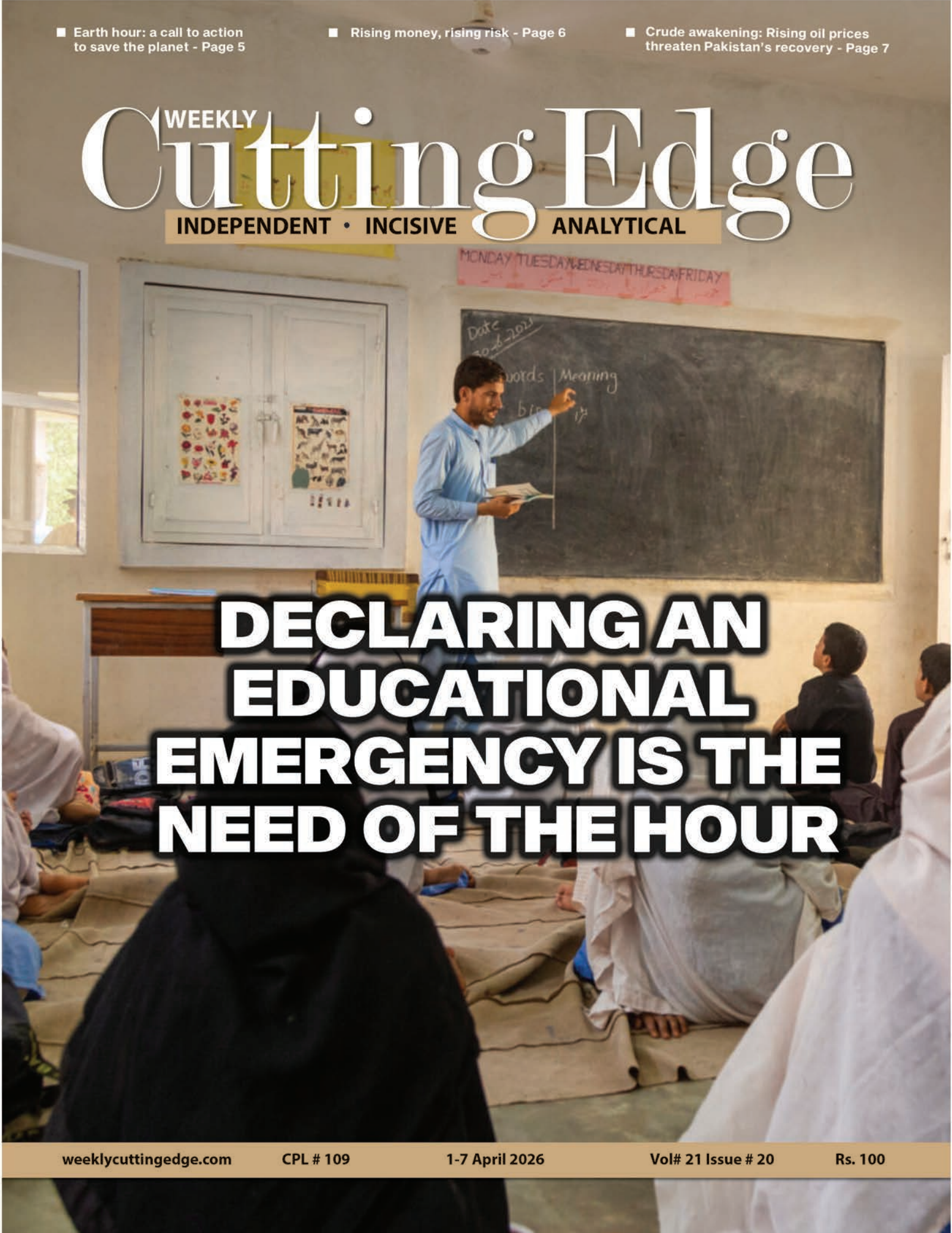


# WEEKLY Cutting Edge

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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](http://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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# Declaring an educational emergency is the need of the hour

Farhan Khan

The recently released official report titled “Public Financing in Education 2025–26” presents a deeply troubling picture of one of the most vital sectors of society. The statistics highlighted in the report are stark and alarming; more than 25.37 million children remain out of school, while 77 percent of school-going 10-year-olds are functionally illiterate.

Equally concerning is the steady decline in the share of education spending within the national economy. Public expenditure on education has consistently remained below international benchmarks, averaging less than two percent of GDP. Over recent years, the downward trend has become even more pronounced: spending declined from 1.9 percent of GDP in 2019–20 to 1.4 percent in 2020–21, before marginally rising to 1.5 percent in 2022–23. The provisional estimate of just 0.8 percent for 2024–25 is particularly alarming, reflecting misplaced policy priorities and a lack of commitment to human development.

This persistent underinvestment explains many of the deep-rooted structural problems plaguing the education sector. Schools across the country frequently lack basic infrastructure, essential teaching materials, and adequately trained staff. In rural and marginalized areas, access to education remains highly uneven, with girls and children from low-income households facing the greatest barriers.

Education is widely regarded as the backbone of a nation, yet Pakistan’s system continues to struggle under the burden of chronic neglect, outdated policies, and widening inequalities. Despite constitutional guarantees ensuring the right to education, millions of children remain excluded from classrooms, and even those who are enrolled often encounter an environment that is ill-equipped to prepare them for the demands of the modern world. This crisis is not new; however, its persistence poses a serious threat to the country’s long-term social cohesion and economic development.

Pakistan’s literacy rate hovers at around 59 percent—significantly below regional averages. Official estimates indicate that more than 24 million children are out of school, placing Pakistan among the countries with the highest number of out-of-school children globally. The situation is particularly severe in rural areas, where poverty, cultural constraints, and inadequate infrastructure combine to keep children—especially girls—away from education.

For those who do attend school, the quality of education remains inconsistent and often substandard. Public schools frequently

lack basic facilities such as electricity, clean drinking water, and sanitation. Overcrowded classrooms are common, and teaching practices are largely confined to rote memorization, leaving little room for creativity, critical thinking, or intellectual curiosity. The disparity between urban and rural education systems is stark: while private schools in urban centers may offer relatively better facilities and teaching standards, they remain financially inaccessible to the majority of the population. In contrast, government schools in rural areas continue to operate with dilapidated infrastructure and limited oversight.

The curriculum itself remains outdated and heavily dependent on memorization, with insufficient emphasis on analytical skills, innovation, and practical application of knowledge. Students are rarely encouraged to question established ideas, explore new concepts, or develop problem-solving abilities. As a result, many are inadequately prepared for higher education



or the evolving demands of the job market.

Teachers, who are the cornerstone of any effective education system, face their own set of challenges. Pakistan suffers from a shortage of qualified, trained, and motivated educators. Recruitment processes are often influenced by political considerations rather than merit, undermining the quality of teaching. Furthermore, opportunities for professional development are limited, and in many cases, teacher absenteeism remains a persistent issue, leaving students without proper guidance and supervision.

Perhaps the most critical challenge remains the chronic lack of investment in education. Pakistan allocates less than 2 percent of its GDP to this sector—far below the 4 to 6 percent recommended by UNESCO. This sustained underfunding severely restricts the government’s ability to improve infrastructure, enhance teacher salaries, and provide adequate learning resources. Without sufficient financial commitment, meaningful reform remains difficult to achieve.

Despite these daunting challenges, viable solutions exist—provided there is strong political will and a recognition of education as a national emergency. Increasing educa-

tion spending to at least 4 percent of GDP is a crucial first step. Enhanced funding would facilitate the construction of new schools, rehabilitation of existing institutions, and provision of essential facilities. It would also enable the government to offer competitive salaries and incentives, thereby attracting and retaining qualified teachers.

At the same time, Pakistan must undertake comprehensive curriculum reform to align education with global standards. Greater emphasis should be placed on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), as well as digital literacy and critical thinking. A modern, forward-looking curriculum that fosters creativity and innovation is essential to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

Equally important is the establishment of teacher training academies across the country to equip educators with contemporary teaching methodologies. Robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms must also be introduced to address absenteeism and ensure performance standards are met.

