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WEEKLY Cutting Edge

INDEPENDENT • INCISIVE ANALYTICAL



**TEXTILE INDUSTRY'S
IMMENSE EXPORT
POTENTIAL REMAINS
UNREALIZED**



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About Us

Cutting Edge is an independent English weekly magazine being published from Lahore. Its founding editor, Dr Niloufer Mahdi, belonged to one of the top industrialist families of Pakistan — Packages Group. She was the daughter of Syed Wajid Ali and granddaughter of Syed Maratib Ali. In a short span of time it has gained popularity and built loyal readership throughout the country. With the contributions by renowned journalists and literary figures and diversity of issues/topics touched by our magazine, we can confidently claim that it has set not only new trends in local journalism, but has emerged as the most read and credible magazine for men, women, students and opinion leaders from different spheres of life. It also circulated in all Foreign Embassies, Libraries, Hospitals, 5 star Hotels and Government/ Private Departments. Its website, weeklycuttingedge.com, is a premier online source for the analysis of current affairs, providing authoritative insight into, and opinion on, national and international news, business, finance, science and technology, as well as an overview of cultural trends. We have commenced its publication, with an aim to bring the best to our readers; similarly, we intend to offer the best in terms of advertising and promotional impact for our valuable advertisers. The 24-page Cutting Edge is divided among different sections, and we have proportionally divided the space in each section for carrying advertisers' message for the utmost impact.

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Textile industry's immense export potential remains unrealized

Farhan Khan

Pakistan's textile industry embodies one of the country's greatest economic paradoxes: the sector that earns the bulk of its merchandise export revenues, sustains millions of livelihoods and offers the clearest route to industrial expansion is being undermined by the very government that should be helping it grow. Rather than treating textiles as a strategic national asset, successive governments have burdened manufacturers with uncompetitive energy prices, exorbitant financing costs, excessive taxation and unpredictable policies.

Pakistan's textile industry is more than a major manufacturing sector; it is the backbone of the country's export economy, a source of employment for millions and one of its most promising avenues for sustainable economic growth. From cotton cultivation and spinning to weaving, dyeing, processing and garment manufacturing, the industry supports an extensive value chain that links agriculture with industry, domestic commerce and international markets.

A decade ago, Pakistan's total merchandise exports stood at approximately \$20.8 billion, of which textiles accounted for \$12.4 billion. By fiscal year 2026, total exports had increased by \$9.3 billion, with textiles contributing \$5.5 billion, or nearly 60 per cent, of that increase. These figures demonstrate that textiles have remained the principal driver of export expansion while other sectors have struggled to emerge as significant sources of foreign exchange.

The industry's resilience becomes even more remarkable when viewed against a decade of successive shocks. The US-China trade war, the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, devastating floods in 2022 and 2025, Pakistan's balance-of-payments and sovereign debt crisis in 2022-23, the military confrontation with India in May 2025, escalating US trade protectionism and instability in the Middle East have all disrupted supply chains, increased uncertainty and complicated international trade.

Despite these challenges, textile manufacturers have continued to supply international markets and generate much-needed dollars. The industry's potential extends far beyond existing cotton yarn and fabric exports. Higher-value garments, technical textiles, home furnishings, sportswear, specialised fabrics and branded products offer opportunities to earn more from every unit of raw material. With the right policies, Pakistan could move further up

the global value chain, create better-paid jobs and strengthen its position in international markets.

One of the greatest obstacles is the high cost of industrial energy. Electricity for Pakistani industry is estimated at around 11-12 US cents per kilowatt-hour, compared with 5-10 cents in India, 4-9 cents in China, 4-7 cents in Vietnam and 8-9 cents in Bangladesh. Although actual tariffs vary by consumer category, contract and applicable charges, the gap places Pakistani manufacturers at a serious competitive disadvantage. Recent history demonstrates the consequences of policy choices. Following the introduction of regionally competitive energy tariffs (RCET), textile exports rose from approximately \$12.5 billion in FY2020 to \$19.3 billion in FY2022. After RCET and other facilitation measures were withdrawn, exports fell to \$16.5 billion in FY2023. They subsequently recovered to \$17.9 billion but remained below the industry's demonstrated potential.

