

# WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL



**ECONOMIC STABILITY  
ACHIEVED BUT STRUCTURAL  
VULNERABILITIES REMAIN**



**PERFECT SHAVE  
WITH PLATINUM EDGE**

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# 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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# Economic stability achieved but structural vulnerabilities remain

Farhan Khan

Pakistan's economy has achieved a modicum of stability under the watchful eyes of the IMF but there is no room for misplaced optimism. The latest Financial Stability Review of the State Bank of Pakistan has described the country's financial system as healthy and resilient, citing stronger reserves, improved capital buffers and an improved macroeconomic environment during CY25. But a deeper analysis shows a different picture.

According to the SBP in the last calendar year inflation had eased, reserves recovered, and the banking sector remained solvent and profitable. The completion of IMF reviews and arrangements under the Extended Fund Facility and Resilience and Sustainability Facility also raised business confidence. But the overall economy remained fragile as we

is particularly important in a country where food carries a substantial weight in household expenditure.

The government is facing a worsening fiscal crisis. Revenue collection targets are being missed as growth slows. The state's reliance on indirect taxation and petroleum levies to shore up revenues has further intensified inflationary pressures at a time when consumer purchasing power is under severe strain.

The SBP has acknowledged that a prolonged Middle East conflict could keep oil prices elevated, strain the external account and weaken growth momentum. Independent experts have also identified geopolitical risk as the single greatest threat to financial stability over the coming months.

For the current year the GDP projection by the SBP has been set at 4.75 percent which seems to be optimistic, given the fact that our

of direct taxes collected is from the levy of withholding taxes in the sales tax mode whose incidence on the poor is greater than on the rich, which explains why the poverty levels in the country are on the rise.

In March this year remittance inflows rose by a healthy 33.2 percent to 28 billion dollars — a major boost for the balance of payments position — though reports suggest that Pakistani expatriates in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) may face some challenges in renewing their work visas, subsequent to their 3.45 billion dollar loan recall that was cleared last month with Saudi Arabia extending an additional 3 billion-dollar roll-over to Pakistan.

The analysis shows that notwithstanding financial stability reported by the SBP, the downside risks remain which call for advance planning and a rigorous implemen-



can see that it has hardly withstood the shock of the Middle East war.

Inflation has again begun to climb in the wake of a sharp rise in oil prices. The petrol and diesel price hikes have jolted the economy and the State Bank itself has warned that inflationary pressures may intensify. Monetary tightening has also resumed because inflation expectations are turning upward again.

A new cycle of fuel-driven price hike will increase pressures on transport, food, manufacturing and borrowing costs. As we have seen over the past few weeks, electricity shortages and load-shedding have affected industrial output and household consumption. Energy costs are too high, depleting disposable incomes. Businesses now face additional uncertainty regarding power availability and input prices. Food inflation is intensifying due to higher transport and energy costs. This

industries are unable to compete internationally due to much higher input costs than regional competitors. Recently, according to knowledgeable sources, as many as 150 textile units have closed down affecting our export potential.

What is a matter of serious alarm is that the volume of domestic borrowing continues to rise unabated. The government has borrowed 1.25 trillion rupees to clear the circular debt whose interest payments are passed onto the consumers. On the other hand, the targets set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were achieved by slashing the Public Sector Development Programme.

Sales tax has remained the major source of revenue for the federal government — 3.1 trillion rupees against 2.8 trillion rupees collected last year in the same period of July-March 2025. It is relevant to note here that the bulk

tation strategy. A prime need is to strengthen the country's industrial sector through a new package of incentives, especially to boost the small and medium enterprises which can create thousands of new jobs.

There is a consensus of opinion among experts that it is time we adopted a new economic paradigm shifting the focus from consumption to production. As a nation we import more than we export and we consume more than we produce. The result is a never-ending mountain of debt which has crushed our growth potential. The rot starts at the top, with the government mindlessly increasing its administrative expenditure on the back of borrowed money from IMF and other sources. The government must show the way to the nation and set an example by drastically cutting its expenditure, much of which is spent on wasteful frills and a luxurious lifestyle.

# Why the world cannot afford a clash over the Strait of Hormuz

Nasim Ahmed

The strategic waters of the Strait of Hormuz have once again become the focus of global geopolitical tension. The narrow maritime corridor, lying between Iran and Oman, carries nearly one-fifth of the world's oil and a substantial portion of global liquefied natural gas supplies. Any disruption there instantly jolts global markets, raises fuel prices, rattles shipping industries, and threatens economic stability far beyond the Middle East.

Today, the world is witnessing an intensifying sparring match between the United States and Iran over who controls the rules of passage through the Strait. At stake is not merely a regional dispute, but the future of freedom of navigation, the sanctity of international maritime law, and the stability of the global economy itself.

Iran's position on Hormuz has hardened considerably in recent months. Tehran argues that because the Strait lies within the territorial waters of Iran and Oman, coastal states possess the right to regulate passage in the interest of national security. Iranian officials have increasingly challenged the Western interpretation of "unconditional transit passage," insisting that no nation can use the Strait for military pressure or hostile operations against Iran while simultaneously demanding unrestricted access.

Iran has even explored the idea of imposing tolls or selective authorization mechanisms for ships using the waterway. Iranian lawmakers and military officials claim such measures are necessary to ensure security and compensate Tehran for maintaining stability in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

Tehran also argues that the security environment has fundamentally changed. Iranian officials maintain that the presence of hostile naval forces near their coast justifies enhanced oversight of maritime traffic. Iran's Revolutionary Guard commanders have gone further by redefining the operational boundaries of the Strait itself, signaling Tehran's desire to expand its strategic influence across a much wider maritime zone.

The United States and its allies, however, reject these claims outright. Washington insists that the Strait of Hormuz is governed by the internationally recognized principle of "transit passage" under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). According to this doctrine, ships and aircraft of all nations enjoy the right of continuous and unimpeded passage through

international straits.

Although the United States itself has not formally ratified UNCLOS, successive American administrations have argued that the transit passage regime has become customary international law binding on all states. American naval patrols and "freedom of navigation" operations in the Gulf are intended to reinforce that principle.

European nations have largely sided with the American legal interpretation, though many European capitals prefer diplomacy over confrontation. The European Union has repeatedly stressed that no tolls or restrictions should be imposed on international shipping through Hormuz. Brussels argues that freedom of navigation is essential for global trade and energy security. The Group of Seven countries, along with the EU, have also called for free and secure transit through the Strait in accordance with international maritime law.

At the same time, many European governments remain wary of escalating military tensions. Europe understands that any armed confrontation in the Gulf would have devastating economic consequences, especially at a time when global inflation, energy insecurity, and supply-chain disruptions are already troubling many economies.

Asian nations are equally concerned. China, Japan, India, and South Korea rely heavily on Gulf energy supplies transported through Hormuz. For these countries, uninterrupted maritime commerce is not simply a legal matter but an economic necessity. Most Asian powers therefore favour negotiated arrangements that reduce tensions while preserving open sea lanes.

The legal complexities surrounding Hormuz are substantial. The Strait is only about 21 nautical miles wide at its narrowest point, meaning its waters fall largely within the territorial seas of Iran and Oman. However, international law created a special category for such waterways because they are indispensable to global navigation.

