rights

Nasim Ahmed

US President Trump's 20-point Gaza peace plan unfurled last week holds the centre stage in the world today. After nearly two years of genocidal war waged by Israel, the prospect of a truce has opened up, although the final picture is yet to emerge. Hopes of a settlement rose following Hamas's conditional acceptance of Trump's peace plan, which includes releasing all hostages and handing Gaza's administration to a technocratic Palestinian body, and Israel's readiness to implement its first phase.

The ceasefire proposal in essence is in the nature of an attempt to bring the two parties to the negotiating table in order to bring peace to a region long mired in a genocidal war by Israel. The two positive points in the plan are the prospects of a cessation to fighting and the resumption of aid to the embattled people of Gaza Strip.

According to the plan, the war would immediately end after the exchange of prisoners. Israeli forces are supposed to withdraw to the agreed-upon line to prepare for hostage release. During this time, all military operations, including aerial and artillery bombardment, will be suspended, and battle lines will remain frozen until conditions are met for the complete staged withdrawal. Also, once all hostages are returned, Hamas members who commit to peaceful coexistence and to decommission their weapons will be given amnesty. Members of Hamas, who wish to leave Gaza, will be provided safe passage to receiving countries.

There would be no role for Hamas in the post-war administrative set-up in the occupied territory. Even the Palestinian Authority, which controls the occupied West Bank, has not been assigned any role in the post-war setup. According to the Trump plan, Gaza will be governed under the temporary transitional governance of a technocratic, apolitical Palestinian committee under the supervision of a new international body, the 'Board of Peace', to be headed by Trump and others. That would practically give America virtual control of the occupied territory for an indefinite period.

Although Donald Trump claims that his Gaza plan will bring durable peace to the Middle East, some regional experts have

expressed doubt whether the scheme will help achieve a just solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute. In their view the document, vague in parts, is one-sided which favours Israel and puts the onus for creating the conditions of peace on the Palestinian groups. No doubt, the ceasefire will bring to an end the ruthless killing and bombardment by the Israeli forces and allow humanitarian aid to go through. But the main question is whether the Trump plan can establish long-term peace in the region without formally recognising the right of the Palestinian people to an independent state.

Especially objectionable is the plan's 'Board of Peace' which is to manage Gaza after the ceasefire. According to the plan, Trump and former British prime minister Tony Blair will oversee Gaza territory and guide

that he had finalized his Gaza peace plan after discussing it with eight leaders of the Muslim world, some of them latter including Qatar and Pakistan publicly announced that the plan as announced by Trump was not what was agreed to. It was also reported in the media that Qatar would ask the US that some sections of the original draft be restored. It later came out that the initially agreed draft was tampered with by Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, during the six hours he spent working out details with Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff.

In Pakistan, the reaction to the Trump plan has been negative at the popular level. It is seen as a document which protects Israel, paving the way for its recognition by the Muslim countries in the coming days. The plan



the Palestinian people until they are fully prepared to rule themselves. Strangely enough, Hamas, which has been ordered to surrender its weapons, will have no future role in Gaza. There is also no mention in the Trump plan to hold Israel accountable for the genocide it has committed in Gaza. Further, there is no guarantee that Israel will stop building illegal settlements in the West Bank.

There is an element of duplicity and double dealing about the whole scheme, especially the way it was negotiated and given shape. When Trump announced last week

ignores the basic principle that Palestine has been illegally occupied by the Zionist entity which has usurped the fundamental right of the Palestinian people to live in peace in their own land. There has also been talk of Pakistan, along with other states, deploying a 'peace-keeping force' in Gaza.

The most prudent way to go about the whole thing will be for the government to take the parliament into confidence so that no step is taken that goes against Pakistan's principled and historical stand in support of the Palestinian people.

Grocery bills surge as inflation bites

Muhammad Ali

In the sweltering heat of late summer, Pakistanis are no strangers to the sting of rising prices. But September brought a particularly sharp jolt: annual inflation leaped to 5.6 percent, nearly double the previous month's rate and the highest in 10 months.

This unwelcome spike, revealed in official data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), traces its roots to devastating floods that ravaged farmlands and supply chains. What started as a brief respite in August—when food prices dipped into negative territory—has reignited, leaving households grappling with steeper grocery bills and transport costs. For a nation still recovering from economic turbulence, this resurgence feels like a cruel twist of fate, reminding families that stability remains elusive.

A year ago, in September 2024, inflation hovered at 6.93 percent, a figure that now seems almost nostalgic amid today's pressures. The culprit this time? A volatile cocktail of climate chaos and seasonal supply disruptions. Torrential rains and floods submerged vast tracts of agricultural land, choking off the flow of fresh produce and staples. Food prices, the perennial thorn in Pakistan's economic side, rebounded with a vengeance, climbing 5.46 percent year-on-year after a -1.79 percent drop in August. It's a stark reminder of how intertwined the country's fate is with its fields and monsoons—events beyond human control that can upend budgets overnight.

Zooming in on the essentials, the pain is palpable. Tomatoes, that humble staple of every Pakistani kitchen, skyrocketed 65 percent month-on-month, turning a routine sabzi into a luxury. Wheat followed suit with a 37.6 percent surge, dragging flour prices up 34.4 percent in its wake—bad news for the roti that anchors daily meals. Onions jumped 28.5 percent, fresh vegetables 9 percent, and even potatoes, eggs, butter, sugar, rice, and pulses saw climbs that squeezed the average shopper's wallet. Amid this frenzy, a few silver linings emerged: poultry meat dipped 5.3 percent, and mash pulse eased 1.2 percent, offering scant relief to meat-loving families and dal enthusiasts. But for most, these drops feel like drops in an ocean of escalating costs.

Beyond the kitchen, other sectors chipped into the inflationary fire. Transport costs accel-

erated to 4.2 percent from 2.5 percent in August, as fuel prices and logistics snarls—exacerbated by flood-damaged roads—piled on. Household furnishings and equipment maintenance rose to 4.13 percent from 3.5 percent, hitting those eyeing home upgrades. Housing and utilities held steady at 3.65 percent, a small mercy for renters and homeowners alike, while health charges remained stagnant, perhaps a nod to government subsidies in that vital area. Clothing and footwear eased marginally to 8 percent from 8.1 percent, and restaurant and hotel rates slowed to 6.1 percent from 7.2 percent—good for the occasional dine-out, but not enough to offset the grocery gloom. Recreation and culture, oddly resilient in downturns, deepened its contraction to -2.7 percent from -2.3 percent, as families prioritized necessities over leisure.

This isn't just numbers on a page; it's the story of everyday Pakistanis. Urban CPI infla-

percent) rose, 12 (23.53 percent) fell, and 20 (39.22 percent) held steady—a mixed bag that underscores the unpredictability of the market.