The cost of borrowing presents another formidable barrier. Pakistan's policy rate stands at 11.5 per cent, compared with 5.25 per cent in India, 4.5 per cent in Vietnam and around 3 per cent in China, according to the supplied figures. Textile manufacturing requires substantial investment in machinery, modernisation, working capital and compliance with increasingly demanding international standards. Expensive credit discourages investment, prevents technological upgrading and makes it harder for firms to accept larger export orders.

Taxation is equally damaging. Pakistan's corporate income tax rate is 29 per cent, while the combined burden of taxes and levies on formal businesses can exceed 60 per cent by some estimates. Exporters face more than 18 federal and provincial taxes and levies, which, according to the industry figures, can amount to 7-11 per cent of turnover against profit margins of just 6-15 per cent. Small and medium-sized enterprises are especially vulnerable. Spinners, weavers, processors and garment manufacturers face cascading taxes, delayed refunds and liquidity constraints at successive stages of production.

Taxation should support economic expansion, not suffocate it. A growing industrial base generates employment, increases incomes, broadens the tax base and ultimately produces more sustainable government revenue. A policy that extracts excessive revenue from a stagnant economy may offer short-term fiscal relief but undermines the growth required to resolve the country's long-term financial problems. A

properly designed Drawback of Local Taxes and Levies (DLTL) scheme could provide part of the answer. Under such a scheme, exporters would receive rebates against eligible domestic taxes and levies embedded in production costs. An incentive of around 8 per cent, as proposed by industry representatives, could be linked to verified export performance and incremental exports, with transparent eligibility rules, independent audits and safeguards against misuse.

A comprehensive reform programme is essential if textiles are to become a dynamic engine of national development. First, the government should establish a predictable, regionally competitive energy-pricing framework. The industry's proposed benchmarks of 7 cents per kilowatt-hour for electricity and \$7 per million British thermal units for industrial gas deserve serious examination against fiscal realities, energy-sector costs and regional competitors.

Second, financing costs must decline as macroeconomic conditions permit. Targeted export-financing facilities, access to long-term investment credit and incentives for modern machinery would help firms improve productivity and quality. Third, the tax system needs simplification. The government should eliminate cascading taxation, expedite legitimate refunds, rationalise levies and reduce compliance costs. Stable policies are essential because textile investments require years to recover their costs.

Fourth, Pakistan must revive domestic cotton production through better seeds, research, irrigation management, extension services and improved pest control. Climate-resilient agriculture and stronger links between farmers and textile manufacturers would reduce dependence on imported raw materials and improve quality. Fifth, the industry must move towards higher-value exports. Investment in modern processing, technical textiles, garment design, automation, sustainable production and internationally recognised environmental standards would allow Pakistani businesses to capture a greater share of global value chains.

Pakistan's textile industry has demonstrated resilience, created livelihoods for millions and contributed disproportionately to the country's export earnings. Its limitations are real, but many are rooted in the wider economic environment rather than an absence of entrepreneurial capacity. The government cannot reasonably demand export expansion while imposing uncompetitive energy costs, expensive credit, excessive taxation and policy uncertainty.

Pakistan: a troubling slide in global hunger index

Nasim Ahmed

Pakistan's worsening hunger situation has received another unwelcome spotlight in the latest Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2026. The country has a score of 25.5 and ranks 106th among 122 countries for which sufficient data are available. Its hunger level is classified as serious, placing it among the countries struggling to provide adequate nutrition to substantial sections of their populations. More troublingly, Pakistan's score has deteriorated from 24.0 in 2018 to 25.5 in 2026, an increase of 6.3 per cent.

The findings are particularly disturbing for a country with extensive agricultural land, a major irrigation network and a substantial production base for wheat, rice, sugarcane, fruit and livestock. Pakistan's problem is not simply the availability of food. It is also the inability of millions of people to afford a nutritious diet, the unequal distribution of resources, inadequate maternal and child nutrition, and the failure to build an effective system of food security.