Under UNCLOS, "transit passage" through international straits cannot generally be suspended, even during periods of tension. Coastal states retain sovereignty over their territorial waters but cannot impede continuous navigation. Iran disputes the universal applicability of this doctrine because it signed but never ratified UNCLOS and claims the transit passage regime binds only treaty members.

This disagreement exposes a broader weakness in the international legal order: major powers selectively invoke international

law when it suits their strategic interests.

Critics point out that the United States insists on maritime freedoms while itself remaining outside UNCLOS. Iran, meanwhile, seeks to assert sovereign rights while depending heavily on the same global trading system whose rules it contests.

The consequences of continued confrontation are potentially catastrophic. Even temporary disruptions in Hormuz can trigger sharp spikes in oil prices, raise shipping insurance costs, and create panic in energy markets. Developing economies, including many in South Asia and Africa, would suffer immensely from rising fuel and food prices.

Moreover, any normalization of tolls or politically conditioned passage rights in Hormuz could establish a dangerous precedent for other maritime chokepoints such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal region, or the South China Sea. The global trading system depends on predictable and rules-based maritime access.

The best path forward lies not in military escalation but in multilateral diplomacy. A sustainable solution should rest on four principles.

First, freedom of commercial navigation must remain guaranteed for all nations without discrimination. The uninterrupted movement of civilian trade is a global public good.

Second, Iran's legitimate security concerns cannot simply be dismissed. Tehran fears encirclement and hostile military activity close to its shores. Confidence-building mechanisms, including joint maritime monitoring and communication channels, could help reduce tensions.

Third, regional ownership of Gulf security should be strengthened. Gulf Arab states, Iran, Oman, and major global stakeholders should pursue a collective maritime security framework rather than relying solely on external military power.

Finally, international law must be applied consistently. Selective interpretations by powerful states only weaken global norms and deepen mistrust.

The Strait of Hormuz is more than a narrow waterway; it is a symbol of the fragile interdependence of today's world. In an era of economic uncertainty and geopolitical rivalry, the international community cannot afford a prolonged confrontation there. Prudence, diplomacy, and respect for shared rules remain the only viable route to safeguarding global trade and economic stability.

# The reality gap

Muhammad Ali

The release of Pakistan's "Summary of Consolidated Federal and Provincial Fiscal Operations July–March 2026" offers an important glimpse into the country's fiscal position, but it also raises troubling questions about the sustainability of the government's economic narrative.

Unlike official statements that routinely celebrate signs of stabilization, the raw fiscal data presents a more complicated and less reassuring picture of the economy. Interestingly, the release coincided with the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) half-yearly report for July to December 2025, which maintained that macroeconomic stability had strengthened during the first half of the fiscal year. This has been a recurring theme in official discourse, with policymakers emphasizing improvements in inflation management, external financing and reserve accumulation. Yet even within the SBP's assessment, caution was evident. The central bank warned that the Middle East conflict, which erupted on February 28, posed serious risks to Pakistan's economic outlook, particularly in terms of inflation, trade flows and growth prospects amid rising global uncertainty.

The timing of that warning is noteworthy because the conflict itself had no impact on the July–December data being evaluated. In fact, during March—just one month after the conflict began—Pakistan recorded a substantial increase in remittance inflows. Overseas Pakistanis sent home nearly \$28 billion during the period, representing a dramatic 33.2 percent increase and providing significant support to the country's balance of payments position.

However, this improvement may prove temporary. Reports suggest that Pakistani workers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) could face difficulties in renewing work visas, a development that has generated concern given the UAE's importance as a destination for Pakistani labor. This issue emerged shortly after Pakistan repaid the UAE's recalled \$3.45 billion loan, while Saudi Arabia extended an additional \$3 billion rollover facility to support the country's external financing needs.

Despite these temporary financial cushions, the broader fiscal picture remains uncertain. A realistic assessment requires comparing the current July–March fiscal data with the same period of the previous year, and that comparison exposes several structural weaknesses.

The first concern relates to economic growth projections. Last fiscal year, the government had budgeted GDP growth at 3.6 percent but ultimately achieved only 3.04 percent. This shortfall meant that the projected GDP size of Rs114.692 trillion was never realized. For the current fiscal year, the SBP has projected growth between 3.75 percent and 4.75 percent. However, these expectations appear increasingly optimistic given prevailing economic conditions.

Pakistan's industrial sector continues to face severe pressures, particularly due to high production costs and rising financing expenses. Industrialists repeatedly argue that they are unable to compete internationally because input costs—including electricity, gas and borrowing rates—remain significantly higher than those faced by regional competitors. The recent increase in the policy rate to 11.5 percent has only intensified these concerns. The All



Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA) has warned that factory closures are increasing, with estimates suggesting around 150 units have already shut down. These realities make the government's projected GDP target of Rs129.567 trillion increasingly difficult to achieve. If growth projections fail once again, many key macroeconomic indicators calculated as a percentage of GDP could lose credibility, undermining confidence in fiscal planning.

A second major issue lies in government expenditure and debt management. Federal current expenditure during July–March 2026 stood at Rs14.267 trillion, compared to Rs14.588 trillion during the same period last year. While this decline appears positive on paper, it largely reflects earlier reductions in the policy interest rate rather than meaningful fiscal consolidation.

The policy rate had fallen sharply from 20.5 percent in June 2024–25 to 10.5 percent before unexpectedly rising again to 11.5 percent

last month. Initially, markets had anticipated further monetary easing by the end of 2025, but renewed inflationary concerns and external risks forced the SBP to reverse direction. Meanwhile, domestic borrowing continues to rise steadily, signaling that the government remains heavily dependent on debt financing despite claims of stabilization.

The situation becomes more concerning when considering the circular debt burden in the energy sector. The government borrowed an additional Rs1.25 trillion to address circular debt liabilities, with the financing secured when the policy rate stood at 10.5 percent. Since energy sector borrowing costs are ultimately passed on to consumers, it remains unclear whether the recent increase in interest rates will trigger further hikes in electricity and fuel prices.

Another recurring feature of Pakistan's fiscal management is the reduction in development spending to meet International Monetary Fund (IMF) targets. Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) allocations have once again been slashed significantly. Against a budgeted allocation of Rs1 trillion, only Rs332.996 billion had been released during July–March 2026. Although this is slightly higher than the Rs309.408 billion released during the same period last year, the gap between commitments and actual spending remains substantial.

This pattern reflects a familiar strategy: fiscal targets are achieved not through structural reform or sustainable revenue generation, but through compression of development expenditure. While this approach may satisfy short-term IMF conditions, it undermines long-term growth prospects by delaying infrastructure projects, reducing public investment and limiting economic expansion. Revenue collection patterns also reveal deeper structural imbalances. Sales tax continues to dominate federal revenue generation, contributing Rs3.1 trillion during July–March 2026 compared to Rs2.8 trillion during the same period last year. However, much of the increase in direct tax collection comes through withholding taxes that function similarly to indirect taxes, placing a disproportionate burden on ordinary citizens.

This regressive taxation structure helps explain the widening gap between official economic indicators and public sentiment. While macroeconomic data may suggest improvement,

households continue to experience declining purchasing power, rising living costs and growing financial stress. The burden of taxation increasingly falls on salaried individuals, consumers and lower-income groups, while broader structural reforms in tax policy remain absent.