Targeted initiatives are needed to increase girls’ enrollment in schools. Measures such as stipends, provision of safe transportation, and community awareness campaigns can help overcome cultural and economic barriers. Educating girls not only transforms individual lives but also contributes significantly to the well-being of families and communities, ultimately driving broader social progress.

The integration of technology into education offers another promising avenue for reform. Digital classrooms and e-learning platforms can significantly enhance access to quality education, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Expanding affordable internet access and providing digital devices such as tablets or laptops can help bridge the educational divide and enable students to engage with global knowledge networks.

Pakistan’s education system stands at a critical juncture. Continued neglect will only deepen the crisis, depriving millions of young people of the skills and opportunities needed to contribute meaningfully to national development. However, the path forward is clear: increase investment, modernize curricula, strengthen teacher capacity, and ensure inclusivity across all segments of society. Education must be recognized not as a privilege for the few, but as a fundamental right for all and a cornerstone of national progress. The future of Pakistan will ultimately depend on the choices made today—whether to invest in its people or to risk the far-reaching consequences of inaction.

# Earth hour: a call to action to save the planet

Nasim Ahmed

Every year, millions of people across the globe unite for a simple yet powerful act: turning off their lights for one hour. Known as Earth Hour, this symbolic gesture has evolved into one of the world's largest grassroots movements for environmental awareness and climate action. Launched in 2007 by the World Wide Fund for Nature in Sydney, Australia, Earth Hour began as a modest initiative involving just over two million people. Today, it spans more than 190 countries, with iconic landmarks—from the Eiffel Tower to the Burj Khalifa—going dark in solidarity with the planet.

The movement encourages individuals, communities, and institutions to switch off non-essential lights for one hour and dedicate that time to a positive environmental activity. Observed annually on the last Saturday of March from 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM local time, Earth Hour fell on March 28 in 2026. It offers a rare opportunity to disconnect from artificial illumination, reconnect with nature, and even explore the beauty of the night sky.

Educational institutions, media organizations, and civil society groups play a vital role in amplifying the message of Earth Hour. Through campaigns, seminars, and extensive social media engagement, these stakeholders help spread awareness—particularly among younger generations who will inherit the consequences of today's environmental decisions. Their involvement ensures that the message extends beyond a single hour and becomes part of a broader environmental consciousness.

Earth Hour serves as a powerful reminder that addressing climate change requires both individual responsibility and systemic reform. Governments must adopt policies that promote renewable energy, conserve natural resources, and reduce carbon emissions. At the same time, individuals must make conscious lifestyle choices that support sustainability. The act of switching off lights for sixty minutes is designed to prompt reflection on consumption patterns and encourage more eco-friendly behavior in daily life. Importantly, Earth Hour is not about saving electricity

for one hour; it is about sparking a global conversation on climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable living. In an era marked by rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation, the urgency for collective action has never been greater.

Critics often argue that turning off lights for an hour has minimal tangible impact. While it is true that the immediate reduction in energy consumption may be limited, the real value of Earth Hour lies in raising awareness and inspiring long-term behavioral change. It motivates individuals to adopt sustainable practices such as reducing energy use, conserving water, and supporting envi-



ronmentally responsible policies. Some critics dismiss it as a “feel-good” initiative with little measurable effect on carbon emissions, while others contend that it shifts responsibility away from governments and corporations.

However, evidence suggests that Earth Hour has, in many cases, prompted meaningful action at institutional levels. Governments and organizations have used the occasion to launch environmental initiatives and policies. For instance, Argentina leveraged its 2013 Earth Hour campaign to help pass legislation establishing a 3.4 million-hectare marine protected area. For individuals, Earth Hour provides an entry point—a moment to reassess daily habits and commit to sustained environmental stewardship. One hour without electric light is not the end goal; rather, it is the beginning of a year-round commitment to sustainability.

Astronomy enthusiasts are among the most ardent supporters of the Earth Hour movement. Reduced light pollution allows for clearer views of the night sky, revealing stars

that are often obscured by artificial lighting. Light pollution—caused by excessive, misdirected, or unnecessary artificial light—has far-reaching consequences. It disrupts ecosystems, negatively impacts human health, and results in significant energy waste. From an astronomical perspective, excessive lighting brightens the night sky, diminishing the visibility of celestial objects. It also interferes with natural day-night cycles that are essential for both wildlife and human well-being. The encouraging aspect is that, unlike many environmental issues, light pollution can be reversed relatively easily by reducing unnecessary lighting—making Earth Hour an ideal starting point.

Like many countries, Pakistan actively participated in Earth Hour on March 28. Prominent national leaders, including Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and Yousuf Raza Gilani, called upon citizens to join the global initiative and reaffirmed their commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development. Sardar Ayaz Sadiq emphasized that Earth Hour represents more than a temporary blackout; it symbolizes a collective resolve to protect the planet, transcending geographical, political, and ideological boundaries.

The province of Punjab also observed Earth Hour, with Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz highlighting the importance of collective efforts to ensure a clean and safe environment for future generations. She commended the contributions of the World Wildlife Fund in advancing environmental protection and stressed that prioritizing environmental sustainability is an urgent necessity.

Pakistan, like many developing nations, faces serious environmental challenges. From smog-filled urban centers to water scarcity and deforestation, the country is increasingly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. Participation in Earth Hour offers an opportunity for citizens, businesses, and government institutions to reflect on these pressing challenges and commit to meaningful, long-term solutions. Ultimately, Earth Hour is not just about darkness for an hour—it is about illuminating a path toward a more sustainable and responsible future.

# Rising money, rising risk

Muhammad Hassan

Pakistan's monetary situation has undergone a significant shift during the current fiscal year, with money supply growth accelerating sharply compared to last year. Data for the first eight and a half months shows monetary expansion rising to 4.5 percent, a substantial increase from just 0.5 percent recorded during the same period a year earlier. This surge reflects a combination of heavy government borrowing and increased liquidity in the banking system, raising concerns about potential inflationary pressures and economic stability.

Monetary expansion, in simple terms, refers to the increase in the total amount of money circulating within the economy. In Pakistan's case, this expansion has been largely driven by the government's growing reliance on bank borrowing, coupled with policy measures introduced by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to stimulate economic activity. While such measures were initially aimed at supporting growth, evolving global and domestic conditions have complicated the outlook.

A key policy move contributing to the liquidity surge was the SBP's decision to reduce the Cash Reserve Requirement (CRR) for commercial banks. Effective January 30, the central bank lowered the average CRR by 100 basis points, bringing it down from 6 percent to 5 percent. At the same time, the daily reserve requirement was reduced from 4 percent to 3 percent. This step was intended to encourage banks to extend more credit to the private sector by freeing up funds that would otherwise remain idle.

The reduction in reserve requirements injected an estimated Rs300 to Rs315 billion into the banking system, significantly boosting liquidity. In theory, this additional liquidity was expected to support investment, enhance business activity, and contribute to overall economic growth. However, subsequent developments have altered these expectations.

The geopolitical situation in the Middle East, particularly the escalation of conflict involving the United States, Israel, and Iran since late February, has introduced a new layer of uncertainty. The conflict has disrupted global energy markets, leading to rising oil and gas prices. For an import-dependent economy like Pakistan, such developments have immediate and far-reaching consequences.

The government has already responded by increasing domestic fuel prices, raising

petrol and diesel rates by Rs55 per litre on existing stocks to manage fiscal pressures. At the same time, its borrowing requirements have surged. During the current fiscal year, government borrowing from banks has reached Rs2.453 trillion, nearly double the Rs1.27 trillion borrowed during the same period last year. This sharp increase has played a central role in expanding the money supply.

Despite the availability of surplus liquidity in the banking system, private sector investment has remained subdued. The prevailing uncertainty, driven by both external geopolitical risks and internal economic challenges, has dampened investor confidence. Businesses appear reluctant to undertake new investments in an environment marked by volatility in energy prices and unclear economic



prospects.