Core inflation, stripping out fickle food and energy, inched up to 7.0 percent from 6.9 percent in August, yet remained below last year's 9.3 percent—a tentative sign that underlying pressures might be easing. The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) moderated to a 0.6 percent increase in September, down from 1.9 percent a year earlier, suggesting producers aren't passing on costs as aggressively.

As eyes turn to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), whose key discount rate sits at 11 percent, anticipation builds for the October 27 board meeting. Will they ease, tighten, or hold? Independent economists are vocal: slash it to single digits. High borrowing costs, they argue, are strangling the budget, with debt servicing gobbling three-fourths of government revenue.

In a nation where fiscal space is razor-thin, every percentage point matters—fueling growth without igniting more inflation is the tightrope walk.

This inflationary blip isn't isolated; it's woven into Pakistan's broader economic tapestry. The floods, part of a climate pattern that's no longer 'if' but 'when,' expose vulnerabilities in supply chains and agriculture. Policymakers have long touted reforms—better irrigation, crop insurance, diversified farming—but implementation lags. Meanwhile, global factors like oil prices and supply chain ripples from afar add layers of complexity.

Inflation erodes savings, delays dreams, and amplifies inequality. A 5.6 percent rise might sound abstract, but when it means skipping extras or stretching paychecks thinner, it hits home. Yet, history shows resilience: communities rally, markets adapt, and ingenuity prevails. As October unfolds, with SPI whispers hinting at more volatility, the hope is for targeted interventions—subsidies on staples, flood-resilient infrastructure, and monetary tweaks that prioritize people over spreadsheets.

In the end, September's surge is a clarion call. Pakistan must fortify against nature's whims and nurture an economy that buffers its citizens. Until then, families will navigate these waters with the grit that's defined the nation—one roti, one commute, one resilient day at a time. With the SBP's decision looming, the coming weeks could pivot from pressure to progress. For now, the lesson is clear: in an unpredictable world, preparation isn't optional—it's survival.



tion clocked in at 5.5 percent, a slight dip from last year's 6.9 percent, while rural areas bore 5.8 percent—up sharply from 2.4 percent in September 2024. The rural-urban divide highlights how floods disproportionately hammer agrarian communities, where food is both livelihood and lifeline.

Adding to the weekly pulse, the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI)—a barometer for short-term trends—ticked up 0.56 percent for the week ending October 2, reaching 332.17 points from 330.32 the prior week. Year-on-year, that's a 4.07 percent climb, covering 51 essential items across 17 urban centers. The pinch varied by income: the lowest consumption group (up to Rs17,732) saw an 0.82 percent rise to 325.43 points, while higher brackets experienced milder increases—0.76 percent for Rs17,733–22,888, 0.61 percent for Rs22,889–29,517, 0.57 percent for Rs29,518–44,175, and 0.49 percent for above Rs44,175. Of the 51 items tracked, 19 (37.25

Rising trade gap rings alarm bells

Shahid Hussain

Pakistan's economy is sounding alarm bells as its trade deficit surged by nearly 46 percent in September, reaching a staggering \$3.34 billion. This widening gap, driven by a 14 percent spike in imports to \$5.85 billion and an 11.7 percent drop in exports to \$2.5 billion, underscores a deepening crisis in the country's external sector.

The numbers paint a grim picture: compared to August, the deficit ballooned by 16.3 percent, and for the July–September quarter, it swelled 32.9 percent year-on-year to \$9.37 billion. With imports climbing and exports faltering, Pakistan faces mounting pressure on its foreign reserves, currency stability, and debt repayment obligations. The question now is whether policymakers will confront these structural weaknesses head-on or continue to rely on short-term fixes like remittances to mask the cracks.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data reveals a troubling trend. For the first quarter of FY2026, imports rose 13.5 percent to \$16.97 billion, while exports dipped 3.8 percent to \$7.6 billion. This imbalance is not just a statistical blip but a symptom of deeper structural issues. The services trade deficit also worsened, climbing 21.9 percent in August to \$437 million, as services imports outpaced exports. While services exports grew 8.4 percent to \$672 million, imports surged faster at 13.4 percent to \$1.11 billion. Although the annual services trade deficit for FY2025 narrowed by 15.8 percent to \$2.62 billion, thanks to a 9.2 percent rise in services exports, the overall trade picture remains bleak.

Economists warn that this growing deficit could destabilize Pakistan's fragile economy. With the country already reliant on external financing, including IMF support, the widening trade gap threatens to drain foreign reserves and fuel rupee volatility. The stakes are high: without urgent action to boost exports and curb non-essential imports, Pakistan risks undoing the stabilization gains achieved under its IMF program.

At the heart of Pakistan's trade woes lies its heavy dependence on agriculture and textiles, which account for the lion's share of its \$30–31 billion in annual exports. This narrow export base leaves the country vulnerable to global price swings and limited demand. The textile sector, once a cornerstone of Pakistan's economy, is now in free fall. A stark example is Gul Ahmed Textile Mills, a major exporter, which recently

announced the discontinuation of its apparel export segment. In a filing with the stock exchange, the company cited “persistent operational losses” driven by rising costs, intense regional competition, a stronger exchange rate, and policy changes like the increase in advance turnover tax. Soaring energy tariffs and the high cost of nominated fabrics have further eroded profitability, forcing the company to scale back its labor-intensive garment exports.

This is not an isolated case. Pakistan's textile industry is buckling under the weight of years of misguided policies that prioritized subsidies over competitiveness. Regional rivals like India, Bangladesh, and Vietnam have outpaced Pakistan by investing in modern infrastructure, efficient supply chains, and innovation. Meanwhile, Pakistan's exporters face a perfect storm of internal



challenges—high production costs, policy flip-flops, and an overvalued currency—that make it impossible to compete on the global stage.

If the textile sector's struggles weren't enough, Pakistan's logistics sector is suffocating its export potential. A policy brief by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) highlights the crippling inefficiencies that plague the industry. Moving goods within Pakistan consumes a staggering 15.6 percent of GDP—nearly double the cost in advanced economies. This inefficiency handicaps exporters before their goods even reach international markets. The World Bank's Logistics Performance Index no longer includes Pakistan, while competitors like India, Vietnam, and Bangladesh continue to climb the ranks.

Karachi Port and Port Qasim, the country's main trade gateways, are operating at a third of their capacity, with containers stuck for twice as long as in neighboring countries. These bottlenecks erode competitiveness, driving up costs and delaying shipments. In contrast, regional peers have invested heavily in efficient

ports, rail networks, and integrated supply chains, leaving Pakistan in the dust. The FPCCI's warning is clear: without sweeping reforms to modernize logistics, Pakistan's exports will continue to lose ground.