At the same time, concerns persist regarding aggressive enforcement measures by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The current FBR leadership has highlighted enforcement-based collections as a success, with even the prime minister reportedly suggesting that such collections be doubled next year. However, businesses and taxpayers continue to complain about arbitrary assessments and illegal collections, with legal remedies often requiring lengthy and costly litigation through tribunals and courts.

Perhaps the most revealing figure in the fiscal report is the sharp rise in statistical discrepancy, which increased from Rs205.691 billion during July–March 2025 to a negative Rs443.554 billion during the same period this year. Such discrepancies raise important questions about the consistency and reliability of economic data.

More importantly, they help explain the growing disconnect between official claims of stability and the public’s “feel-bad factor.” For many Pakistanis—whether taxpayers, salaried workers, business owners or low-income households—the lived reality of economic hardship remains unchanged despite improvements in selected macroeconomic indicators.

In conclusion, Pakistan’s latest fiscal data

reveals an economy that may have stabilized temporarily but remains structurally fragile. The government has succeeded in avoiding immediate crisis through external support, monetary tightening and expenditure compression. However, the underlying weaknesses—low productivity, rising debt, weak industrial competitiveness, regressive taxation and inadequate development spending—remain unresolved.

The challenge ahead is not merely to maintain macroeconomic stability, but to convert it into sustainable and inclusive growth. Without deeper reforms that strengthen investment, expand exports, improve governance and reduce inequality, stabilization risks becoming little more than a temporary pause before the next economic crisis.

# The 3.7% illusion

Husnain Shahid

Pakistan’s latest GDP estimates present a cautiously optimistic picture of the economy. A projected growth rate of 3.7 percent for the current fiscal year suggests that the country is gradually emerging from a prolonged period of instability marked by external financing pressures, inflationary shocks and fears of sovereign default.

Although the figure falls short of the government’s original 4 percent target—and even slightly below the lower end of the State Bank of Pakistan’s projected range of 3.75 to 4.75 percent—it still marks an improvement over last year’s 3.18 percent growth.

After four difficult years of economic turbulence, even modest expansion offers some relief. The economy has shown resilience despite rising oil prices triggered by tensions in the Gulf region and continued uncertainty in global markets. Encouragingly, the State Bank expects growth to continue next year, though at a subdued pace, provided energy prices remain manageable and geopolitical tensions do not escalate further.

Yet beneath these headline figures lies a more sobering reality. Pakistan’s economy remains trapped in a low-growth cycle, constrained by deep structural weaknesses that continue to limit its long-term potential. The latest numbers indicate stabilization, but not transformation. The country may have secured temporary breathing space, but the foundations for sustained and inclusive growth remain fragile.

One positive indicator is the expansion in the size of the economy, which has now



crossed \$452 billion. Per capita income has also risen modestly to \$1,901 from \$1,824 a year earlier. Large-scale manufacturing has recovered after years of contraction, while the services sector continues to dominate overall economic activity. These developments suggest that the economy has regained some momentum following a period of severe compression.

However, a closer examination of the data reveals important weaknesses. Agriculture, long considered the backbone of Pakistan’s economy and a critical source of em-

ployment and rural livelihoods, has performed below expectations. Growth of 2.89 percent in a sector that supports a significant share of the population is hardly encouraging. Weak agricultural productivity continues to expose broader issues related to water management, outdated farming practices, inadequate infrastructure and climate vulnerability.

The composition of growth also raises concerns about sustainability. Much of the rebound in industrial activity reflects recovery from a historically low base rather than genuine industrial expansion. For example,

automobile production reportedly increased by more than 61 percent, a figure that appears impressive at first glance. Yet this surge largely reflects the reopening of factories and easing of import restrictions after previous disruptions severely depressed output. It does not necessarily indicate a strong or broad-based industrial revival.

Similarly, the continued dominance of the services sector points to an economy still driven primarily by consumption and government spending rather than productivity and exports. While services can support growth, sustainable economic development typically requires strong industrial expansion, rising productivity and competitive exports. Pakistan continues to struggle in these areas.

Unlike many fast-growing economies that relied on export-oriented industrialization to sustain high growth rates, Pakistan has yet to build a competitive manufacturing base capable of driving long-term expansion. Exports remain narrow, concentrated in low-value sectors and heavily dependent on traditional markets. Weak productivity, high energy costs and policy uncertainty continue to undermine industrial competitiveness, preventing the economy from transitioning toward a more dynamic growth model.

Perhaps the most significant concern is the disconnect between macroeconomic recovery and the everyday realities faced by ordinary citizens. While per capita income has increased in dollar terms, this improvement has not translated into meaningful relief for most households. Inflation over the past several years has eroded purchasing power, while wages have remained largely stagnant. Rising utility bills, expensive food items and higher transportation costs continue to strain

household budgets.

For lower-middle-income families, the increase in per capita income from \$1,824 to \$1,901 offers little practical significance. Many households remain focused not on economic recovery, but on managing day-to-day survival in an environment of high living costs and limited employment opportunities. This disconnect highlights a recurring weakness in Pakistan's economic model: growth figures often fail to reflect broader improvements in living standards.

The broader implication is that the current recovery remains cyclical rather than structural. Pakistan has managed to stabilize the economy through IMF-backed reforms, tighter fiscal discipline and external financing support. These measures helped avert immediate crisis and restored a degree of confidence in the country's financial position. However, stabilization alone cannot substitute for genuine economic development.

The same structural problems that have historically constrained Pakistan's economy remain unresolved. Investment levels remain low, particularly in productive sectors. Exports continue to lag behind regional competitors. Tax collection remains weak and overly dependent on a narrow base, while large segments of the economy remain undertaxed. Human capital indicators—including education, healthcare and workforce skills—also continue to limit productivity and long-term competitiveness.

Without addressing these underlying weaknesses, Pakistan risks remaining caught in a familiar cycle: periods of moderate recovery followed by renewed economic crises. The economy stabilizes temporarily, growth returns at a modest pace, imports rise,

external pressures re-emerge and another balance-of-payments crisis follows. This pattern has repeated itself for decades.

A growth rate of 3.7 percent may signal that the economy is no longer in immediate danger, but it is far from sufficient for a country with Pakistan's demographic pressures and development needs. With a rapidly growing population, the economy requires significantly higher and more sustainable growth rates to create jobs, reduce poverty and improve living standards. Modest recoveries may ease short-term pressures, but they cannot deliver long-term prosperity.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to increase growth numbers, but to improve the quality and sustainability of growth itself. Pakistan needs reforms that enhance productivity, modernize industry and strengthen export competitiveness. Investments in education, technology and human capital must become central to economic planning. Energy sector reforms are also critical to reducing costs and improving industrial efficiency. Equally important is improving governance and ensuring policy consistency to restore investor confidence.

In conclusion, Pakistan's latest GDP figures offer a measure of cautious optimism, but they should not be mistaken for evidence of deep economic transformation. The country has stabilized after years of severe turbulence, yet stabilization alone is not enough. The real test lies in whether policymakers can use this period of relative calm to implement the structural reforms necessary for sustainable and inclusive growth. Without that shift, the economy may continue to oscillate between modest recovery and recurring crisis, never fully escaping the low-growth trap that has defined much of its recent history.

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# Pakistan's stabilisation trap

Shahid Hussain

The recent escalation in tensions between the United States and Iran has once again exposed the vulnerability of regional economies, particularly fragile states like Pakistan.