Monetary policy has also remained cautious. Even though inflation had shown signs of easing earlier, the SBP chose to keep its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 10.5 percent in its latest policy decision. The central bank's stance reflects a balancing act between supporting growth and containing potential inflation. However, with global oil prices on the rise, inflationary pressures are expected to intensify in the coming months.

The expansion in money supply, combined with external shocks, raises concerns about overheating in certain segments of the economy. When the growth in broad money outpaces the growth in economic output, it can lead to inflation. In Pakistan's case, the current trajectory suggests that the excess liquidity generated to stimulate growth may instead contribute to rising prices.

Official data highlights the scale of this expansion. Between July 1 and March 13 of the current fiscal year, monetary expansion amounted to Rs1,804.3 billion, compared to just Rs180 billion during the same period last

year. This tenfold increase underscores the magnitude of the shift in monetary conditions.

Currency in circulation has also risen sharply, reaching Rs1,103.6 billion, up from Rs691 billion in the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. This increase indicates higher cash usage in the economy, which can be a sign of both increased economic activity and underlying inflationary tendencies.

Another important indicator is the change in the banking system's Net Domestic Assets (NDA). Due to the combined effect of reduced reserve requirements and increased government borrowing, the NDA has risen to Rs649 billion. This marks a significant turnaround from the negative growth of Rs715 billion recorded during the same period last year. The shift reflects a substantial injection

of domestic liquidity into the financial system.

While increased liquidity can be beneficial in supporting economic recovery, it also presents challenges. If not managed carefully, it can lead to imbalances such as rising inflation, currency depreciation, and asset price bubbles. The current situation requires a delicate policy response to ensure that the benefits of monetary expansion are not outweighed by its risks.

Looking ahead, policy-makers face a complex set of challenges. On one hand, there is a need to sustain economic growth and encourage private sector activity. On the other, there is a growing risk of inflation driven by both domestic factors and external shocks, particularly in the energy sector. The effectiveness of monetary policy will depend on how well authorities can navigate this uncertain environment. Measures to improve investor confidence, stabilize energy prices, and maintain fiscal discipline will be critical. At the same time, coordination between fiscal and monetary policies will be essential to avoid conflicting signals and ensure overall economic stability.

In conclusion, the sharp rise in monetary expansion highlights both the opportunities and risks facing Pakistan's economy. While increased liquidity and government spending can provide short-term support, they also carry the potential for longer-term challenges. With global uncertainties on the rise and domestic pressures mounting, prudent and well-coordinated policy actions will be key to maintaining economic balance in the months ahead.

# Crude awakening: Rising oil prices threaten Pakistan's recovery

Muhammad Zain

Pakistan's fragile economic recovery faces a renewed challenge as rising global oil prices threaten to derail fiscal consolidation efforts. According to a new policy viewpoint released by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), escalating geopolitical tensions in the Gulf region—particularly involving Israel, the United States, and Iran—along with disruptions in key petroleum supply routes, could significantly strain Pakistan's economic stability in the months ahead.

The study underscores that Pakistan, as a heavily oil-dependent economy, remains acutely vulnerable to fluctuations in international crude prices. It warns that the latest surge in oil prices could weaken the government's fiscal position, increase macroeconomic pressures, and complicate efforts to maintain financial discipline under ongoing international commitments.

At the center of the analysis is Pakistan's projected federal primary surplus, which currently stands at Rs1,706 billion, or 1.3 percent of GDP. This surplus, considered a key indicator of fiscal health, appears highly susceptible to external shocks. According to PIDE's projections, even a moderate increase in oil prices to \$100 per barrel could reduce the surplus to Rs1,002 billion. In a more severe scenario, where prices rise to \$120 per barrel, the surplus may shrink further to Rs821 billion. In an extreme case of oil reaching \$144 per barrel, the surplus could decline to just Rs781 billion, significantly undermining fiscal stability.

Simultaneously, the fiscal deficit is expected to widen sharply under these scenarios. From a budgeted Rs6,501 billion—equivalent to 5.0 percent of GDP—the deficit could increase to Rs7,517 billion, or 5.8 percent of GDP, reflecting heightened fiscal stress. Such deterioration would not only complicate debt management but also put additional pressure on already constrained public finances.

The report explains that the impact of rising oil prices extends far beyond an increased import bill. Higher oil costs tend to trigger a chain reaction across the economy, fueling inflation, weakening the exchange rate, slowing economic growth, and eroding overall business and consumer confidence. For Pakistan, which relies heavily on imported energy, these effects are particularly pronounced.

Historical evidence presented in the study reinforces this concern. Periods when

Brent crude prices exceeded \$110 per barrel have consistently been associated with double-digit inflation in Pakistan. Conversely, phases of lower oil prices have offered temporary relief, allowing for improved macroeconomic indicators. However, such relief has often been short-lived, given the country's structural dependence on external energy sources.

The report also highlights the broader fiscal implications of oil price shocks. These include reduced revenue collection due to slower economic activity, increased spending on energy subsidies, and mounting pressures on the exchange rate. Additionally, contingent liabilities—such as those linked to the energy sector—tend to rise during periods of high oil prices, further straining government resources.

A key concern identified by the report is the limited policy space available to the government in responding to such shocks. With Pakistan currently operating under the International Monetary Fund's Extended Fund Facility (EFF), fiscal targets are tightly constrained. In particular, the scope for adjusting petroleum levies—a critical revenue source—remains restricted. As a result, policymakers have fewer options to cushion the impact of rising oil prices without compromising fiscal discipline.

Given these constraints, the report emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong primary balance. This metric, which excludes interest payments from government expenditures, serves as a crucial benchmark for assessing fiscal sustainability. A weakening primary balance could signal growing risks to debt stability and undermine investor confidence. The scenario-based analysis for the fiscal year 2026 paints a challenging picture. Even under moderate oil price increases, Pakistan's fiscal position is expected to deteriorate due to existing weaknesses, including shortfalls in revenue collection by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). In more severe scenarios, the combined effects of rising inflation, slowing growth, and declining fiscal buffers could create significant macroeconomic instability.

While higher inflation may lead to some nominal gains in government revenues, the report notes that these are unlikely to offset the broader economic costs. Increased import bills, higher subsidy requirements, and reduced economic activity are expected to outweigh any temporary revenue benefits, leaving the overall fiscal position weaker.

In response to these challenges, the report calls for a comprehensive and for-

ward-looking policy approach. The report recommends that the government place the primary balance at the core of fiscal management, ensuring that all policy decisions are aligned with maintaining fiscal discipline. Strengthening tax administration and improving compliance are also identified as critical priorities, particularly in broadening the tax base and reducing reliance on a narrow pool of taxpayers.

The study suggests leveraging digital tools to enhance monitoring and enforcement in high-revenue sectors. By reducing leakages and improving transparency, the government can generate additional fiscal space without imposing excessive burdens on the economy. At the same time, it stresses the need to curtail non-essential expenditures, particularly those that do not contribute to long-term growth.

Importantly, the report cautions against indiscriminate austerity measures. While fiscal consolidation is necessary, it should not come at the expense of social protection programs or key development initiatives. Investments in infrastructure, productivity, and export-oriented sectors must be preserved to ensure sustainable economic growth and resilience.

The report's central message is clear: oil price volatility is not a temporary phenomenon but a recurring structural challenge for Pakistan. In an increasingly uncertain global environment, reactive and ad hoc policy measures are no longer sufficient. Instead, the country must adopt a proactive and institutionalized approach to managing fiscal risks. To this end, it advocates the development of a formal fiscal contingency framework. Such a framework would enable policymakers to respond effectively to varying degrees of oil price shocks—whether moderate, severe, or extreme—without undermining overall economic stability. By setting predefined policy responses, the government can reduce uncertainty and enhance its ability to navigate external shocks.

In conclusion, the report serves as both a warning and a roadmap for policymakers. Rising oil prices, driven by geopolitical tensions and supply disruptions, pose a significant threat to Pakistan's fiscal health. Without strategic planning and disciplined policy implementation, these challenges could reverse recent stabilization gains and push the economy back into a cycle of instability. The need for decisive and forward-looking action has never been more urgent.