The regional comparison reveals the scale of the challenge. Pakistan's GHI score of 25.5 is substantially above the South Asian average of 23.5 and the global average of 18.1. Its position is worse than that of India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, although Afghanistan faces an even more severe hunger problem. Bangladesh has brought its score below the threshold for serious hunger, while Nepal and Sri Lanka have achieved considerably better outcomes. Pakistan's score is also worse than its 2018 level, showing that long-term improvements have not been sustained consistently.

The Global Hunger Index, jointly published by Welthungerhilfe, the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict and Helvetas, uses four indicators to assess hunger. It combines food deprivation, child undernutrition and child mortality into a score ranging from zero to 100. Zero represents the best possible outcome and 100 the worst.

The four indicators are:

1. Undernourishment: This measures the proportion of the population whose regular food consumption provides insufficient dietary energy to maintain a healthy, active life. It captures food insecurity across the population,

rather than only among children. In Pakistan, 16.1 per cent of the population is undernourished.

2. Child stunting: This measures the proportion of children under five who are too short for their age, indicating chronic undernutrition and repeated exposure to inadequate diets, illness or poor living conditions. Pakistan's rate is 33.6 per cent, a deeply concerning indicator of long-term nutritional deprivation.

3. Child wasting: This measures the proportion of children under five whose weight is too low for their height. It reflects acute undernutrition, often associated with insufficient food intake or disease. Pakistan's wasting rate is 9.8 per cent.

4. Under-five mortality: This measures the proportion of children who die before

in food prices, electricity bills, transport and housing leaves low-income households with less money for nutritious meals. Families may continue buying flour and other basic staples while reducing their consumption of milk, eggs, meat, fruit and vegetables. Calories alone cannot provide the balanced nutrition necessary for healthy childhood development.

Second, Pakistan's agricultural system suffers from structural weaknesses. Small farmers face expensive inputs, limited access to credit, unreliable water supplies and inadequate storage facilities. Post-harvest losses, inefficient supply chains and the influence of middlemen increase the cost of food between farms and consumers. Periodic floods, droughts and extreme heat further undermine agricultural productivity.

Third, malnutrition is closely linked to poor sanitation, unsafe drinking water and inadequate healthcare. Children repeatedly suffering from diarrhoea and other infections cannot absorb nutrients properly, even when some food is available. Finally, fragmented government policies have failed to integrate agriculture, public health, education, water management and poverty reduction into a comprehensive food-security strategy. Subsidies and relief programmes can help, but temporary assistance cannot replace sustained investment in nutrition and rural develop-



ment. Although deaths have multiple causes, inadequate nutrition, unsafe water, infections and insufficient healthcare can substantially increase the risk. Pakistan's under-five mortality rate, as represented in the index, is 5.6 per cent.

The latest index also illustrates that hunger remains a global crisis. Somalia has a score of 47.0, the Democratic Republic of the Congo 39.5, Chad 38.0 and Madagascar 36.5, placing these countries in the alarming category. Several other countries, including Nigeria, Haiti and Niger, also face alarming levels of hunger. These figures underline the severity of the worldwide problem, but Pakistan's own performance is particularly troubling given its vast agricultural resources.

The question is: Why is hunger persisting in Pakistan? The first major cause is poverty and declining purchasing power. Inflation

ment.

What must Pakistan do? First, protect the purchasing power of vulnerable households. Targeted cash transfers and nutrition assistance should reach the poorest families, particularly pregnant women, nursing mothers and households with young children. Existing social-protection programmes should prioritise access to nutritious food rather than merely providing temporary financial relief.

Second, invest in maternal and child nutrition. Pakistan needs effective programmes for prenatal nutrition, breastfeeding, micro-nutrient supplementation, growth monitoring and the early treatment of wasting. Schools should offer nutritious meals in disadvantaged districts, while health workers should identify malnourished children before their condition becomes critical.

Third, reform agriculture and food

distribution. Investment in water-efficient irrigation, climate-resilient seeds, agricultural research, cold storage, rural roads and modern warehouses can improve productivity and reduce wastage. Small farmers need affordable credit and better market access. Fourth, make nutritious food affordable. Government policy should encourage the production and consumption of pulses, vegetables, fruit, eggs and dairy products. Fortification of commonly consumed foods can address deficiencies in essential micronutrients.