Faced with a crumbling export sector, policymakers have increasingly leaned on remittances from overseas Pakistanis, projected to hit a record \$43 billion in 2025. These inflows have been a lifeline, cushioning the current account deficit and masking structural failures. But relying on remittances to prop up the economy is a dangerous gamble. While they provide temporary relief, remittances cannot build factories, fix ports, or revive industries. A nation that depends more on what its workers send home than what its industries produce is treading a precarious path.

To reverse this downward spiral, Pakistan must take aggressive steps to address its structural weaknesses. First, diversifying the export base is critical. The country's overreliance on textiles and agriculture leaves it exposed to external shocks. Incentivizing high-value exports, such as technology and manufactured goods, could create new revenue streams and reduce vulnerability. Second, curbing non-essential imports is essential to narrow the trade gap. This requires targeted policies to prioritize domestic production and reduce reliance on foreign goods.

Third, modernizing the logistics sector is non-negotiable. Investments in efficient ports, rail networks, and digital supply chain systems could significantly lower costs and boost competitiveness. Finally, strengthening regional trade links with neighbors like India and Bangladesh could open new markets and reduce dependence on distant ones. The National Tariff Policy 2025–2030 and digital tax refund systems are steps in the right direction, but their success depends on consistent implementation.

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture. The ballooning trade deficit is a wake-up call, exposing the fragility of its economic model. While remittances provide a temporary buffer, they are no substitute for a robust, competitive export sector. Policymakers must act decisively to address the root causes of this crisis—inefficient logistics, an uncompetitive textile industry, and a lack of export diversification. By prioritizing structural reforms and investing in long-term growth, Pakistan can not only stabilize its external sector but also build a resilient economy capable of thriving in a competitive global landscape. The clock is ticking, and the time for complacency has long passed.

Pakistan's growth outlook hinges on reform

Husnain Shahid

Pakistan's economy stands at a pivotal moment as it navigates a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) projects a GDP growth rate of 3 percent for the fiscal year, a cautious estimate compared to the government's more optimistic target of 4.2 percent.

While this growth signals a steady recovery, recent floods and persistent structural challenges cast a shadow over the nation's economic trajectory. However, with targeted reforms, fiscal discipline, and a favorable global environment, Pakistan has a chance to not only meet but exceed these expectations, fostering resilience and sustainable progress.

According to the ADB's Asian Development Outlook (ADO) released recently, Pakistan's growth forecast for FY2026 remains unchanged at 3 percent. This projection reflects a delicate balance between promising developments and significant risks. The economy is poised to benefit from reduced vulnerabilities tied to debt and balance-of-payments pressures, as evidenced by Pakistan's upgraded sovereign credit ratings by international agencies. A landmark US-Pakistan trade agreement has further bolstered business confidence, creating a ripple effect that could stimulate investment and economic activity.

Yet, the devastating floods that swept through parts of the country have left a trail of destruction, damaging critical infrastructure and vast swathes of farmland. These losses threaten to drag down growth, particularly in agriculture, a cornerstone of Pakistan's economy. The floods have not only disrupted livelihoods but also risk pushing up food inflation, squeezing household incomes and private consumption. Despite these setbacks, the ADB remains cautiously optimistic, noting that recovery and rehabilitation efforts, coupled with fiscal incentives for construction in the FY2026 budget, could mitigate some of the damage.

Pakistan's economic recovery hinges on the government's ability to sustain structural reforms and sound macroeconomic policies. The FY2026 budget sets ambitious targets, including a primary surplus of 2.4 percent of GDP and an overall deficit of 3.9 percent, with plans for gradual reduction over the medium term. Tax revenue is projected to reach 13.2 percent of GDP, driven by bold reforms aimed at boosting compliance and expanding the tax base. Measures such as restricting non-filers from major

transactions—like purchasing assets—along with a uniform 18 percent sales tax on online goods, solar panel imports, and vehicles, signal a commitment to fiscal consolidation.

Investment is another bright spot. As fiscal discipline reduces the government's borrowing needs, more funds become available for private investment. Falling interest rates and improved business confidence are expected to further fuel domestic demand. The National Tariff Policy 2025–2030 and a digital tax refund system for exporters are designed to enhance competitiveness, encouraging private sector participation. Workers' remittances, a lifeline for many Pakistani households, are also projected to rise, supported by a stable exchange rate and the urgent need to aid flood-affected families. These inflows could cushion the blow of declining farm



incomes, stabilizing private consumption.

Despite these positive developments, Pakistan's economic outlook is not without risks. The ADB highlights several challenges that could derail progress. Policy slippage and weak implementation of reforms remain a concern, as does the failure to achieve revenue and fiscal consolidation targets. Climate change, exemplified by the recent floods, poses a recurring threat, with extreme weather events capable of wreaking havoc on agriculture and food security. Global geopolitical uncertainties and policy shifts could further complicate matters, impacting inflation, external stability, and investor confidence.

The floods, in particular, underscore Pakistan's vulnerability to climate-related shocks. Beyond the immediate destruction of infrastructure and crops, they exacerbate food inflation and strain household budgets, particularly in rural areas. These pressures could undermine the fragile recovery, making it critical for the government to act swiftly on rehabilitation efforts and climate-resilient policies.

On the flip side, the ADB notes that faster reforms and a more favorable global environment could propel Pakistan's growth beyond current

projections. Structural reforms, if implemented effectively, could unlock new avenues for investment and economic diversification. For instance, the digital tax refund system for exporters is a step toward modernizing fiscal processes, while the National Tariff Policy aims to create a more competitive trade environment. These measures, combined with improved liquidity and falling interest rates, could attract both domestic and foreign investors, laying the foundation for sustainable growth.

Moreover, Pakistan's upgraded credit ratings signal growing international confidence in its economic management. This could pave the way for increased foreign investment, particularly in sectors like manufacturing and infrastructure. A stable exchange rate and rising remittances further bolster external stability, providing a buffer against global uncertainties. If the government can maintain its commitment to fiscal discipline and reform, Pakistan could not only meet its growth targets but also build a more resilient economy capable of withstanding future shocks.

Pakistan's economic journey in FY2026 is a balancing act between leveraging opportunities and mitigating risks. The government's focus on fiscal consolidation, tax reforms, and investment-friendly policies is a promising start. However, the specter of climate change, coupled with global uncertainties, demands proactive measures to protect vulnerable sectors like agriculture and ensure inclusive growth. Rehabilitation efforts for flood-affected areas must be prioritized, not only to restore infrastructure but also to safeguard livelihoods and food security.

The ADB's cautious optimism reflects the delicate nature of Pakistan's recovery. While the 3 percent growth forecast is a step in the right direction, achieving the government's 4.2 percent target will require unwavering commitment to reforms and swift action on climate resilience. By addressing downside risks and capitalizing on opportunities, Pakistan can chart a path toward sustainable growth, offering hope for a brighter economic future.