# IMF lifeline: A breather, not a cure

Shahid Hussain

Pakistan's fragile economy has received a temporary breather as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the release of two loan tranches totaling \$1.2 billion. The decision follows intense negotiations at a time when the country is grappling with mounting economic pressures, exacerbated by global uncertainties, particularly the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

While the inflow of funds provides short-term stability, it also comes with stern warnings and strict conditions that underscore the urgent need for structural reforms. The IMF's approval came after the successful completion of the third review under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and the second review under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF). However, the disbursement is not without strings attached. The global lender has made it clear that Pakistan must remain firmly committed to its agreed fiscal targets, even in the face of external shocks such as rising oil prices and geopolitical instability.

One of the key concerns raised by the IMF is the government's fiscal discipline. Authorities have been advised to take prompt monetary action, including adjusting interest rates, if inflation exceeds the agreed threshold. This presents a difficult challenge for policymakers, as the country is already struggling with high borrowing costs, sluggish economic activity, and limited fiscal space. Balancing inflation control with economic growth will require careful and decisive policymaking.

Despite the government's relatively optimistic projections, there is a noticeable gap between Islamabad's expectations and the IMF's assessment. Pakistani authorities anticipate only a modest rise in inflation—around 0.3 percent—while projecting economic growth at approximately 4 percent. They also expect the current account deficit to remain contained within \$2 billion, even amid volatile global oil prices.

In contrast, international financial institutions and independent analysts paint a more cautious picture. Many estimate that economic growth is likely to remain below 3 percent, citing persistent structural weaknesses and external vulnerabilities. Additionally, concerns about currency depreciation

and declining foreign direct investment (FDI) remain significant, particularly given the uncertain geopolitical environment and domestic economic challenges.

This divergence in outlook highlights the pressing need for realistic planning and effective policy implementation. The IMF has expressed dissatisfaction with Pakistan's track record in fulfilling its reform commitments. In particular, the government has struggled to eliminate untargeted subsidies, reduce non-essential expenditures, and expand revenue generation through new and untapped sources.

A major area of concern is the continued reliance on a narrow tax base. Despite repeated commitments, efforts to broaden the tax net have yielded limited results. Large segments of the economy remain undocumented or under-taxed, placing an undue burden on compliant sectors. Addressing this imbalance is essential for achieving fiscal sustainability and reducing dependence on external bor-



rowing. The IMF has consistently emphasized the importance of structural reforms as the cornerstone of economic stability. Among these, the restructuring and privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) stand out as critical priorities. Many of these entities continue to operate at a loss, draining public resources and contributing to fiscal deficits. A transparent and efficient privatization process could not only reduce the financial burden on the state but also improve service delivery and attract investment.

Equally important is the need for stringent anti-corruption measures. Corruption remains a significant impediment to economic progress, undermining investor confidence and eroding public trust. Strengthening institutional frameworks, ensuring accountability, and promoting transparency are vital steps toward creating a more conducive environ-

ment for economic growth.

The current situation also underscores a broader, long-standing issue: Pakistan's repeated reliance on IMF programs. For over five decades, the country has turned to the Fund for financial support during times of crisis. While these programs have provided temporary relief, they have often failed to address the underlying structural weaknesses of the economy. This cycle of dependency highlights the urgent need for a sustainable and self-reliant economic strategy.

Breaking free from this pattern will require bold and comprehensive reforms. Policymakers must move beyond short-term fixes and focus on long-term solutions that enhance productivity, improve governance, and foster inclusive growth. This includes investing in key sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, as well as promoting innovation and entrepreneurship.

Another critical aspect is energy sector reform. High energy costs and inefficiencies have long been a drag on economic performance. Rationalizing tariffs, reducing transmission losses, and encouraging investment in renewable energy can help alleviate some of these challenges while improving overall competitiveness.

Furthermore, political stability and policy continuity are essential for successful reform implementation. Frequent changes in economic direction and inconsistent policies have hindered progress in the past. A unified and sustained commitment to reform across political cycles is necessary to achieve meaningful and lasting change.

While the IMF's latest disbursement offers a measure of relief, it should not be seen as a solution in itself. Rather, it serves as a reminder of the difficult choices and tough reforms that lie ahead. The government must seize this opportunity to address long-standing issues and lay the groundwork for a more resilient and self-sustaining economy.

In conclusion, the path forward is challenging, but not insurmountable. With decisive action, strong political will, and a commitment to reform, the country can move beyond its cycle of crises and build a more stable and prosperous future. The IMF's support may provide temporary respite, but the responsibility for lasting change ultimately rests with Pakistan itself.

# Strengthening democracy through informed voters and effective local governance

Raza Khan

Democracy, as a system of governance, fundamentally depends upon periodic and regular elections conducted at various tiers—national, provincial, and local. However, democracy can only truly flourish when these elections are conducted in a fair and transparent manner. More importantly, such fairness and transparency can only be ensured when the electorate—namely the voters—are fully aware of the essence of democracy, their right to choose, and the mechanisms to guard against electoral fraud and malpractice.

The local government bodies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa completed their tenure recently in March, while by June 2026, local bodies in Balochistan and Sindh will also complete their respective tenures. Consequently, LG elections must be held within 120 days, as enshrined in the Constitution. In Punjab, however, local government elections are long overdue, as the previous bodies completed their tenure back in 2021. Therefore, elections there may be held at any time. Local government institutions are widely regarded as the building blocks of democracy. Yet, unless voters are fully informed about their rights, the candidates, their agendas, and, above all, the proper exercise of their right to vote, any number of elections would remain ineffective and would fail to contribute to meaningful democratic consolidation.

In essence, LG elections have always been central to any democratic dispensation. As highlighted earlier, the role of the voter is pivotal in this entire process. The voter serves as the pivot around which the democratic political system revolves. Decisions made by voters in favor of or against any political force are shaped by a complex interplay of factors, among which communication plays a vital role. In contemporary mass societies, the most effective means of making voters aware of political realities is through mass communication channels, including both traditional media and social media platforms. A mass society is not merely defined by large populations, but rather by the nature of interactions within it—interactions that are often impersonal and mediated through communication technologies.

On the global stage, however, mass media are increasingly becoming localized and specialized, giving rise to the phenomenon of de-massification. Since the local government system

operates at the grassroots level, the most suitable and effective means to inform and educate the public about elections and voting processes are local media outlets and, more significantly, social media-based virtual communities. These platforms enable targeted communication and foster greater engagement with local populations.

In a country like Pakistan, where nearly half of the population remains illiterate and where electoral systems and laws are not adequately incorporated into educational curricula, mainstream media and social media emerge as the most effective tools for public awareness. These platforms are crucial in informing and educating the masses, particularly voters, about their democratic rights and responsibilities.

In this context, electronic media—in-



cluding television, radio, and especially social media networks—can play a highly instrumental role. The reach of electronic media is extensive, cutting across geographical and social barriers and delivering messages with remarkable efficiency. Today, a significant portion of Pakistan's population has access to television, radio, and social media platforms. Therefore, disseminating information about electoral processes, systems, and the importance of voting is not an insurmountable challenge.

However, merely informing the public is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to a greater end. If the role of media is confined solely to information dissemination, it would result in what some media scholars describe as “informed futility.” The ultimate objective must be to educate citizens about the critical issues facing the state and society, and to persuade them that only through their active and informed participation can capable, conscientious, and visionary leadership emerge—leadership that can effectively address these challenges. Voters must understand not only the importance of their vote but also the consequences of abstaining from the electoral process.

Achieving this objective requires not just effective communication, but also positive and strategic communication. This involves crafting messages that take into account the psychological makeup of the target audience. Such message design requires an understanding of how to engage and influence individual attitudes and perceptions. In this regard, the psycho-dynamic model of mass communication becomes highly relevant. This model is based on the premise that media messages do not have a uniform impact; rather, their effects vary according to individual differences and characteristics. Therefore, effective persuasion lies in influencing the internal psychological structure of individuals through carefully designed communication. By doing so, desired behavioral responses—such as increased awareness, informed decision-making, and active voter participation—can be achieved.