Rising energy prices, disrupted trade flows and growing geopolitical uncertainty have added fresh pressure to an already strained economy. Yet while external shocks have undoubtedly worsened the situation, they have also highlighted a deeper and more persistent problem within Pakistan's economic framework: the overreliance on "stabilisation" as both a policy objective and a measure of success.

In recent years, the term "economic

stabilisation" has dominated official discourse. Government officials and economic managers routinely present stabilisation as evidence of responsible governance and recovery. However, the concept has increasingly lost clarity and substance, becoming a catch-all phrase used to justify austerity measures, spending cuts and emergency financial management. In reality, stabilisation on its own is not an economic strategy. At best, it is a temporary mechanism designed to prevent immediate financial collapse, manage balance-of-payments pressures and maintain short-term macroeconomic order.

Such measures may provide breathing space, but they do not create the foundations for long-term growth. Pakistan's recent experience

illustrates this distinction clearly. Under repeated stabilisation programmes, the country has focused heavily on controlling imports, reducing fiscal deficits and maintaining foreign exchange reserves. While these steps may have prevented an outright crisis, they have come at a significant economic and social cost.

Industrial activity has slowed considerably, businesses have struggled to survive and consumer purchasing power has sharply declined. High inflation, rising utility costs and elevated interest rates have weakened domestic demand, forcing many enterprises to either scale back operations or shut down entirely. As economic activity contracts, job creation has stalled, leaving millions facing greater financial insecurity.

ty. Poverty levels have risen, and middle-income households have found it increasingly difficult to cope with the rising cost of living.

At the same time, investor confidence has continued to deteriorate. Foreign investors, already cautious about Pakistan's economic and political volatility, have increasingly withdrawn from the market. Unpredictable policies, inconsistent regulations and weak demand have reduced profitability and heightened risk perceptions. Domestic investors, too, have shown growing reluctance to commit capital locally, with many seeking safer and more stable opportunities abroad.

These outcomes raise an important question: can an economy truly be considered "stabilised" if growth remains stagnant, investment continues to decline and living standards worsen? The answer lies in understanding the difference between temporary crisis management and genuine economic transformation.

True economic stabilisation is not simply about preserving reserves or narrowing deficits. It requires addressing the structural weaknesses that repeatedly push the economy into crisis. Pakistan's economic challenges are deeply rooted in long-standing issues such as low productivity, weak export competitiveness, poor governance, inefficient taxation and overdependence on external financing. Unless these underlying problems are resolved, any period of stability is likely to be short-lived.

Countries that have successfully stabilised their economies did not rely solely on austerity and demand suppression. Instead, they used periods of adjustment to implement difficult but necessary reforms. They modernised industries, invested in education and technology, improved institutional efficiency and created conditions that encouraged investment and exports. Stabilisation was treated as a transition toward sustainable growth—not as an end in itself.

Pakistan, however, has often approached stabilisation differently. Rather than using economic crises as opportunities for structural reform, policymakers have frequently relied on temporary measures such as import restrictions, emergency borrowing and cuts in consumption. These actions may reduce immediate pressure on external accounts, but they do little to strengthen the economy's productive capacity.

As a result, the country remains trapped in a recurring cycle. Each time growth begins to recover, structural weaknesses quickly resurface. Rising imports, low exports and dependence on external financing once again create balance-of-payments pressures, forcing the government back into another round of stabilisation. The economy oscillates between short periods of expansion and prolonged periods of austerity,

without ever achieving sustained and inclusive growth.

The recent impact of Middle East tensions and energy price shocks further demonstrates this vulnerability. A truly stable and resilient economy would have been better equipped to absorb external disruptions. Instead, Pakistan's dependence on imported energy and limited export base magnified the effects of rising global oil prices, worsening inflation and placing additional strain on foreign exchange reserves.

This situation underscores the need for a broader rethink of economic policy. Stabilisation should not be presented as the final objective of governance, nor should it be celebrated as a standalone achievement. Economic success



cannot be measured solely through reserve accumulation or fiscal tightening. While macroeconomic discipline is important, it must be accompanied by policies that promote growth, productivity and investment.

The real measure of economic management lies in whether it improves people's lives. Are new jobs being created? Are businesses expanding? Is industrial production increasing? Are exports becoming more competitive? Are incomes rising? Without positive answers to these questions, claims of stabilisation remain incomplete.

To move beyond crisis management, Pakistan needs a long-term development strategy centered on structural reform. Tax reform is a critical starting point. The current system remains narrow, inefficient and heavily reliant on indirect taxation, placing disproportionate pressure on compliant sectors while leaving large segments of the economy undertaxed.

Broadening the tax base and simplifying compliance would not only improve revenues but also create a fairer and more productive business environment.

Similarly, governance reforms are essential. Investors require consistency, transparency and policy continuity. Frequent reversals, bureaucratic delays and regulatory uncertainty discourage both domestic and foreign investment. Strengthening institutions and ensuring accountability can help restore confidence and reduce economic unpredictability.

Investment in human capital is equally important. Sustainable growth depends on a skilled and healthy workforce capable of supporting industrial modernization and technolog-

ical advancement. Education, vocational training and healthcare must therefore become central components of economic planning rather than secondary concerns.

Export competitiveness also demands urgent attention. Pakistan's export base remains narrow and heavily concentrated in low-value sectors. Diversification, innovation and industrial upgrading are necessary to reduce dependence on imports and strengthen external resilience.

In conclusion, the current economic model based on repeated cycles of stabilisation is no longer sufficient. While short-term measures may prevent immediate crises, they cannot substitute for genuine structural transformation. Pakistan's economy requires more than survival management; it needs a clear and credible path toward sustainable growth. Until stabilisation is paired with meaningful reform, it will remain what it has increasingly become—a temporary pause before the next economic emergency.

# Why democracy has struggled to evolve in Pakistan

Raza Khan

There has long been an intense debate within Pakistan's intellectual circles over why democracy has failed to flourish as a stable system of governance in the country. Despite decades of political experimentation, democratic institutions remain fragile and vulnerable. However, there is no conclusive evidence or objective research that identifies a single definitive cause behind the failure of democracy in Pakistan.

Many self-styled scholars often present mono-causal explanations, frequently blaming one institution or factor for the country's democratic shortcomings. Yet renowned social scientists in developed countries argue that social phenomena such as democratic failure or success, development or underdevelopment, cannot be explained through a single cause. Instead, multiple interacting factors shape political outcomes. This broader analytical framework must also be applied to Pakistan in order to understand the real reasons behind the weakness of democracy in the country.

Although Pakistan has experienced periods of elected rule and, since 2002, there has been a trend of elected governments and assemblies completing their constitutional tenures, democracy as an institution has still failed to mature and consolidate itself. Several interconnected reasons explain this failure and help predict the uncertain future of democracy in Pakistan.

The foremost and most fundamental reason lies in the incompatibility between Pakistan's social structure and the essential values of democratic culture. Every culture and institution evolves from the customs, norms, and practices of society. Pakistan's social structure, comprising its institutions, values, statuses, and roles, largely remains undemocratic in character.

A democratic culture is built upon principles such as equality, justice, individual freedom, equity, merit, and participation. These values are difficult to find in a deeply tribal and ultra-conservative social structure. Pakistani society remains hierarchical in orientation and revolves around traditional authorities such as tribal chiefs, feudal landlords, clan elders, and religious leaders.