In conclusion, FY2026 presents Pakistan with a critical opportunity to solidify its economic recovery. With the right mix of policies, reforms, and resilience-building measures, the country can not only weather current challenges but also lay the groundwork for long-term prosperity. The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but with determination and strategic vision, Pakistan can turn its economic potential into tangible progress for its people.

Reassessing ex-FATA merger: A call for a new path forward

Raza Khan

The special committee, established by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to propose reforms for the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), has yet to deliver any substantial recommendations, leaving the future of the Merged Tribal Districts (MTDs) uncertain following their integration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) via the 25th Constitutional Amendment in 2018.

Formed in June under the leadership of PML-N's Federal Minister Amir Muqam, the committee includes key figures such as Federal Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi. Its primary mandate is to explore options for revitalizing the jirga system and bolstering civil administration in the region.

Creating a committee to address reforms in the MTDs was a misstep by the federal government. The jirga system, historically embedded in the region's governance, has been more a hindrance than a help, perpetuating legal, political, administrative, and economic underdevelopment. As the MTDs are now part of KP, the provincial government alone holds the authority to implement reforms in its jurisdiction, rendering the federal committee's formation inappropriate.

Consequently, the KP government, led by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has rejected the federal committee's efforts to revive the jirga system in the MTDs. PTI and KP authorities argue that such a move is an attempt to undo the 2018 merger, driven by vested interests eyeing the region's significant deposits of rare earth metals. They claim the federal government seeks to reassert control over the MTDs, though the validity of these allegations remains open to debate.

The merger of ex-FATA with KP, however, has fallen short of its intended goals: restoring peace, mainstreaming the region, and fostering development by filling the political and administrative void. More than seven years later, the MTDs remain isolated, underdeveloped, and plagued by legal and administrative gaps. This failure prompted the federal government's interest in reviving the jirga system, but such a step is misguided, as the system itself has historically been corrupt and ineffective.

The root issue lies in the flawed approach

to mainstreaming the MTDs. The merger was executed hastily, without consulting local communities or leadership, as a means to offload the region's challenges. This writer has consistently opposed the merger, both before and after its implementation, arguing that it would not only fail to develop the MTDs but also strain KP's already limited resources, leading to further underdevelopment across both regions. This prediction has proven accurate: the MTDs remain restive, with groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), now labeled Fitna-tul-Khawarij by the state, operating freely, while terrorism and counteroperations have destabilized KP as a whole. The modest progress KP had achieved in physical and human development prior to 2018 has been significantly undermined.

The merger's fallout is evident in demo-

tribal leaders, have vocally opposed the merger. The FATA Grand Alliance, representing tribal notables from all seven agencies and six frontier regions of ex-FATA, recently declared the merger unconstitutional and illegal, citing a lack of local consent. Led by figures like Malik Bismillah Khan Afridi, the alliance argues that the merger eroded traditional institutions. However, this argument is flawed, as those institutions contributed to the region's chronic underdevelopment and isolation.

The solution does not lie in reverting to outdated systems like the jirga or maintaining the status quo. Instead, sustainable modern institutions—such as elected local government bodies, a self-governing administrative framework with a local legislative assembly, and the establishment of industries and urban centers—are essential to provide the foundation for development and



graphic shifts. With an estimated 10 million residents in the MTDs—though official figures suggest half that number—many, particularly educated individuals, have migrated to KP's urban centers for better infrastructure and opportunities. This migration has left the MTDs vulnerable, with groups like the TTP regaining influence in vacated areas. Conversely, residents of KP's settled areas have not moved to the MTDs due to the lack of opportunities, further stunting the region's growth.

The merger's failure has fueled calls to reverse it. Political groups like Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), alongside influential

integration. The assumption that KP could absorb and uplift the MTDs was misguided, given KP's own financial, administrative, and political constraints. Burdening an already resource-strapped province with the MTDs' challenges has led to setbacks for both regions.

The way forward for the MTDs is clear: the merger must be revoked, and the districts should be reconstituted as a separate province with its own legislative assembly and government. This would empower the region to address its unique challenges, foster development, and ensure meaningful integration into Pakistan's broader framework, unencumbered by the limitations of the current arrangement.

Hidden cost of floods on literacy in Pakistan

Rasheed Ali

When the floodwaters rose around her village in southern Punjab this summer, fourteen-year-old Ayesha thought she might miss a week of school at most. She remembers standing with her younger brother on a rooftop in her village near tehsil Duniyapur town of district Lodhran, pointing at the swollen river that had swallowed the road, their fields, and finally the single-storey school building that had been the heart of their community.

Within days the classrooms were under water, the chalkboard turned into a faint green blur beneath the murky tide, and the iron gate was carried away like a toy. When the water finally receded, there was nothing to go back to: the roof had collapsed, the furniture was gone, and the school was declared unsafe. Her parents told her she would have to walk several kilometres to another school in a neighbouring town. She did not go back.

Ayesha's story is not unique. Over the past decade, Pakistan's classrooms have been repeatedly swept away by floods. In 2010, more than 10 thousand schools across the country were damaged, according to UNESCO. Later disasters followed the same pattern: in 2022, over 17 thousand schools were affected, more than six thousand completely destroyed, and nearly three million children saw their education disrupted. For boys, the journey to a distant replacement school is a hardship but sometimes still possible; for girls, it is often the end of their schooling. Concerns about safety, lack of transport, and social expectations combine to drive parents to keep daughters at home. The floods therefore do more than destroy buildings — they extinguish opportunities, particularly for girls in rural Pakistan, where literacy rates remain stubbornly low.

This year has brought yet another crisis. In Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, the summer floods of 2025 damaged or destroyed nearly three thousand schools. Punjab's Minister for School Education, Rana Sikandar Hayat, confirmed that three thousand schools were lost, severely affecting the education of hundreds of thousands of students. Some of the buildings remain under water weeks after the floods, their walls weakened and playgrounds turned into muddy ponds. The closures have disrupted the education of more than six hundred thousand children, among them an almost equal share of girls and

boys. The scale is staggering: in some districts nearly half of all functioning schools are closed.

Minister Hayat acknowledged the depth of the crisis during a meeting with UNICEF's Representative to Pakistan, Pernille Ironside, on Sept 25. The two discussed immediate steps to restore learning and long-term cooperation for resilience. Hayat explained that the department had already been struggling with shortages of classrooms, furniture, and teachers before the disaster struck. The floods, he said, "have destroyed thousands of schools, many of which are still under water. The department is now confronted with the challenge of rehabilitating these schools." To prevent a total collapse in continuity, the government has begun running three shifts in surviving



schools, so that displaced children can squeeze into already crowded classrooms. Tent schools are being erected in flood-hit areas, and in some cases private buildings are being rented temporarily. Authorities expect it will take three months to rehabilitate the damaged schools, though past experience suggests the process could be far slower.