In Pakistan, social and political institutions—excluding family and religious structures—remain relatively weak. Due to limited political participation by the majority of the population in decision-making processes, a lack of social cohesion persists. Consequently, public trust in socio-political institutions remains low, leading to reduced participation in elections. This vacuum has resulted in an increased reliance on media institutions as sources of information and guidance.

It is, therefore, the responsibility of the media to transform the attitudes of non-voters by portraying the electoral process and public participation in a constructive and positive light. At the same time, the media must emphasize that merely consuming informational or educational content about elections does not fulfill one's civic duty. There exists an inherent paradox in media consumption: audiences often become passive recipients, mistakenly believing that awareness alone constitutes participation. In reality, meaningful democratic engagement requires active involvement in the electoral process.

The future of democracy—and, by extension, good governance—in Pakistan depends on informed and educated voters who actively exercise their right to vote. Therefore, it is imperative that special attention be given to voter education. If the government fails to take necessary initiatives due to political considerations, then civil society and, most importantly, the intelligentsia must step forward to lead this crucial endeavor and ensure that democratic values are strengthened through active citizen participation.

# The skill gap: Pakistan's forgotten workforce

Rasheed Ali

On a quiet morning in the suburbs of Rahim Yar Khan city of Punjab, Rashid Mahmood Matela pushes open the creaking gate of the vocational training institute where he once dreamed of building his future. Inside, rows of outdated electrical panels gather dust. A lathe machine sits idle in the corner, its parts worn out from years of use and little maintenance. Rashid, now 22, completed his diploma months ago. He had imagined stepping straight into a job. Instead, he returns here occasionally, not as a trainee — but as someone still searching for work.

“I thought I would be earning by now,” he says quietly. “But the skills we learned... they don't match what companies want.”

His story echoes across Pakistan, where technical and vocational education and training (TVET) remains a neglected yet critically important sector. In a country with a rapidly growing youth population and rising unemployment, the need for skilled labour has never been greater. Yet only about 6 per cent of country's workforce possesses formal technical skills, a figure that underscores the scale of the problem.

The foundations of technical education in Pakistan were laid soon after independence in 1947, when the government established polytechnic institutes to support industrial development. Over the decades, the system expanded under bodies such as the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority and the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission. Today, the country has around 3,700 to 3,800 technical and vocational institutes, with approximately 56pc in the private sector and 44pc in the public sector.

Despite this seemingly extensive network, the sector has failed to deliver meaningful outcomes. The problem begins inside the institutes themselves. Many training centres operate with outdated equipment that no longer reflects modern industrial practices. Workshops often lack functioning machinery, while laboratories — if they exist — are poorly equipped. In rural areas, the situation is even more challenging, with limited funding and basic infrastructure gaps.

Instructors, too, are in short supply. Those available frequently lack exposure to current industry environments, meaning students are taught theory or outdated techniques rather than practical, market-relevant skills. This disconnect between training and industry needs has become one of the most persistent

weaknesses of the system.

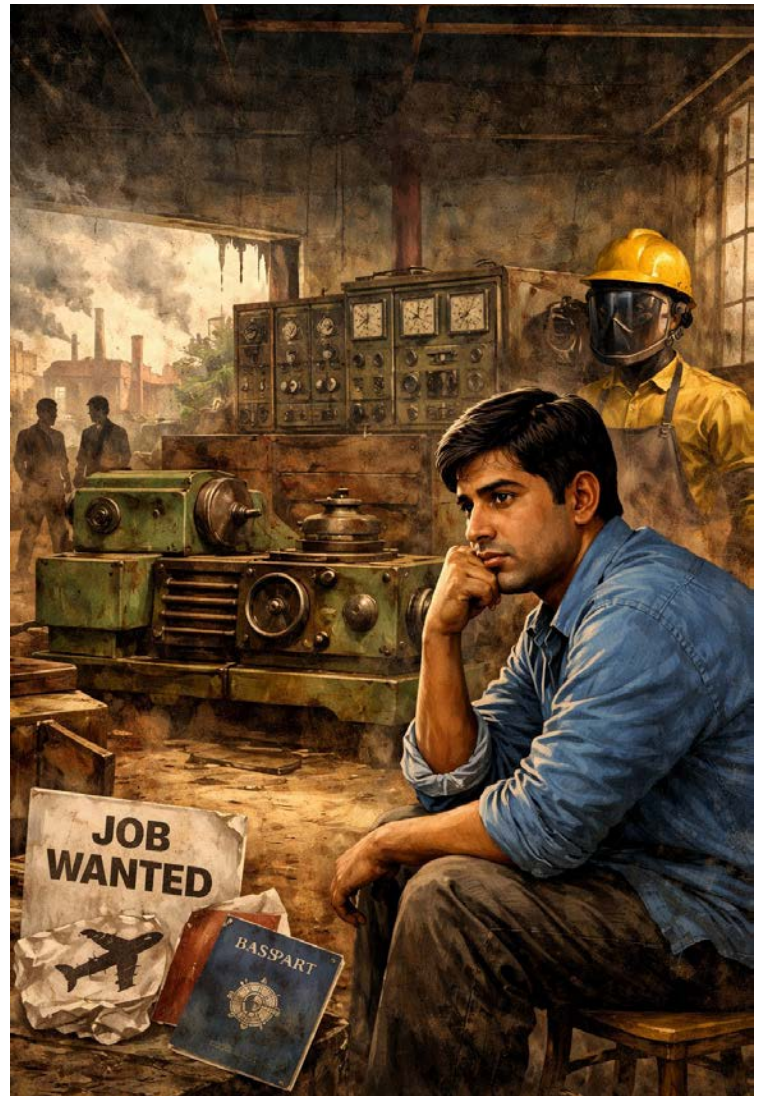
Experts point out that curricula in many institutes have not kept pace with technological advancements. As industries adopt automation, digital tools, and specialised processes, training programmes often remain stuck in the past. The result is a widening gap between what students learn and what employers require.

This gap becomes painfully evident after graduation. Many TVET graduates struggle to secure employment, not because there is no demand for skilled workers, but because their skills do not align with market needs. Employers frequently hesitate to hire directly from training institutes, citing concerns over quality and relevance.

“There is a clear mismatch,” admits an official associated with the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission. “Industries are evolving, but our training systems are not evolving at the same pace.”

Compounding these structural issues is a societal mindset that places little value on technical education. For many families, vocational training is seen as a last option — something pursued only when academic pathways fail. University degrees, even in oversaturated fields, are still considered more prestigious.

This perception has contributed to low enrolment levels and a persistent gender imbalance. Women remain underrepresented in technical fields, particularly in rural areas where



access to training facilities is already limited.

Historically, enrolment in technical education has remained low. Data shows that even at its peak before 2000, enrolment in TVET institutions reached just over 120,000, reflecting limited demand and capacity. While numbers have improved since then, the sector still struggles to attract students at the scale required to meet national needs.

Governance issues further complicate the picture. The TVET sector operates under a fragmented system, with overlapping responsibilities between federal and provincial bodies. While NAVTTC sets national policies, implementation largely falls to provincial TEVTAs. This division often results in inconsistent policies, duplication of efforts, and a lack of long-term planning.

# Urban heat crisis in Pakistan

Dr. Fatima Khan

Pakistan is heading toward an increasingly perilous future, shaped not only by rapid urbanisation but also by intensifying heat linked to climate change. A recent study by the University of Chicago's Climate Impact Lab has issued a stark warning: by 2050, the country could experience a net increase of 51 temperature-related deaths per 100,000 people. This projection places Pakistan among the nations most vulnerable to climate-driven mortality, with the greatest burden expected to fall on its urban population.

The findings paint a troubling picture of how rising temperatures could transform Pakistan's cities into hotspots of health risk. Major urban centres—including Faisalabad, Multan, Gujranwala, Lahore, Peshawar, Hyderabad, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad—are projected to witness sharp increases in heat-related deaths over the coming decades. In some cases, the numbers are particularly alarming. Faisalabad alone could face as many as 9,400 additional deaths annually by mid-century if current trends continue unchecked.