This is why titles and symbols of traditional authority — including Khan, Malik, Chaudhry, Wadera, Sardar, and religious clerics — continue to dominate society through inherited influence and power, often at the

expense of democratic leadership emerging from the masses.

To preserve their dominance, these traditional elites have historically worked in collaboration with state institutions to strengthen their power structures. Since democratic and liberal forces pose a challenge to their authority, tribal leaders and clerical elites have consistently resisted the evolution of genuine democracy in Pakistan.

One major reason democracy has failed to strengthen is that traditional elites have infiltrated and dominated democratic institutions themselves, including political parties, parliaments, and elected governments. Consequently, many political parties in Pakistan have evolved into family-controlled enterprises where politics functions as a means of main-



taining power and economic privilege rather than serving democratic ideals.

The institutions of tribal culture inherently function on inequality and centralized authority. Democracy, by contrast, operates on equality, participation, and equal opportunity for all citizens. In theory, Pakistan's political system follows the democratic principle of one-person-one-vote. In practice, however, many citizens cannot exercise their vote freely due to pressure from traditional power brokers, social dependency, lack of education, and limited political awareness.

As a result, elected governments often reflect the influence of what German sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann described as the "loud minority," while the silent majority remains politically marginalized.

The lack of education and information among the masses further compounds the problem. This too is rooted in the entrenched tribal and conservative social order that discourages critical thinking and social mobility. Even when people recognize the importance

of education, they often lack the opportunities and resources to attain it due to rigid social and economic barriers.

Another major obstacle to democratic development is the role of auxiliary state institutions such as the bureaucracy and government departments. Ideally, these institutions should support democratic governance by strengthening policymaking, transparency, accountability, and service delivery. However, due to superior administrative skills and institutional advantages, many bureaucratic structures have instead prioritized personal and institutional interests.

This has enabled sections of the bureaucracy to enjoy extensive privileges at public expense while governance standards continue to deteriorate. Since genuine democratic accountability threatens entrenched privileges, powerful bureaucratic circles often develop alliances with traditional elites to preserve the status quo.

Moreover, state institutions recruit individuals largely socialized within the same tribal and conservative social framework prevailing in society. Consequently, many officials themselves lack a deep commitment to democratic principles such as equality, justice, participation, and transparency.

Ideally, state institutions should strengthen democracy by promoting rule of law, accountability, and equal rights. Yet when both society and state structures remain influenced by conservative and anti-democratic forces, democratic evolution becomes extremely difficult.

Under these circumstances, the greatest hope for democratic transformation lies with the country's intelligentsia. History demonstrates that intellectual movements have often challenged oppressive social orders and inspired democratic change. Thinkers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau played pivotal roles in shaping modern democratic thought in France. Similarly, figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine helped lay the intellectual foundations of democracy in the United States.

Pakistan's democratic future may likewise depend on whether its intellectuals, educators, reformers, and civil society can challenge entrenched social structures and promote democratic values capable of transforming both society and the state.

# Vanishing snow, rising risk

Dr. Zaheer Ahmad Babar

The latest findings by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development should serve as a serious warning for Pakistan and the wider region. A sharp and sustained decline in snow cover across the Hindu Kush–Himalayan (HKH) region is no longer a distant environmental concern—it is an immediate and intensifying threat to water security, agricultural productivity, and economic stability. For countries dependent on the Indus River Basin, where nearly half of total runoff is linked to snow and glacier melt, this trend signals structural stress in a system that underpins food production and livelihoods for millions.

Pakistan's heavy reliance on the Indus River system makes it particularly vulnerable. Despite this dependence, water governance and management practices remain largely outdated, fragmented, and inefficient. The ICIMOD data pointing to a persistent reduction in snow cover should have triggered urgent policy recalibration. Instead, responses have largely remained reactive, shaped by crisis management rather than long-term planning. In a climate environment that is becoming increasingly volatile, such an approach is no longer sustainable.

The implications of declining snow reserves extend well beyond immediate water shortages. Reduced snow accumulation directly affects seasonal meltwater flows, which are essential for irrigation during critical agricultural periods. More importantly, it disrupts groundwater recharge cycles and soil moisture retention, both of which are vital for maintaining crop yields. Over time, this creates a compounding effect: each consecutive dry year intensifies the severity of the next, deepening agricultural vulnerability and increasing systemic risk.

For an agrarian economy like Pakistan's, the consequences are profound. Agriculture remains the largest employer and a key contributor to rural incomes, yet it is highly exposed to climate variability. Lower water availability translates into reduced crop output, heightened food inflation, and increased rural distress. ICIMOD's warning that "every dry spell will hit harder" is therefore not merely a scientific observation—it is a direct economic forecast with serious social implications.

Despite these risks, Pakistan's water governance framework remains poorly aligned with the scale of the challenge. Decision-making

is often driven by short-term political considerations rather than scientific evidence or long-term resource planning. Provincial competition over water allocation further complicates the situation, weakening collective responses and limiting the effectiveness of national strategies. Institutional fragmentation—where multiple agencies operate with overlapping mandates and limited coordination—continues to undermine efficiency in water management.

The report's emphasis on coordinated action highlights a fundamental governance gap. Without integrated planning and institutional coherence, even technically sound solutions are unlikely to achieve meaningful impact. Water management in Pakistan is not merely a technical issue; it is a governance challenge



that requires alignment across federal and provincial structures, as well as consistent policy direction over time.

One of the most urgent priorities is the development and deployment of robust early warning systems. Accurate forecasting of snowmelt patterns, precipitation trends, and river flows can significantly improve preparedness. Such systems would allow farmers to adjust cropping cycles, enable authorities to manage reservoir levels more efficiently, and reduce the economic shock of unexpected shortages. However, early warning mechanisms must be integrated into decision-making frameworks to be effective, rather than existing as isolated technical tools.

Equally important is the need to improve water-use efficiency, particularly in agriculture. Pakistan remains one of the most water-intensive agricultural economies in the world, largely due to outdated irrigation practices such as flood irrigation. Significant quantities of water are lost through inefficient delivery systems, poor infrastructure, and

inadequate storage capacity. Modernizing irrigation—through drip systems, lined canals, and precision agriculture—could substantially reduce wastage and improve productivity per unit of water.

At the same time, expanding water storage capacity and improving groundwater management are essential. Excess water during peak melt periods must be captured and stored for use during dry months, while unchecked groundwater extraction needs to be regulated to prevent long-term depletion. These measures require sustained investment and institutional commitment, rather than ad hoc interventions during crisis periods.

Regional cooperation is another critical dimension that cannot be overlooked. The Hindu Kush–Himalayan region spans multiple countries, and its water systems are inherently transboundary. Climate-induced changes in snow and glacier patterns will therefore have cross-border implications. Data sharing, joint research initiatives, and coordinated policy responses are essential for managing shared risks effectively. Institutions such as ICIMOD provide an important platform for regional dialogue, but their recommendations must be matched by political commitment at the national level.

However, regional cooperation alone will not be sufficient unless domestic governance structures are strengthened. Effective water management begins at home, with coherent policies, strong institutions, and evidence-based planning. Pakistan must move away from fragmented decision-making and toward an integrated water governance model that aligns agricultural, environmental, and energy policies under a unified framework.