To ease the burden on families, Punjab has waived examination fees for students in flood-affected areas and promised scholarships to help keep them in the system. But for many, these measures will not be enough. The journey to school itself has become impossible in villages where bridges were washed away or where the nearest functioning school is miles away. Parents who already struggle to meet daily expenses are unwilling to risk daughters' safety or pay for transport. For them, the loss of a local school is the end of the line.

The pattern is painfully familiar. After the devastating floods of 2010, large numbers of schools across Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa were never fully rebuilt. Temporary shelters served as classrooms for years, until they too became unsafe. In Swat, recent floods

left more than a hundred schools unusable, forcing teachers to conduct lessons in open grounds or half-collapsed buildings. In Sindh, the 2022 deluge damaged nearly half the province's schools, including thousands of girls' institutions. In many cases, the promised reconstruction has been delayed by bureaucracy, funding shortages, and competing emergencies.

Education experts warn that Pakistan cannot afford another lost generation. The literacy rate for women in rural areas is still below 40 per cent, and dropout rates after primary level remain among the highest in South Asia. Each school that disappears under floodwaters represents not only physical damage but the loss of fragile progress in reducing gender disparity. The Malala Fund has stressed

that climate disasters are disproportionately harming girls' education, as families under stress tend to pull girls out first.

The challenge now is to move beyond temporary fixes. Tents and rented halls may keep some children in class for a season, but they cannot replace safe, permanent schools. Nor can crowded three-shift systems provide quality learning when teachers are overworked and classrooms crammed with twice their normal size. Building back stronger is the refrain among policymakers, but in practice reconstruction often means patching walls or replacing roofs with the same vulnerable materials. Resilient infrastructure — elevated foundations, flood-resistant designs, proper drainage — is more expensive, yet without it, the cycle of destruction and repair will continue.

For families like Ayesha's, the future hangs in the balance. She spends her days now helping her mother with household chores and looking after younger siblings. When asked if she hopes to return to school, she nods but her answer is uncertain. "If they open a school nearby again, I will go," she says softly. Her father is less hopeful. "These things take years," he explains. "We cannot wait forever."

The floods of 2025 have once again washed away not just classrooms but a generation's fragile hold on education. Unless governments — federal and provincial — treat school reconstruction as an emergency and partners like UNICEF sustain their support, Pakistan risks turning disasters into permanent scars. For the children who have lost their schools, time is not on their side. Every month out of class deepens the gap, and every kilometre further to school makes the dream of learning more distant.

Child marriages: A call for action and accountability

Dr. Fatima Khan

Child marriage, often cloaked in the guise of cultural tradition or economic necessity, remains a profound violation of fundamental human rights. In Pakistan, where poverty and patriarchal norms intersect, young girls are frequently pushed into marriages that rob them of their childhoods. The consequences are devastating. Young brides face heightened risks of maternal mortality, domestic abuse, and chronic poverty.

Education, a gateway to empowerment, is often cut short, leaving girls without the skills or opportunities to build independent lives. These are not isolated tragedies but a widespread crisis that stifles national development and perpetuates cycles of inequality.

A survey's findings from Sindh and Balochistan paint a particularly grim picture. Nearly six in ten girls in these provinces are married before 18, a rate that underscores the deep-rooted social and economic barriers they face. While these regions show the highest prevalence, child marriage is a national issue, with varying degrees of impact across all provinces. The practice thrives in environments where poverty limits choices, where cultural norms prioritize early marriage over education, and where enforcement of protective laws falters.

Sindh stands out as a pioneer in Pakistan, with the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2013 making it the only province with a dedicated legal framework to combat child marriage. The law is clear: marrying anyone under 18 is a punishable offense, with penalties including imprisonment, fines, or both for parents, guardians, and those officiating such unions. This legislation is a vital step, setting a minimum age for marriage and signaling a commitment to protecting girls' rights. Yet, the law's impact is blunted by a glaring gap in enforcement.

Across Sindh, and indeed the country, the disconnect between policy and practice

is stark. Laws alone cannot dismantle deeply ingrained traditions without robust systems to back them up. Weak enforcement, limited awareness, and lack of accountability allow child marriages to persist, even in areas where legal protections exist. Police and local authorities often lack the resources or training to intervene effectively, while communities may view early marriage as a norm rather than a violation. This gap underscores a broader truth: legal frameworks are only as strong as the systems and social will behind them.

Tackling child marriage requires more than policy declarations. It demands a multifaceted approach that weaves together legislation, enforcement, education, and community

acceptance of early marriage and highlight its harms.

Economic support is another key piece of the puzzle. Many families turn to child marriage as a coping mechanism for financial hardship, believing it secures their daughters' futures. Social safety nets, microfinance programs, and vocational training for women can alleviate these pressures, offering families alternatives to early marriage. While Sindh and Balochistan face the highest rates of child marriage, the issue is not confined to these provinces. It exists in varying degrees across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and beyond, requiring a coordinated national response. The federal government must lead by example,

harmonizing provincial laws to set a consistent minimum age for marriage and ensuring enforcement mechanisms are in place. Partnerships with civil society can amplify these efforts, bringing grassroots insights to the table.

Moreover, data-driven strategies are essential. Regular monitoring and transparent reporting can track progress, identify gaps, and hold authorities accountable. Investing in girls' health, education, and empowerment not only addresses child marriage but also fuels broader social and economic progress. Every girl who stays in school, avoids early pregnancy, and enters the workforce strengthens Pakistan's future.

Ending child marriage is not just a legal obligation—it's a moral and economic imperative. Every girl married off too soon is a lost opportunity for innovation, leadership, and growth. By protecting their dignity and expanding their choices, Pakistan can unlock the potential of half its population. It's time to move beyond dialogue to decisive action—strengthening laws, enforcing accountability, and empowering communities to say no to child marriage.

As Pakistan looks to its future, the path is clear: invest in girls, dismantle barriers, and build a society where every child has the freedom to dream. The 60 percent of girls in Sindh and Balochistan married before 18 are not just numbers—they are daughters, sisters, and future leaders. Their stories, and their potential, demand that we act now/



engagement. Policymakers, law enforcement, educators, civil society, and local communities must work in tandem to create an environment where girls can thrive.