Globally, Pakistan's cities are expected to account for a significant share of rising heat mortality. The study suggests that nearly one-third of the additional deaths in cities worldwide due to increasing temperatures could occur in Pakistan's urban areas. This disproportionate impact highlights both the country's vulnerability to climate change and the structural weaknesses in its urban development model.

At the heart of the problem lies the way Pakistan's cities have expanded over the years. Urban growth has been rapid, often unplanned, and largely disconnected from considerations of environmental sustainability and climate resilience. Green spaces, trees, and natural landscapes have steadily given way to concrete structures, roads, and dense housing. This transformation has intensified the urban heat-island effect, where built-up areas trap heat and remain significantly warmer than surrounding rural regions.

The consequences of this phenomenon are already visible. Cities are experiencing longer and more intense heatwaves, with limited relief during nighttime hours. The lack of vegetation reduces natural cooling, while widespread use of heat-absorbing construction materials exacerbates temperature increases.

Traffic congestion and industrial activity further contribute to rising urban temperatures, compounding the risks for residents.

The impact is especially severe for those living in informal settlements. Millions of people in Pakistan's cities reside in densely populated areas with inadequate infrastructure. Poor ventilation, limited access to clean water, unreliable electricity, and substandard housing conditions make these communities highly vulnerable to extreme heat. For many residents, even basic coping mechanisms—such as using fans or air conditioning—are either unavailable or unaffordable.

Despite the scale of the challenge, international experience shows that targeted interventions can significantly reduce heat-related mortality. Cities around the world have implemented measures that offer valuable lessons for Pakistan. Expanding urban green cover, for instance, can play a crucial role in cooling neighbourhoods. Trees and parks not only provide shade but also help lower ambient

with fans, water, and medical support—can provide critical relief during peak heat periods. Strengthening emergency response systems is equally important to ensure timely assistance for those affected by heat-related illnesses.

However, one of the most significant obstacles to effective adaptation is the lack of financial resources. Pakistan's budget for climate adaptation remains limited, constraining the scope and scale of potential interventions. While international climate finance has been pledged to support developing countries, much of it has yet to materialise in a meaningful way. This funding gap poses a serious challenge to implementing the comprehensive measures needed to address rising heat risks.

The situation calls for a more proactive and coordinated approach at the national and local levels. Policymakers must integrate climate considerations into all aspects of urban development, from infrastructure projects to housing policies. Investments in sustainable urban design should be viewed not as optional

but as essential for safeguarding public health and economic stability.

Moreover, raising public awareness about the risks of extreme heat is crucial. Communities need to be informed about preventive measures, such as staying hydrated, avoiding outdoor activities during peak heat hours, and recognising the symptoms of heat-related illnesses. Empowering citizens with knowledge can enhance resilience at the grassroots level.

The broader implication of the study is clear: climate change is no longer a distant threat but an immediate and growing reality. For Pakistan, the intersection of rapid urbanisation and rising temperatures creates a particularly dangerous combination. Without decisive action, the human cost of inaction could be immense.

In conclusion, Pakistan's urban future is at a critical crossroads. The choices made today will determine whether cities become more resilient or increasingly hazardous places to live. Addressing the urban heat crisis requires a combination of strategic planning, investment, and political will. As temperatures continue to rise, the urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. Ultimately, the cost of failing to act will not be measured in economic terms alone, but in the loss of human lives.



temperatures through natural processes such as evapotranspiration.

Urban planning must therefore be reoriented to prioritise climate resilience. This includes designing cities with shaded streets, green corridors, and accessible public parks. Building regulations should also be updated to encourage the use of reflective materials, improved insulation, and designs that enhance natural ventilation. Such measures can reduce indoor temperatures and lessen the reliance on energy-intensive cooling systems.

In addition to long-term planning, immediate steps are needed to protect vulnerable populations during extreme heat events. Early warning systems can help alert communities ahead of heatwaves, allowing them to take precautionary measures. The establishment of cooling centres—public spaces equipped

# The US-Israeli war on humanity

Yara Hawari

We are witnessing a war on humanity. This might sound hyperbolic to some, but it should not. What is unfolding across the globe is not a series of isolated events or crises. It is a coordinated assault waged through brute force against the international systems that sustain humanity. The goal is a world order that doesn't just quietly practise "might makes right" but proudly proclaims it.

Yet we cannot understand this moment without understanding that Palestine – as both a place and a struggle – has emerged as the epicentre of it. While the October ceasefire in Gaza offered some relief from the daily carpet bombing, shelling, drone strikes and targeted sniper fire, deadly violence continues to rain on Palestinians from the sky. In violation of the agreement, the Israeli regime also continues to severely restrict the entry of aid and food into the strip.

The Israeli army has divided Gaza in half with the so-called Yellow Line running from north to south and carving out more than 50 percent of Gaza's pre-genocide territory. Supposedly temporary, this line in reality functions as a mechanism of permanent demographic reorganisation.

This daily violence is not incidental to the post-ceasefire arrangement – it is structural to it. We, therefore, need to be precise about what this arrangement is. It is a new phase of the genocide – one that allows the Israeli regime to pivot while enabling third states to claim progress when the core reality for Palestinians in Gaza remains largely unchanged.

Without a doubt, this moment is the apex of the Israeli regime's plan to bring into being "Greater Israel" – a biblical project that would see Israel expand to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and parts of Saudi Arabia. The destruction of Gaza, the annexing of large swaths of the West Bank, the invasion of southern Lebanon and now the bombing of Iran all pave the way for the actualisation of that plan. With few consequences and little pushback despite the flagrant trampling of international law, the Israeli regime now realises it has more freedom than it could have possibly ever imagined to act however it wants and take whatever it wants.

None of this, however, can be understood in isolation from what has made it possible – nearly eight decades of unprecedented diplomatic, financial and military cover for the Israeli regime from the United States and

European states. This refusal to hold Israel to account continues even as the Israeli government lays waste to the facade of the global rules-based order.

One of the starkest iterations of this dynamic came in November when the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 2803, endorsing US President Donald Trump's 20-point plan for Gaza, including the creation of the Board of Peace. This resolution was pushed through with extraordinary levels of political pressure and coercion. It mandates foreign administrative control over the Palestinian population in Gaza with no reference to the genocide or war crimes nor accountability mechanisms. It is, in effect, a resolution that launders impunity through the mechanisms of

have been implicated in the genocide in Gaza and whose technology is now deployed by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency on the streets of US cities. We are seeing the private security sector, the surveillance industry and the military-industrial complex – whose profits peaked during the genocide and are reaping now during the war on Iran – all expanding through conflict and all finding new markets, new laboratories and new populations to test on.

This is a profound moment, not just for the region, but also for the rest of the world. Trump's comments about Spain after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's refusal to allow the US to use its military bases to conduct strikes on Iran demonstrate this par excel-



multilateralism.

Since then, the Trump administration has made it clear that it intends for the Board of Peace to be a global project – one that attempts to displace the UN and replace multilateral governance with a structure answerable solely to Washington. Clearly for Trump, Gaza is where this project will begin but it is not where it will end. We have already seen it spread: the illegal attack on Venezuela's sovereignty and the kidnapping of its president; the intensification of the siege on Cuba and its deliberate starvation; the illegal US-Israeli war on Iran, which is still given diplomatic cover by many Western states; Israel's assault on Lebanon, aimed at reoccupying parts of its territory.

Simultaneously, we are also seeing the rise of artificial intelligence companies that

ence. He said: "Spain actually said we can't use their bases. And that's all right. We could use their base if we want. We could just fly in and use it." This shouldn't be dismissed as Trumpian ramblings. It should be a warning to all sovereign nations.

Capitulation or appeasement manifested in agreements to grant access to ports and airspace and defence cooperation treaties won't shield sovereign nations from danger – in fact, quite the contrary. Such entanglements bind them to the war-making machinery of the US and Israel, rendering sovereignty conditional. It is a pattern many countries know too well.

What is now clear is that what started in Gaza is continuing elsewhere in the world. The genocidal US-Israeli war machine is expanding, and by doing so, it is waging war on humanity itself.