Ultimately, the declining snow cover in the HKH region is not just an environmental issue—it is a stress test for governance, planning, and institutional capacity. It exposes the gap between scientific warning and policy response, and between long-term risk and short-term decision-making. The science is clear, the risks are well documented, and the technical solutions are known. What remains uncertain is whether Pakistan's policy apparatus can match the urgency of the challenge.

Failure to act decisively could transform a manageable environmental trend into a full-scale water and food security crisis. Conversely, timely investment in reform, efficiency, and cooperation could help build resilience in one of the world's most climate-vulnerable regions. The choice, as the data suggests, is becoming increasingly narrow—and increasingly urgent.

# The Gulf does not have to choose Iran or Israel

Abdulla Banndar Al-Etaibi

One of the most dangerous ideas in today's Middle East is the claim that Gulf states must choose between Iran and Israel. This framing is politically simple, but strategically misleading.

It assumes that Gulf security can be reduced to alignment with one regional actor against another. The Gulf's central interest is neither to defend Iran nor to serve Israel's regional agenda. Its real interest is to prevent the region from becoming a battlefield.

For Gulf states, escalation is a direct threat. Any confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States immediately affects Gulf airspace, shipping lanes, energy infrastructure, investment confidence and domestic stability. The Gulf cannot observe from a distance; it automatically incurs costs from the conflict. Therefore, the real choice is not between Iran or Israel. It is between stability or permanent war.

Recent events have demonstrated that even if the Gulf does not initiate confrontation, it still becomes an arena of it. In June when Israel attacked Iran, the conflict spilled over. In September, an Israeli air strike targeted Doha. This was not a separate episode but a continuation of the same campaign.

This matters because Qatar has built much of its foreign policy around mediation, dialogue, de-escalation and the preservation of channels with other regional actors. Yet even this posture did not shield it from the consequences of confrontation. The second conflict in 2026 widened the battlefield to the rest of the Gulf. This made it clear that the whole region is at risk when conflict erupts.

Even before the latest escalation, the Gulf states already had experience with Iran-linked missile threats, proxy networks, ideological pressure, maritime insecurity and the use of instability as leverage. Iran's regional influence, combined with its ability to threaten the Strait of Hormuz, makes it a central concern for Gulf security. But recognising Iran as a threat does not mean accepting war as a strategy. The Gulf has an interest in containing Iranian pressure but also in preventing a wider war that would damage its infrastructure, economy and development. Its policy must, therefore, combine firmness with communica-

tion: oppose coercion but keep channels open to prevent miscalculation.

Gulf states may share some concerns with Israel regarding Iran, but shared concern does not mean identical interests. Israel has its own security doctrine, domestic pressures, military calculations and regional ambitions. These do not reflect Gulf priorities. Israel may see escalation as a way to restore deterrence or weaken its adversaries. For the Gulf, however, escalation produces immediate costs: disrupted maritime routes, higher insurance costs, exposed energy facilities, cyber-risks and political pressure across Gulf societies. A conflict that may appear manageable from Tel Aviv can be far more dangerous when experienced from the Gulf.

Automatic alignment with Israel against Iran is strategically risky. It reduces the Gulf

are lifelines for energy exports, food imports, industrial production and global trade.

Any attempt to weaponise these routes threatens the entire Gulf system: oil and gas flows, economic diversification, supply chains, investor confidence and the credibility of Gulf states as stable global hubs. However, maritime security cannot be protected by military power alone. The Gulf needs crisis communication, early-warning systems, intelligence sharing, regional maritime coordination, cyber-resilience and diplomatic mechanisms that reduce miscalculation.

The Strait of Hormuz illustrates a larger point: Geography makes isolation impossible. Iran cannot be removed, Israel cannot be ignored, the US remains central to Gulf defence, China is economically significant and Europe has energy and maritime interests. This

environment requires a layered strategy that combines deterrence with diplomacy.

Mediation and back-channels are practical tools for preventing incidents from becoming wars. In a region where one missile, one naval encounter or one misread signal can trigger escalation, communication becomes strategic insurance. The Gulf's answer should be strategic autonomy, not passive neutrality. This means resisting Iranian coercion without becoming an extension of Israeli escalation, partnering with the US without outsourcing every security de-

cision, engaging China economically without accepting dependency and preserving channels without compromising sovereignty.

Air defence, maritime surveillance, cyberprotection, food security, energy infrastructure and crisis diplomacy must become shared priorities. The Gulf cannot rely indefinitely on external actors to define its security future.

In the end, the Gulf needs to choose whether it wants to become a theatre for permanent war or an architect of regional stability. Working towards stability is not a soft slogan. It is a strategic doctrine. It protects sovereignty, maritime lifelines, economic development and regional resilience. The Gulf's strongest position is not to choose between Iran and Israel. It is to choose itself: its security, sovereignty, economic future and role as a centre of balance in a region too often pushed towards perpetual war.



to a support base for another actor's security agenda and ignores the Palestinian question, which remains central to the legitimacy of any regional order and stability.

When faced with repeated escalation, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain have pursued distinct foreign policy tracks, sometimes complementary, sometimes divergent. Qatar's mediation posture has differed sharply from the UAE's harder line on Iran. Oman has maintained quiet channels with Tehran that others have not.

Yet the Gulf countries have a clear common interest in regional security and stability. Freedom of navigation is central to it. For the Gulf, maritime security is not an abstract legal principle or a Western slogan. It is a national necessity. The Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Oman, Bab al-Mandeb and other passages

# In the UK, Muslim votes are treated as a problem to be managed

Naomi Green

Britain's politics is in turmoil. The Labour government is consumed by an open leadership crisis, with the Prime Minister facing demands from more than ninety of his own MPs to resign and a likely challenge from within his own cabinet. All of this was triggered by Labour's hammering in the local and devolved elections of May 7.

Westminster is absorbed in the spectacle, and understandably so. But for British Muslim communities, the lasting significance of those elections lies elsewhere. The May vote brought a real surge in Muslim civic engagement, with initiatives like the Muslim Council of Britain's "Get Out The Vote" campaign helping to drive registration and turnout. Yet that engagement was too often met with suspicion rather than welcome.

During the campaign, too many political actors and media outlets fell back on lazy, divisive narratives about Muslims, spreading misinformation and misrepresenting how our communities actually engage politically. Commentators repeatedly raised the spectre of "family voting", claiming that Muslims, particularly Muslim women, were pushed or directed to vote in certain ways, as though they had no agency of their own. Others spoke of "sectarian voting," portraying Muslims as a single bloc voting on the basis of religion alone, rather than as a diverse community with a multiplicity of political views. These terms were used to cast suspicion on Muslim voters, particularly in areas where Muslim electoral participation is more visible.

Reform UK, which campaigned heavily on an anti-immigration platform, made significant gains in local council elections in England, largely at the expense of both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, the two dominant forces in British politics for over a century. In the devolved elections, Labour's vote also declined, but the picture was more complex. In Wales, Plaid Cymru emerged as the largest party for the first time since devolution, with Reform UK Wales finishing a strong second. In Scotland, the SNP remained the largest party but lost seats, while the Greens had their best-ever result and Reform UK won its first MSPs. Voters in different parts of the UK clearly reached for different alternatives.

Frustration with the mainstream parties accounts for some of Reform's success, but the party also gained substantial support for its hardline positions. These include proposals

for large-scale immigration detention centres capable of holding tens of thousands of people, the abolition of "indefinite leave to remain", and a combative framing of integration and national identity.