Fifth, address the underlying demographic and economic pressures. Voluntary family-planning services, girls' education, women's economic participation and better employment opportunities can improve household welfare and nutritional outcomes. Hunger reduction should be made a measurable national priority, with regular district-level data, clear targets and public reporting on government performance.

Finally, federal and provincial authorities must coordinate their programmes. Pakistan

should establish an accountable national food-security framework that tracks not only food production and prices but also dietary quality, childhood growth and household access to nutritious meals. Pakistan's performance in the Global Hunger Index is a warning that agricultural capacity does not automatically translate into human well-being. Unless Pakistan confronts poverty, child malnutrition, agricultural inefficiency and policy failure together, hunger will continue to damage the health and potential of coming generations.

Pakistan's external economy: Vulnerable despite reserves

Muhammad Hassan

The rise in prices of crude oil on the global markets, difficulties in conducting business transactions with Gulf nations due to the ongoing conflict, as well as the protracted Russia-Ukraine war have increased the risks in the external sector of the economy.

Foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan were quite impressive at the end of September with a value of \$21.4 billion, which provided much needed relief in the context of the prevailing uncertainties in the economy. The reserves represent a buffer stock worth of only around three months of import bill and are generally regarded as the bare minimum standard set by international finance institutions.

Any further rise in the cost of imports and any kind of disruption to the foreign exchange flows will render the situation vulnerable. The major shortcoming in the external sector of Pakistan is that there has been no significant rise in exports to match the level of imports. This discrepancy continues to push the country into the same old boom and bust cycle again and again. When the economy witnesses an improvement in its performance, the demand for imports starts increasing.

While measures to curb imports may help to reduce the current account deficit in the short term, they do influence industrial production and economic growth, too. Businesses reliant on imports find it difficult to sustain their output levels, and uncertainty regarding access to raw materials tends to discourage investment. Once restrictions are lifted, demand for imports rebounds, adding pressure on the external position of the economy. This has been a recurring pattern in

Pakistan, indicating that import compression cannot be a sustainable solution to the country's balance-of-payments problem.

These latest numbers highlight the continuing nature of the problem. The current account deficit of Pakistan has risen to \$874 million in the first quarter of FY27 (July-September 2026), from \$755 million in the same period last year. While the amount itself may not appear alarming, the trend is important at a time when there are still significant needs for external financing.

In the case of a consistent current account deficit, there is a need for a nation

the US dollar, especially when there has been a devaluation in the exchange rates of various trading partners. An exchange rate that is stable ensures that there is stability in the import price level while also enabling business people to plan better.

In its evaluation of the economy of Pakistan, the International Monetary Fund has continuously highlighted the need for exchange rate flexibility. In a statement issued in October, the Fund highlighted that exchange rate flexibility should continue playing its role as a major shock absorber. The other requirements included increased reserve holdings,

gradual foreign exchange liberalisation and deepening of domestic financial markets to increase resilience and facilitate the development of the private sector.

It shows how external stability through administrative means has its own limitations. Exchange rate flexibility backed by sound economic policies will make sure that the economy is able to cope with any external shock. The only problem is that exchange rate flexibility has to be backed

by steps to increase productivity, export performance and protection of poor households against higher costs of living.

Another area where Pakistan is falling short is that of foreign investment. Foreign direct investment in the last fiscal year amounted to \$1.6723 billion while portfolio investment had a net outflow of \$1.186 billion. Hence the net flow of funds from both these sources comes up to around \$486.1 million. Such levels of investment are inadequate for meeting the requirements of an economy aspiring towards



to earn foreign exchange through borrowing, investments, remittances or even through the available reserves. Pakistan has often had recourse to multilateral funding agencies to address this situation. Although this approach prevents a crisis from developing, continuous borrowing leads to higher debt levels, thereby exposing the economy to the vagaries of international finance.

Then there is the issue of exchange rates. Various independent economists have questioned the strength of the rupee against

growth and a sound external position.

This is despite the fact that there has been an increase of 3.51 percent in the stock market index. The reason why this might be happening could be due to the fact that portfolio investment has been negative even while the stock market index has increased.