Empowering girls is at the heart of this fight. Education is a powerful antidote, offering girls the tools to envision and pursue their own futures. Yet, access to schooling remains limited in many areas, particularly in rural Sindh and Balochistan, where poverty and early marriage often pull girls out of classrooms. Programs that provide scholarships, safe transport, or community-based learning can keep girls in school longer, delaying marriage and opening doors to opportunity. Equally critical is engaging families and communities to shift social norms. Awareness campaigns, led by local leaders and influencers, can challenge the

A 10-point plan for Israel

Somdeep Sen

Hamas has sent its response to the “20-point Gaza peace plan” put forward by United States President Donald Trump. Importantly, the Palestinian group agreed to hand over the administration of Gaza to a group of technocrats and free all Israeli captives in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

The US president welcomed the response and told Israel to “immediately stop bombing”. Yet, in the 48 hours after Hamas submitted its response, Israeli attacks killed at least 94 Palestinians in Gaza.

While the Trump plan may bring a temporary respite for the Palestinians, it will not achieve peace. For this to happen, we also need a plan that makes demands of Israel and eliminates its genocidal drive.

So here is a 10-point plan for Israel: Israeli politics and public sphere need to be deradicalised. Over the past 24 months, the Israeli political elite have been cheerleaders of genocide, publicly celebrating the erasure of Palestinian life in Gaza with complete impunity. Much of the Israeli public has also tagged along. The Israeli state will need to institute programmes that promote values of tolerance and peaceful coexistence within state institutions and within the education system to address this.

The Israeli army needs to be reformed. Be it the deliberate targeting of Palestinian civilians or the social media posts by Israeli soldiers from the battleground mocking the destruction of Palestinian homes – the dehumanisation of Palestinians is deeply embedded in the armed forces. Israeli authorities will need to engage in a concerted effort to formulate and implement a new military code of conduct rooted in the dictates of international humanitarian law.

Israeli political and military leaders must be tried at the International Criminal Court. Forensic experts, civil society organisations, human rights groups and activists have been collecting evidence of the nature of the Israeli military campaign. This evidence could be the basis of the legal proceedings.

Gaza must be opened up. This means there must be an end to the siege by land, air and sea that has been in place since 2007. The free movement of people and goods must be allowed.

International observers or a protective

force must be deployed in Gaza to make sure there are no violations – either by the Israeli military or by Israeli extremists.

Taking the cue from the 2024 International Court of Justice ruling that settlements in the occupied West Bank are illegal under international law, the Israeli authorities must stop and criminalise all settlement activities, including activism, lobbying and fundraising efforts geared towards expanding settlements or establishing new outposts.

The West Bank and Jerusalem must be demilitarised and deoccupied. This would entail the dismantling of Israeli military infrastructure, checkpoints, watchtowers and walls that have systematically fractured the land and

in the immediate socioeconomic needs of this historically marginalised community.

Over the years, Israel has ramped up its public diplomacy efforts to gain global support for its policies. In 2024, these efforts received an infusion of about \$150m in public funds. This money has been used for pro-Israel social media campaigns, lobbying efforts, fellowships and trips to Israel for non-Israeli businesspeople, journalists, politicians and decision-makers. Such investments have paid dividends through the crackdown on Palestinian solidarity efforts, especially in the West, since the start of the genocide in Gaza. Israel must, therefore, allow an international panel of experts to investigate the workings of its pub-



worked to circumscribe the Palestinian right to a homeland.

While the US plan requires Israel to release 250 Palestinian prisoners serving life sentences and 1,700 detainees, thousands of Palestinians remain in custody without trial. There will need to be a swift end to the Israeli policy of administrative detention and a wider plan to release the remaining Palestinians in Israeli prisons.

Israel will have to enter into negotiations to address the Palestinians' right of return. This will need to happen through direct discussions and negotiations with the Palestinians in Palestine and the diaspora as well as representatives of United Nations bodies and civil society groups who have worked closely with Palestinian refugees and are well-versed

lic diplomacy efforts and whether such efforts violate the sovereignty as well as the freedom of expression laws of other nations.

Of course, it is unlikely that the Israeli government would willingly pursue any of these 10 points. But global public opinion is changing dramatically. The Israeli narrative is no longer dominant despite the best efforts of the Israeli government and its allies. A growing number of people around the world are recognising that the Palestinian issue goes well beyond the fate of the Palestinian people.

Palestine is deeply intertwined with the issues and challenges that shape life and politics across the Middle East and beyond. And it is only when we address these wider issues and rightfully place the burden of responsibility on the State of Israel, can we hope for lasting peace.

Nepal's leaderless Gen-Z revolution has changed the rules of power

Piyush Adhikari

In the 48 hours that Nepal's Gen-Z revolution unfolded, one question echoed across the country: "Where is their Lenin?" But perhaps that question missed the point. For decades, every Nepali revolution has been undone not by its enemies but by those who claimed to lead it. This time, the absence of a single figurehead was not a weakness; it was the movement's greatest strength.

When the protests subsided, one name began to circulate: Sudan Gurung, head of the youth-led organisation Hami Nepal. But Gurung did not lead the uprising; he emerged only after it was over, more as a spokesperson than a commander. His late prominence was proof of what made this revolt different. By refusing to anoint a leader, Nepal's young protesters broke with a past where power was always concentrated in the hands of a few. They showed that change could emerge from the collective rather than the charismatic.

Yet the same revolution that reimagined leadership also revealed the enormous human cost of reclaiming power. In both human and economic terms, it was among the most destructive 48 hours in Nepal's history. At least 74 people were killed and about 2,113 injured in the clashes. All three pillars of democracy – the parliament building, the Supreme Court and the Singha Durbar – were torched. The violence was not confined to the capital; at least 300 local government offices across the country were damaged. Even the fourth pillar of democracy, the media, came under attack, with the Kantipur Media House, Nepal's largest private outlet, set ablaze. The economic damage has been estimated at up to three trillion Nepalese rupees (about \$21bn), with preliminary government figures putting public infrastructure losses near one trillion, nearly half of Nepal's annual gross domestic product.

By September 10, the state machinery had collapsed. The prime minister had resigned, parliament was in ruins, and the army was the only institution maintaining order. Amid this political vacuum, the revolution's decentralised nature became even more visible. Protest organisers used the "Youths Against

Corruption" Discord channel as an impromptu public square to decide on a path forward. The so-called "Discord Election" was chaotic, with thousands debating. One report described it as a "marathon session more befitting a Twitch stream", with moderators struggling to manage a flood of opinions from users with anonymous handles and anime avatars. More than 7,500 people voted on the platform, ultimately selecting former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as their nominee for interim prime minister.