Elements of Reform's rhetoric have at times overlapped with anti-Muslim and Islamophobic narratives also promoted by more extreme figures such as Tommy Robinson and Rupert Lowe, the MP who leads the far-right populist Restore Britain party. This rhetoric has included stoking fear around "political Islam," calling for mass deportations, and advancing a more restrictive vision of British cultural identity. Such language grew louder over the course of the campaign, with some supporters and

Gaza, and human rights, we stand alongside neighbours of all faiths and none.

For British Muslims, as with all communities, taking part in the democratic process is essential to ensuring fair representation and a meaningful voice in public life. We are a diverse community, and people will rightly vote for different parties and candidates. Recent shifts in voting patterns, away from traditional support for Labour and towards the Greens and independents in particular, show clearly that no community's support can be taken for granted. When voters feel overlooked or dismissed, they will look elsewhere. Representation has to be earned through genuine engagement, respect, and accountability, not historical expectations.

What concerns us most is not any single party or politician, but the speed at which the Overton window has shifted. Calls for the mass deportation of Muslims, for increased securitisation of our communities, and for limitations on our freedom of expression and protest were once confined to the political fringe. They are now made openly, by elected representatives, and meet silence rather than condemnation from much of the mainstream. As that fringe becomes mainstream, other parties feel pressure to move with it, and the space for a confident, plural British politics narrows.

Countering this requires more than calling it out. It means building confidence, strengthening civic literacy, and making sure people feel empowered rather than alienated. The more we engage politically and constructively, contacting our local councillors and MPs, responding to consultations, attending community meetings, and working with others on shared local issues, the less our communities can be sidelined, spoken for or spoken over.

There is also space for optimism. Across the country, messages rooted in hope, fairness, accountability, and community-focused politics resonated strongly. Many voters backed candidates who centred humanitarian and ethical concerns and worked to build unity across our diverse communities rather than exploit division. Independent councillor Mansoor Ahmed, one of the youngest councillors elected, stood in the highly diverse ward of Nechells in Birmingham on a locally rooted, community-focused platform, reflecting concerns about housing, local services, youth provision, and representation rather than national identity politics. That appetite for constructive change is something to build on.



individual Reform candidates posting content on social media that was openly Islamophobic, racist or anti-Semitic. Phil Tierney, elected for Chelmsley Wood in Solihull and pictured with Reform's deputy leader Richard Tice during the campaign, had publicly posted, "I am Islamophobic" on X, called Islam a "plague," and shared material arguing that no Muslim should be allowed to hold public office. Ben Rowe, elected in Plymouth, was reported to have urged an anti-Muslim mob during the 2024 Southport riots to "get rid of that filthy building" as they threw bricks at police protecting a mosque. While such posts do not always reflect official Reform party policy, they contribute to a wider environment in which such rhetoric is highly visible and normalised.

Muslims, like anyone else, are not a monolith. We vote on a wide range of issues shaped by personal experience, local priorities, and wider concerns. Housing, the cost of living, education, safety, local services, and infrastructure matter to us just as they do to everyone else. And on national and international issues, including humanitarian crises, the genocide in

## Sindh's institutional inertia

A recent incident in South Africa, described by the BBC as a nerve-wracking operation, has drawn global admiration. In a remarkable display of courage and professionalism, police recovered human remains from a crocodile-infested stretch of the Komati River. Capt Johan Potgieter was lowered from a helicopter into perilous waters during the search for a businessman swept away by floods.

With the assistance of drones and aerial surveillance, the authorities identified a suspicious 4.5-meter crocodile — distinguished by its unnatural stillness and heavy stomach. The animal was euthanized, and a necropsy confirmed the grim discovery.

This extraordinary mission stands as a powerful testament to police expertise, dedication and an unflinching commitment to uncovering the truth — even under extreme and life-threatening conditions. This inspiring example of bravery and efficiency sharply contrasts with our own troubling reality.

In Sindh, several cases involving the poor and the vulnerable remain buried beneath inertia and influence. Cases continue to cry out for justice, including the haunting disappearance of Priya Kumari, abducted in 2021 during a procession in broad daylight; Fazila Sarki, missing since 2007; and the nine family members of Mano Bheel, abducted in 1998. These cases are enduring symbols of institutional failure.

The example from South Africa should not merely inspire admiration; it should provoke introspection. It demonstrates that with resolve, courage and institutional integrity, even the most complex mysteries can be pursued and resolved. Our law-enforcement machinery must rise above expediency and influence. The forgotten cases must be revived with sincerity, transparency and unwavering determination so that mysteries surrounding these delayed cases are finally resolved.

Qamer Soomro  
Shikarpur

## The ghost of the Raj

Great Britain had not entered the subcontinent to serve its people or to introduce democracy through persuasion, as is sometimes claimed. Its primary objective was economic and political control. The administrative machinery it built was, therefore, not designed to serve citizens, but to govern them. Civil servants were trained as authority figures — officers who expected compliance — rather than as facilitators of public welfare.

Although Britain left the subcontinent nearly eight decades ago, elements of that administrative culture continue to shape governance in Pakistan and India. In many instances, the relationship between the state and the citizen still appears inverted: instead of public officials serving the people, citizens often

feel compelled to navigate rigid systems that demand patience, persistence and deference. Indeed, there are decent officials as well, but they are considered misfit in the system, they are denied promotions and sometimes even face demotions. To understand what a people-centred system can look like, one may consider the example of the Netherlands. Despite its relatively small population of around 18 million, it is widely regarded as one of the world's strongest welfare states. What stands out is not just policy, but attitude. In Dutch public offices, whether in person or over the phone, officials tend to engage with applicants not as distant authorities, but as service providers. Rather than relying on delays or procedural barriers, they often aim at resolving issues promptly.

At the end of an interaction, it is common for an officer to ask, *Heeft u nog een vraag?* (Do you have another question?) This simple gesture signals something deeper: a commitment to ensuring that the citizen leaves satisfied and informed. The interaction typically concludes with a courteous farewell. This is what public service, in its true sense, looks like — not merely the execution of rules, but the delivery of assistance with respect and efficiency. The contrast highlights an important distinction. A public servant is someone whose authority exists to assist, guide and serve the citizen. A system becomes oppressive when authority is exercised without responsiveness, creating unnecessary obstacles rather than solutions. If post-colonial societies wish to move beyond inherited administrative cultures, the transformation must go beyond structural reforms. It requires a shift in mindset — from control to service, from hierarchy to accountability, and from procedure to purpose. The question, then, is not simply about history, but about choices: will public institutions continue to reflect the logic of the past, or evolve towards a model where the citizen is truly at the centre?

Abdul Quayyum Raja  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

## Accidents waiting to happen

Overloaded vehicles carrying wheat straw frequently pass through Wahi Pandhi city, causing serious problems to the residents. These vehicles make it very difficult for people to cross roads or commute safely. This situation is especially dangerous for people who are travelling in emergencies. Moreover, the excessive load makes these vehicles unstable and poorly balanced, which increases the risk of accidents further. The authorities concerned should take immediate steps to control overloading, and ensure the safety and convenience of the public.