# How the US and Israel are making the Islamic republic stronger

Hossein Dabbagh

The United States-Israel war against Iran is usually described in the language of strategy: Deterrence, escalation, military pressure, missile capacity, nuclear risk. All of these matter, but they do not tell the whole story.

To understand how Iran may fight and survive this war, we need to look beyond military calculations and into the moral world through which the Islamic Republic understands power, loss, and, above all, endurance. This is not merely a state under attack, but one whose ideological core has long been shaped by a Shia political theology of martyrdom, sacrifice and sacred resistance. That matters because wars are not fought only with weapons, but with narratives and values; meaning itself can become a political resource.

Since the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in US-Israeli strikes during Ramadan, hardliners have held state-backed mourning ceremonies night after night, even as bombs continue to fall. Among the Islamic Republic's loyalists, especially within the paramilitary force, the Basij, are people prepared to die as martyrs for what they regard as rule by a divinely-guided cleric.

This does not mean the Islamic Republic is invulnerable. It means something more complicated and more troubling: External violence may not weaken it in the way its enemies expect. It may instead reactivate the symbolic and moral grammar through which the Islamic Republic has sustained itself for decades while legitimising repression at home and abroad.

The Islamic Republic was never just a bureaucratic state. It presented itself from the beginning as a moral project, one that fused sovereignty with sacred history. The central emotional and symbolic reservoir of that history lies in Shia memory, especially the battle of Karbala of 680, in which an Umayyad army massacred Prophet Mohammad's grandson Hussein and the small party accompanying him.

In Shia tradition, this historical event has come to represent unjust power, innocent suffering, righteous resistance and redemptive sacrifice. It reminds believers that oppression does not necessarily mean defeat, suffering can signify standing on the side of truth, and death can become a form of witness.

This is why martyrdom is not a second-

ary theme in the Islamic Republic's self-understanding, but one of its central organising values. For years, the ruling order has drawn legitimacy from presenting itself as the righteous victim and the guardian of a sacred struggle against Estekbar (imperialism), domination, humiliation and foreign aggression.

A political-theological order built partly on the sanctification of sacrifice can absorb attack into its own moral universe. What appears from outside as devastation can be narrated from within as testimony, endurance and faithfulness, with death itself becoming politically productive.

This is not speculation. Iran's strategy in the current war is increasingly one of endurance and attrition: Outlasting its enemies, surviving the blows, disrupting energy flows and betting that the political resolve in Washington and



allied capitals will fracture before Iran's own does. Reports suggest that, despite heavy losses, there were no visible signs of internal collapse under bombardment.

The memory of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war also left the Islamic Republic with a durable culture of endurance and sacrifice, alongside experience in surviving prolonged external pressure, even though the human cost to Iranians was immense.

Of course, not all solidarity is theological. Many Iranians who despise the Islamic Republic may still recoil from foreign attack, not out of loyalty to the republic but out of nationalism, fear, grief or horror at collective punishment. Yet this is precisely the point. External violence can blur moral lines inside the country. It can narrow public space, intensify siege mentality and allow the state to present itself once again as the defender of the nation rather than the author of repression.

The Islamic Republic has often benefitted

when domestic anger is displaced by external threat. In peacetime, its failures are exposed: Corruption, repression, economic decline, coercive rule. In wartime, especially under foreign, unlawful attack, it can recover an older image: Not the incompetent authoritarian state, but the embattled guardian of resistance.

This does not mean the Islamic Republic's theology is universally persuasive. Reports suggest that Iran's next leadership faces a fraying loyalist base and serious long-term questions about legitimacy. Many Iranians have long ceased to believe in the state's sacred narrative. But political theology does not need universal belief in order to function. It needs enough believers, enough institutions, enough ritual, enough fear and enough war to turn suffering into cohesion.

That is what makes the present war morally and politically dangerous. If the US and Israel imagine that overwhelming force will simply strip the Islamic Republic of meaning, they may be badly misunderstanding the kind of political-theological order they are fighting.

US President Donald Trump's own rhetoric has not helped. His demand for Iran's "unconditional surrender", which pushes war away from limited strategic ends and towards humiliation and absolute defeat, does more than escalate; it gives the Islamic Republic exactly the kind of external enemy it knows how to narrate.

In a secular strategic imagination, violence weakens by destroying capacity. In a political-theological imagination, violence can strengthen by confirming sacred purpose. An ideological state that sees itself through the lens of sacred resistance may lose commanders, infrastructure and territory, yet still gain something symbolically vital: Renewed access to the language of martyrdom. This is one of the tragedies of war against ideological states. The more one attacks them from the outside, the easier it can become for them to recover the myths that sustain them from within.

None of this is to deny the brutality of the Islamic Republic or to romanticise its theology of sacrifice. That theology has often been used cynically, sending people to die while sanctifying loss in the language of faith. But moral criticism requires clarity. If we want to understand how the Islamic Republic survives, we must see that its resilience is not only military or institutional but also symbolic. It lies in its ability to transform injury into moral authority.

## The end of strategic restraint

The era of strategic restraint is dead, and the era of kinetic enforcement has just begun. What has been unfolding along the Durand Line in recent times is a foundational doctrinal pivot — the moment Pakistan redefined self-defence to inter its policy of 'strategic patience'. The relentless surge of terrorist atrocities, facilitated by Kabul's strategic betrayal, has forced Islamabad to replace diplomacy with a firm national security mandate. Pakistan's borders are no longer a porous gateway for terror, but a launchpad for a sovereign state resolved to eliminate threats at their source.

In a decisive and robust application of force, Operation Ghazal-Haq shattered the illusion of terrorists' sanctuary. Precision airstrikes on infrastructure well inside Afghanistan signalled the end of impunity. As the government formally declared an 'open war', the kinetic dismantling of these defence locations served a clear notice: any entity sheltering terrorists would be treated as an enemy of the state.

This conflict is the front line of a calculated, multi-state conspiracy aimed at strategic strangulation of Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have transitioned from a so-called 'revolutionary movement' into a strategic conduit for Indian hegemony — a vassal colony of New Delhi serving as a staging ground for Hindutva-sponsored terrorism. This proxy war is further fuelled by an axis of aggression — a sinister nexus between India and Israel. This unholy alliance weaponises the Afghan governance vacuum to create chaos designed to sabotage the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and destabilise the world's only nuclear-armed Muslim power.

Simultaneously, the interim Afghan Taliban regime is facing a terminal crisis of legitimacy with the national resistance movement surging in Panjshir and northern highlands. Kabul's heavy reliance on the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as a Praetorian Guard against its own people only further delegitimises its authority.

Pakistan's kinetic strikes are thus synchronised with the tide of history; a regime that always exports terror while brutalising its citizens cannot survive this pincer of external military enforcement and internal revolt. Ultimately, sovereignty is actually a responsibility, not a shield for exportable terrorism. Pakistan has drawn its line in the sand with the fire of precision strikes. If the so-called 'emirate' wishes to survive, it must verifiably sever its ties with the Indo-Israeli nexus.

The concerted military offensive by Pakistan is the final notice: The sanctuaries of TTP and other terrorists must be cleared, or they will be turned into their graveyards.

Majid Burfat  
Karachi

## The collapse of food regulation

It is a fact that food contamination has affected all kinds of food, not just the poultry chain. There is no effective drug-and-food authority to regulate the menace. Food laws provide for a framework to brand, sell or produce food, and analyse food in government laboratories, but the enforcement is lax.

The government keeps appointing various categories of officials and inspectors to check adulteration in their respective areas, but nothing happens. The magistrates impose nominal fines, and, in extreme cases, imprisonment 'till the rising of the court'.

Besides, packaged food without a proper label of contents keeps flooding the market. Samples of adulterated flour, retrieved from delivery trucks, and other products are declared 'unfit for human consumption' by the analyst, but the godowns are never confiscated. During martial law days, I vividly remember the deputy commissioners and others checking the progress of anti-food adulteration campaigns in their respective areas on a monthly basis. Such campaigns are now not even part of our collective memory.