However, judging this revolution only by these events would be an injustice to history. The uprising was not planned; it was a reaction. We were simply high school and university students protesting. The massacre of 19 protesters, some still in their uniforms, on the first day transformed peaceful dissent into national fury. The symbols of a state that would kill its own children became the inevi-

pal's political history not as a series of isolated events but as a recurring pattern. The 2025 uprising did not emerge from nowhere; it was the latest eruption in a long cycle of revolt and betrayal. A Marxist analytical lens can help, not as ideology but as a framework. We can borrow the concepts of "base" and "superstructure" and adapt them politically. The "political base" can be understood as Nepal's entrenched system of power, a network of patronage, corruption and governance that sustains the status quo. The "political superstructure" is the force that rises to challenge it, sometimes an organised party and others, in the case of Gen-Z, a decentralised public. This framework reveals a tragic cycle: In Nepal, every new superstructure that succeeds merely becomes the new base.

Consider 1951, when Nepal saw its first revolution of the century. From this lens, it

was the political superstructure rising against the old autocratic base of the Rana regime. Figures like B P Koirala, King Tribhuvan and the five martyrs became the revolution's heroes, but one cannot forget the roles of the exiled parties, the aspiring bourgeoisie and a rehabilitated monarchy. Hopes were high, and Koirala, especially, became the face of that hope, later becoming Nepal's first democratically elected prime minister.

Those hopes, however, never crystallised. Barely a decade later, King Mahendra dissolved par-

liament, abolished the parties and introduced the Panchayat system, vesting sovereignty in the monarchy itself. While some glorify this era as a golden age, the discontent it produced led to the protests of 1980 and ultimately to the People's Movement I in 1990, the second great revolution of modern Nepal.

That revolution, too, followed the familiar pattern. It restored multi-party democracy, again shifting the political base. Yet the democratic elite, composed of the same parties that had fought the Panchayat, failed to dismantle the underlying structures of patronage and feudalism. Instead, they became a new political base, perfecting a kleptocratic system that would lead the country into a bloody civil war. The Maoist insurgency, brewing for years before its first attack, marked another dark chapter.



table targets.

Now, the physical chaos has subsided. A new interim government with technocratic ministers has given Nepalis renewed hope. But that hope comes with a challenge: Will we fall into the old pattern of outsourcing power to leaders, or will we hold them to a new standard? For 48 hours, the people of Nepal believed that power resided with the public. This was not merely a belief; it was a truth the public stumbled upon through chaos.

Moving forward, the challenge for Nepalis, both Gen-Z and beyond, is to never forget the lessons of this revolution. History will not forget what happened on September 8 and 9, but we must also ask how and why it happened.

To understand this, we must view Ne-

Rural roots, urban challenges

A number of migrants from rural areas are often seen struggling to adjust to the urban environment and its systems. They silently suffer while navigating unfamiliar public infrastructure. As urban migration increases, public services like buses become overcrowded, yet little is done to make these systems inclusive or accessible to those unfamiliar with them.

What is perhaps most disheartening is the discrimination rural migrants face. Urban residents treat them with impatience, annoyance and sometimes outright disrespect. They often see themselves as more civilised or refined, while those from villages are labelled as backward, awkward and uncultured.

While people from rural areas may seem old-fashioned or less equipped to handle relatively modern systems, they carry something that is quickly disappearing from our fast-paced cities: humanity. In a world racing towards digital perfection, it is often the most 'unpolished' souls who still remember how to empathise, how to help, and how to live with heart. Addressing this growing divide requires real investment in rural development and education. We must prepare these migrants for the systems they encounter in the cities. Teaching them how to use basic public services like electric buses, elevators, shopping malls, or even modern public restrooms can go a long way in restoring their confidence and dignity.

The deeper issue, however, lies in the lack of access to quality infrastructure in their own hometowns. As such, many villages still lack proper schools, colleges, libraries and recreational spaces. And, these happen to be the things that the urban population takes for granted. If we normalise empathy, inclusion and accessibility across the board, we can have a truly united and progressive nation.

Ghania Baig
Karachi

Rain exposes Karachi's inequalities

Another spell of rain brought the same misery that seems to have become the fate of Karachi. Rain and misery go hand in hand in Karachi. This is an absolute tragedy. Just weeks ago, a 120mm rain spell in less than 48 hours had submerged homes across the city, paralysed transport, and displaced hundreds. Beneath the floodwaters lies a bitter truth: the city's crisis is not merely meteorological; it is political, infrastructural and profoundly gendered.

Relief camps set up in such cases lack privacy and protection against harassment. Pregnant women are cut off from maternal care. Working women are stranded without safe transport. These are not incidental oversights; they are the predictable outcomes of gender-blind governance. Feminist scholar Simra Sohail reminds us that climate change does not create new inequalities; it intensi-

fies existing ones. Karachi's floods are not gender-neutral. They expose how patriarchy and poor planning together make women's lives more precarious. The unpaid labour of caregiving becomes survival work. The absence of women in decision-making turns natural hazards into social catastrophes. This demands more than sandbags and rescue boats. It demands a shift in how we imagine resilience. Cynthia Enloe's concept of feminist curiosity urges us to ask who is missing from the story and who benefits from their absence. In Karachi's particular case, it is not patriarchy in action, it is what is actually called hyper-masculinity. Karachi's women are not voiceless; the system refuses to listen to them by design.

Mahnoor Aftab
Karachi

New law to protect patient rights

In line with the directions suggested by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the government is in the process of amending the federal Industrial Relations Act (IRA), 2012, which covers the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) as well as trans-provincial establishments and industries. The provinces, on the other hand, have their own independent IRAs.

The following clause has been deleted from the act in the proposed amendments: "The act shall not apply to any person employed by an establishment or institution for the treatment or care of sick, infirm, destitute or mentally unfit persons excluding those run on commercial basis". In fact, a new section (45-A) has been added wherein "the health/hospital sector including ambulance service" has been mentioned as 'Essential Services' in Schedule 3. It stipulates that no employee or employer engaged in an essential service shall act by way of strike or lockout. Indeed, bringing the healthcare/hospital sector within the ambit of 'essential service' is a praiseworthy move ahead, as the provision of health services cannot afford any outside disruption by way of staff protests, agitations or physical assaults during the patients' treatment, medical procedures and/or surgeries.

Parvez Rahim
Karachi

Pakistan's global role and lessons from the past

There is a lot of discussion these days about Pakistan's growing role in the world, and rightly so because our ties with powerful global centres have seen a massive change since the military success we registered a few months ago. While enjoying the global spotlight, it is important to move forward with due sense of history as we build new alliances. Our key strength lies in the fact that we have a relationship going well with powers in both the East and the West. Our past interactions with other

powerful nations have taught us some valuable lessons, and those lessons should guide us as we move forward.

Looking back, the kind of relationships we have had with major global players were often based on mutual benefit, but these alliances were almost never without consequences. A major example of this is our involvement in the Cold War, when Pakistan ended up standing alongside the West against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. It was not a war we had started, but we certainly felt the impact. Later, in the wake of 9/11, we were pulled into a conflict that was not ours to begin with. These events should serve as reminders that while alliances could have brought benefits, they also led to complications we had not anticipated. The questions in many minds about what exactly the United States wants from us now are quite relevant and valid. When we think about entering into any business venture with the global powers, we must proceed carefully and diligently. Other than financial rewards, we must also assess the contributions of such deals to Pakistan's long-term development.