Abdul Hayee  
Dadu

## Pay the teachers

While the cost of living has increased exponen-

tially over the past decade, teachers' salaries and allowances have remained largely outdated. House rent allowance is still based on old scales that bear little resemblance to current rental realities. Similarly, the conveyance allowance seems stuck in the early 2000s, despite soaring fuel prices. The medical allowance, too, has become insufficient in the face of rising health-care costs. Teachers, who play a critical role in shaping the future of the nation, are struggling to maintain even a basic standard of living. The government must prioritise revising salaries in line with growing inflation.

Sadam Hussain  
Larkana

## The agony of pensioners

Pensioners in Punjab are being forced to travel from place to place, enduring hardship, simply to submit their life certificates by themselves and for biometric verification. Many are unable to walk properly, but they must visit banks at the insistence of bank staff for biometric verification and to submit life and non-marriage certificates despite the fact that, due to old age, their fingerprints are not always read by the machine. According to the notification issued on Jan 28, 2021, by the Finance Division in Islamabad, if a person is unable to undergo biometric verification due to incapacitation by illness, infirmity, or if their fingerprints do not exist due to old age or a genetic condition, they shall be provided under rule 343 a life certificate signed by an authorised person. The notification also says that a pensioner of rank may be privately identified by the disbursing officer, and need not be required to appear at the disbursing office.

Currently, most banks, including the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), are refusing to accept certificates unless pensioners personally visit the branch, regardless of their ability to walk. This places a severe burden on elderly pensioners, and raises serious concerns about the performance of these institutions.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) should issue directions regarding the use of such certificates attested by a gazetted officer to replace the requirement of fingerprint verification. If it is essential to confirm that a pensioner is, indeed, alive, bank officials should identify the pensioners privately and verify their status, for example, by taking a photograph.

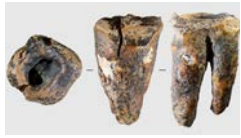
While using online banking applications, fingerprint systems should be replaced with facial recognition or some other convenient method, which would greatly assist the elderly. Financial institutions' responsibilities should not be limited to handling finances; they are expected to take steps that facilitate the public, particularly old-age pensioners. Making these adjustments will ensure that banks serve their intended purpose, providing convenience and support to the people of Punjab.

Muhammad Iqbal Awan  
Mianwali

## 'Exceptional' drilled tooth reveals Neanderthals practiced dentistry in Siberia 60,000 years ago

Sophie Berdugo

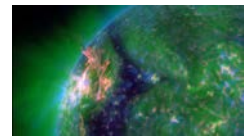
Around 60,000 years ago in Siberia, a Neanderthal opened their mouth so that a rotten tooth could be drilled — and the case is the oldest evidence of an intentional dental treatment to date, a new study finds. A lower molar tooth belonging to a Neanderthal adult was originally unearthed in 2016, but it was not clear what had caused the deep hole in its surface. Now, experimental evidence indicates the hole was made with a small stone drill used to clean out bits of severely rotten tooth tissue, according to a study published in the journal PLOS One. This intricate procedure shows Neanderthals — our closest human relatives who lived from around 400,000 to 40,000 years ago — had the brains to recognize this painful tooth cavity could be treated and possessed the fine motor skills to successfully execute the procedure. "The fact that this invasive treatment took place and the person survived lends me to believe that this is another example of the really very sophisticated Neanderthal understanding of human biology and when you need to intervene," study co-author John W. Olsen, a professor emeritus of anthropology at the University of Arizona, told Live Science. It's unclear whether this was self-treatment or dentistry performed by another individual. Even so, "it suggests that the roots of invasive medicine and surgery do not belong exclusively to Homo sapiens, but are part of a broader legacy shared with our closest relatives," Gregorio Oxilia, an associate professor of human anatomy at the Free Mediterranean University in Italy who was not involved in the research, told Live Science in an email.



## Eruption blows hole in sun's atmosphere, unleashing solar flare

Patrick Pester

A solar eruption has blown a massive hole in the sun's atmosphere, causing temporary radio blackouts and possibly triggering a northern lights display tomorrow.



Scientists recorded an M5.7-class solar flare on May 10, which briefly disrupted high-frequency radio communications on the sunlit side of our planet, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Space Weather Prediction Center. M-class solar flares are the second strongest category of solar eruption, after X-class flares.

Solar flares are sudden bursts of electromagnetic radiation ejected from the sun. This energy travels at the speed of light, so by the time scientists observe them, they're already here. Earth's atmosphere and magnetic field protect us from the flares' harmful radiation, but they can disrupt radio communications traveling through the upper atmosphere, as well as satellites and spacecraft, according to NASA.

The eruption also produced a coronal mass ejection (CME) — a slower-moving cloud of solar plasma and radiation — that can trigger geomagnetic storms and aurora displays. There's no guarantee that the CME will hit Earth, but we could take a glancing blow, according to the Space Weather Prediction Center.

## What happens to your body when you drink green juice every morning

Zia Sherrell

Green juice is made from blended green vegetables like spinach, kale, celery, and cucumber. The ingredients provide a rich source of vitamins and minerals, delivering a boost of hydration and nourishment.



Green vegetables contain vitamins A, C, E, and K. These nutrients support your immune system, skin health, and bone strength. They're also a good source of minerals like iron, calcium, and magnesium, which support energy and muscle function. Leafy greens like spinach and kale are particularly nutrient-dense. One benefit of juicing is that it concentrates these nutrients into a smaller serving, making it easier to consume more than you might typically eat in one sitting.

Vegetables like cabbage, celery, spinach, and lettuce are over 90% water. These ingredients make green juice an excellent source of fluids, helping you stay hydrated. You get roughly 20% of your water intake from the food you eat. Drinking vegetable-rich green juice contributes to your hydration needs while providing essential nutrients.<sup>4</sup>

Green vegetables contain plant compounds called polyphenols and flavonoids. These compounds have antioxidant properties that help protect cells from damage caused by unstable molecules called free radicals. Consuming leafy green vegetables may help reduce inflammation. The antioxidants in these vegetables may support overall health and reduce the risk of certain chronic diseases.

Green vegetables contain compounds that can act as prebiotics. These nutrients feed beneficial bacteria in your gut, which may support digestion and immune function.

## Salmon vs. chicken: Which protein source is better for heart health?

Carley Millhone

Salmon and chicken are nutritious sources of lean protein that can benefit muscle gain and heart health.<sup>12</sup> Both foods are great additions to a balanced diet, but they provide different nutrients.



Salmon is one of the best sources of polyunsaturated fats called omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3s like eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) are essential for brain function, eye health, and heart health. A 3-ounce filet of Atlantic, farmed salmon contains about 1.24 grams of DHA and 0.59 grams of EPA.<sup>1</sup> Wild-caught salmon contains slightly less omega-3s, but is still a good source of healthy fats.

Just one 3-ounce serving of salmon can help you meet the adequate intake of omega-3s.<sup>1</sup> The American Heart Association recommends eating two servings of fatty fish, like salmon, per week to get enough EPA and DHA for heart and overall health. Both chicken and salmon are complete proteins—meaning they contain all of the essential amino acids your body needs to function and build muscle. This makes both foods ideal if you're looking to increase your protein intake to build muscle or support your overall health.

Chicken contains more protein and less fat than salmon. A 3.5-ounce (100-gram) serving of boneless, skinless chicken breast offers about 31 grams of protein and less than 4 grams of total fat. Chicken breasts also contain only about 1 gram of saturated fat.<sup>6</sup> Consuming less saturated fat helps you avoid high LDL (the "bad") cholesterol, which can increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.



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