Amjed Jaaved and M. Saad Malik  
Rawalpindi

## America's strategic quagmire

It is unfortunate that the United States has been dragged into yet another war by the occupiers of Palestine. It is fair to say that had there been no occupation in the Middle East, the US would have been on friendly terms not just with Iran, but also with the larger Muslim world. And, there would have been peace in the region elsewhere. China today enjoys cordial relations with the larger world despite its financial and military muscles. There is reason to believe that the US would have done the same.

It is terribly sad that with all the investments the Arabs have done in the US and Europe, and despite offering the two transatlantic partners military bases in their countries, they are struggling to be 'protected'. The fact is that these bases and arsenal were there to protect Israel, not the Arabs.

It seems quite odd to even expect today's US to change course, but the fact is that the US administration should listen to people of America, to political commentators like Tucker Carlson, to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley and Cori Bush, who now see the occupation supporters for what they really are. The occupation and its supporters have wreaked havoc in America itself, with attacks on Americans on their own soil through Israeli-trained security forces. The

Zionists have also done the same in parts of Europe. The occupation regime has every intention to expand the war, dragging America with it because without America the Zionists are helpless.

Angabeen Ahmad  
Karachi

## Banking helplines and balance depletion

The minimum balance required to make a call at bank helplines is often pretty high. Besides, the customer has to stay on call for a long time during which the balance keeps getting deducted. There are times when one has to spend as much as 30 minutes to explain their problem to the customer service representative. If the balance is low, the line gets dropped. In such cases, both money and time are wasted, and the customer has to repeat the process all over again. The second major problem is for people who want information in Urdu. Before talking to the representative, the recorded message in some cases starts playing in English which confuses the caller. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) should intervene in the matter.

Saleemullah Siddiqui  
Karachi

## Information censorship

Apart from the elements of misinformation and disinformation, there is a major challenge in the shape of censored information in this era. It creates an entirely polarised world of opposing narratives by controlling the other side of the view. This is clearly evident in the case of the US-Israeli bombardment of an Iranian school that claimed a lot of innocent lives. This huge loss was reported initially by regional media, but not by the so-called liberal Western media, which opted to censor the atrocities committed by their self-proclaimed democratic states. This was done to maintain an illusion of the sanctity of their inherently weak liberal values in front of their audiences.

Mahrukh Ameer  
Lahore

## The myth of online learning

The global fuel crisis is no reason to deprive children of their education. Rural schools lie within walking distances, and students do not need petrol to reach them. Moreover, in the absence of basic facilities, one fails to understand how the government can expect online classes to be effective in these areas. The decision of school closure risks pushing people further back. The government should reopen rural schools and ensure that education remains accessible to all children.

Riaz Ramzan Rajar  
Jamshoro

## Drought could fuel the rise of antibiotic-resistant superbugs

Stephanie Pappas

A study of soil microbes showed that drought favors the microorganisms that survive antibiotics. It also found that some of the genes for resistance in soil-dwelling bacteria show up in antibiotic-resistant pathogen samples collected from hospital patients. Because bacteria can easily swap big chunks of genetic information — a process called horizontal gene transfer — any increase in resistance in soil-inhabiting microbes can easily make its way to microbes that infect humans, the study authors said.

"No place is immune," said Dianne Newman, the study's senior author and a biologist at Caltech. "If you have a pathogen arise in one part of the world, it very quickly spreads, so this is something of concern regardless of where you live."

Antibiotic resistance is already a major health problem, with the World Health Organization estimating that antibiotic-resistant pathogens directly caused 1.27 million deaths per year as of 2019 and contributed to another 4.95 million. While antibiotics kill microbes, the drugs people use in the clinic are also derived from microbes (or fungi, such as in the famous case of penicillin). Microbes synthesize antibiotics as part of an evolutionary arms with other microbes, aiming to kill any potential competitors or threats. One of the major battlegrounds for this evolutionary warfare is in soil.

Newman and the new study's first author, Caltech postdoctoral researcher Xiaoyu Shan, first uncovered a hint that drought could worsen antibiotic resistance in a set of five metagenomics databases that gather soil microbe genetic information from different environments on continents around the world. Some of these databases included samples from the same sites before and after drought.



## Obesity's cancer link is worse than you think

Donavyn Coffey

Cancer deaths are dropping overall, but not the ones linked to obesity.

That's what mounting evidence now shows.

A sweeping new report on U.S. cancer trends revealed that cancers linked to obesity are becoming more common. Another study, presented in July at the Endocrine Society Annual Meeting in San Francisco, found that deaths from obesity-related cancers have more than tripled over the past two decades. These include esophageal, colon and rectal, breast (postmenopausal), uterine, gallbladder, upper stomach, kidney, liver, ovarian, pancreatic, thyroid, meningioma (brain), and multiple myeloma — 13 types in all, now accounting for 40% of new cancer diagnoses in the U.S. Women, older adults, Native Americans, and Black Americans are especially vulnerable. Second only to smoking, obesity ranks as one of the leading preventable causes of cancer. Yet even as the public's awareness of smoking's risks has dramatically increased, experts warn we've underestimated just how much excess weight — and the complex biology behind it — can fuel the disease. What exactly drives this link is not fully understood, but experts are homing in on some strong possibilities. It could be estrogen, fat cells, the microbiome, insulin resistance, or all of the above. One thing is sure: The public health threat of obesity is only increasing. Behind the drop in overall cancer rates are significant declines in the number of smokers — and smoking-related cancers. Between 1965 and 2015, the smoking rate fell from 42% of the population to 15%, putting a major dent in rates of lung cancer, which is still the deadliest form.



## NASA rover discovers first ruby-like crystals on Mars

Ivan Farkas

Mars is hiding a clutch of ruby-like crystals in its rocks, observations from the Perseverance rover suggest, and astronomers say other precious minerals, like sapphires, could exist across the Red Planet, too.

An international team of researchers presented the findings, based on observations from spring 2025, March 16 at the 57th Lunar and Planetary Science Conference in Texas. These findings are currently under peer review and will appear in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*.

The story begins a short time ago on a planet not too far away, when a roving robot the size of a compact car climbed the side of a 4 billion-year-old impact crater and began exploring its rim. On that ancient and stony rim, NASA's Perseverance rover found a curious scattering of pale-colored "float rocks" — out-of-place rocks that must have been transported there by impacts, geological activity or hydrological processes.

As scientists often do when faced with a curious specimen, they blasted it with a laser — specifically, the green laser from the Perseverance rover's SuperCam, situated atop its mast. This laser excites minerals, causing them to emit light at specific wavelengths. And because every element and compound emits certain wavelengths of light, this reveals a sample's chemical composition. The analysis showed that three of the laser-blasted float rocks exhibited clear signatures of the mineral corundum, with inclusions of the element chromium — crystals that match the chemical description of rubies.



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

Sara Novak

Type 1 diabetes cases are rising faster than ever — up 42% in three decades — with sharp increases among U.S. children and teens. But

new and emerging treatments are surging too, as experts say we're now in the most promising era yet.

"These patients are living much longer than they used to with an improved quality of life," said Kupper A. Wintergerst, MD, a pediatric endocrinologist and executive director of the Wendy Novak Diabetes Institute, a part of Norton Children's Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky.

Genetics can increase a person's risk by 40%, but experts say the environment may play a role in triggering the autoimmune condition, which happens when the immune system mistakenly attacks insulin-producing beta cells. These things in the environment include early-childhood infections (like mumps, rubella, and influenza B), childhood obesity, antibiotics overuse, vitamin D deficiency, and the hygiene hypothesis, which suggests that limited microbial exposure in early life may lead to an overactive immune system.

Another possibility: Certain chemicals found in our food and water supply — including PFAS (often called "forever chemicals"), dioxins, and arsenic — may promote inflammation, adding to the immune system mistakenly attacking and destroying its own beta cells. Over time, this lack of beta cells causes the body to stop producing its own insulin, and blood sugar begins to rise. Researchers are responding with advanced treatment strategies, including new medications that not only control blood sugar but actually slow the disease.



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