Our focus must be on gaining technology, ensuring that it does get passed on to our people. We should not let short-term gains cloud our judgment. By keeping these priorities in mind, we can create a future that is prosperous and sustainable.

Zahid Maqsood Sheikh
Lahore

Delay in Postal Life Insurance claim

My experience with the Postal Life Insurance (PLI) department regarding the settlement of my policy claim has been seriously disappointing. My PLI policy matured more than a year ago, but despite repeated follow-ups and personal visits to the relevant office, I am still waiting for the payment cheque. The official response has always been frustratingly consistent: the non-availability of funds. Unfortunately, the prolonged delay has caused a loss in monetary value of the amount involved due to inflation and missed opportunities for alternative investment. I wonder if someone can intervene in the matter and make PLI recognise its fiduciary responsibility.

Dr Zaheer Chiragh
Gujranwala

Safer healthcare

There are four chains of hospitals accredited by the Joint Commission International (JCI), a status that ensures a high level of commitment to patient safety and attention to detail. Thousands of little processes are carried out each day at these hospitals. Given this, more hospitals in Pakistan should target such global accreditations in order to improve patient safety locally.

Mariam Khan
Lahore

Mysterious 160m-year-old creature unearthed on Isle of Skye

Patrick Pester

The fossilized skeleton of a Jurassic reptile that appears to be part lizard, part snake, has been unearthed on Scotland's Isle of Skye. This mysterious lizard had hooked, snake-like teeth for hunting down prey 167 million years ago, a new study has found. The newly discovered species is named *Breugnathair elgolensis*, which means "false snake of Elgol," honoring the creature's confusing anatomy and the Elgol area of southern Skye, where the fossil was found, according to the study published in the journal *Nature*. *B. elgolensis* was only about 16 inches (41 centimeters) long, but that still made it one of the largest lizards in its ecosystem, according to a statement released by the researchers. Scientists suspect that it hunted smaller lizards, early mammals and even young dinosaurs, such as small herbivorous heterodontosaurids and predatory bird-like paravians.

It had a snake-like jaw and curved teeth similar to a modern python, but its body was short, with fully formed limbs like a lizard. *B. elgolensis* also had gecko-like features on some of its bones, including the back of its skull. Researchers are still deciphering *B. elgolensis*' evolutionary history, but its discovery could change the way they look at early snake evolution. Scientists currently have a scattered understanding of early lizard and snake evolution. Both animals belong to a group called Squamata, which emerged about 190 million years ago. There's some overlap between members of the group, but lizards came first and generally have four limbs, while snakes are limbless.



Chocolate and health: A new twist on an old debate

Lisa O'Mary

Chocolate is one of the most confusing foods in nutrition science – hailed as a superfood for its potential heart, brain, and anti-inflammatory benefits, yet criticized as sugary, fatty junk food that's easy to overeat.



Nutrition research is notoriously tricky, said dietitian Julie Stefanski, MEd, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and chocolate studies can be particularly challenging. Differences in people's lifestyles, diets, and personal factors – like genetics or medical conditions – mean results "might not be able to be applied to all people," she said. In studies, "dark chocolate" could mean cocoa powder, supplements, or candy bars – crucial differences that make it hard to compare results.

Scientists do agree on one thing. If chocolate has health benefits, they likely come from flavonols – plant compounds thought to support heart health, improve blood vessel function, and reduce inflammation. This insight has shifted chocolate research toward exploring how flavonols might slow "inflammaging" – the low-grade, chronic inflammation that naturally rises with age and increases health risks, including risks to your heart and blood vessels. "The 'how' part is really the critical question," said Howard Sesso, ScD, an epidemiologist at Harvard Medical School and author of two new studies exploring just that. Now Sesso and other scientists are getting closer to that "how" – and that clearer picture could help people make sense of how to enjoy chocolate in a healthier way. In Sesso's latest study people who took a daily cocoa flavanol supplement for two years had significantly lower levels of c-reactive protein (CRP) – a marker of inflammation linked to heart disease – compared with those on a placebo.

Scientists create human egg cells from skin cells

Nicoletta Lanese

Scientists have created human eggs in the lab using a similar process to the one used to clone the famous Dolly the sheep, then used in vitro fertilization (IVF) to turn them into embryos.



Although this method is far from being used in a clinical setting, the hope is that it could eventually pave the way to new fertility treatments.

"In addition to offering hope for millions of people with infertility due to lack of eggs or sperm, this method would allow for the possibility of same-sex couples to have a child genetically related to both partners," study co-author Dr. Paula Amato, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) School of Medicine, said in a statement. The proof-of-concept experiment was described in the journal *Nature Communications*. The egg-making process involved removing the nucleus from an existing human egg cell and swapping it out for a nucleus from a human skin cell. This first step, called somatic cell nuclear transfer, has been used to clone a variety of animals, including Dolly. But the OHSU researchers aimed to make a functional egg, not a clone, and eggs carry half the chromosomes as nonreproductive cells in the body do. During fertilization, an egg's 23 chromosomes combine with 23 chromosomes from a sperm cell, resulting in a total of 46.

4 everyday kitchen habits that could actually make you sick

Brian Mastroianni

Food poisoning is a common problem in the United States, causing roughly 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths each year. The good news: You can often avoid infection by taking steps to prevent harmful germs from contaminating your food.



Here are four common mistakes that can raise your risk of food-related illness—and what to do instead.

Not Washing Your Hands: One major oversight is not washing your hands properly—or at all—before and after meal prep, especially when handling raw meat or seafood, said Michael Levine, MD, associate professor of emergency medicine at UCLA Health. This can allow harmful germs to contaminate your food or enter your body if you touch your eyes, nose, or mouth afterward.

Experts recommend washing your hands not only before and after working with food, but also after using the restroom and before eating. To do it properly, use soap and water and scrub vigorously for at least 20 seconds, paying attention to areas between your fingers and under your nails.

Not Thoroughly Cooking Food: Another common mistake? "Not cooking food adequately," Levine told Health. Consuming undercooked food like chicken and meat can be an easy way to contract infections like *Salmonella* and *E. coli*, which haven't been heated thoroughly enough to be killed.

Leaving Leftovers Out For Too Long: Leaving leftovers out too long before refrigerating them can also increase your risk of foodborne illness. Bacteria that cause food poisoning multiply most quickly between 40°F and 140°F, which is why hot food should be kept above 140°F until it's time to eat. Once the meal is over, leaving it out too long gives bacteria a chance to grow as the food cools.

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