The subinvestment grade creditworthiness of Pakistan makes it harder for it to attract investment under favorable terms. Investors consider political uncertainty, risk of currency fluctuations, expenses associated with energy, regulation, and the capability of the government to honor its debts. Thus, a good environment for investments is created by stable policy, quality infrastructure, proper regulation, and assurance that firms would have a predictable legal environment when conducting business.

Public debt is yet another problem. While the ratio of public debt to GDP continues falling, one has to take into account the change in the structure and the cost of public debt. The transformation of short-term debt into long-term debt is helpful to lower the refinancing problem, but it might result in higher interest expenses. The extension of terms of loan repayment does not necessarily mean that there is no debt problem.

The recent issuance of Eurobonds worth \$3 billion by the government is one example

which highlights these risks. The country has generated \$1.75 billion via Eurobonds at the rate of 7.5 per cent for five and a half years and \$1.25 billion at the rate of 7.9 per cent for a ten-year period. Although these dealings help the country to generate foreign exchange immediately, yet they result in a huge liability for the country in the form of future obligations of dollars. Should the rupee devalue prior to the payment period, the cost of servicing the debt in terms of domestic currency would go up even more.

The risk of financial liability in the energy sector is also very high. For instance, payments owed to Chinese IPPs have been reported to be worth Rs498 billion and the circular debt in the energy sector has crossed Rs2 trillion. These liabilities could also pose a threat to the country's finances in the form of various government subsidies, guarantees, delays in payments etc.

A new strategy is needed to tackle these interrelated issues. Reforms in the tax system must expand the revenue base while not overburdening the taxpayer who is already paying taxes. In the energy sector, there is a need to lower costs and increase efficiency as well as addressing the root cause of circular debt. Export oriented industries need a stable policy framework, reliable and affordable energy and advanced technology among others.

There is also need to encourage productive foreign investment instead of relying too much on the inflow of financial resources from abroad and overseas borrowings. There will be confidence among investors if economic policies are consistent and certain. Education, skills, infrastructure and technology will also play an important role in making local businesses move to more value added products and exports.

The constant resorting to the IMF programs by Pakistan poses a crucial question regarding the effectiveness of its economic policy. Over several decades, Pakistan has implemented roughly 25 agreements with the Fund; however, many of the structural problems that have led to the need for earlier programs have not been addressed. The international help can help stabilize the economy but it cannot replace the internal reforms aimed at improving the productivity and increasing the export capacity.

Pakistan has to make use of the resources that it already has and the breathing room created by the international help in order to implement sensible and consistent economic policies. The implementation of the IMF requirements might be essential in order to keep up the access to the loans; however, the ultimate goal has to be to minimize the dependence on the loans.

Pakistan's debt trap: The cost of borrowing

Muhammad Zain

The rising dependency of the Pakistani government on both internal and external borrowings poses major doubts about its seriousness in ensuring financial independence. Even though the prime minister and other high ranking officials have been promising over and over again that the IMF program would be the last, the latest borrowing statistics imply that the dream of financial independence is still out of reach.

For Pakistan to stop switching from one source of financing to another, and having to allocate an ever-increasing share of its income on servicing its debt, the problem of structural weaknesses, which cause these fiscal and external deficits, needs to be solved. According to the statistics published by the Economic Affairs Division, in the first quarter of the present fiscal year (from July to September) Pakistan borrowed \$5.445 billion, as opposed to \$1.815

billion in the same quarter of the last year.

Out of this amount, multilateral sources supplied \$952.2 million and the bilateral sources contributed \$58.1 million. This type of financing is usually available on relatively favorable terms, especially in case they are from development institutions that make concessional loans. The rest of the money, however, involved large borrowing from international capital markets and other relatively costly sources.

The country made a two tranche issue of Eurobond that helped Pakistan to obtain about \$3 billion. It borrowed \$1.75 billion through bonds that offered annual interest rate of 7.5pc with a tenure of five and a half years. The second transaction of \$1.25 billion was made through ten-year bonds with annual interest rate of 7.9pc. This helped Pakistan get immediate foreign exchange, but this money will have to be paid back in the future. At this point, Pakistan is still suffering from poor exports

and trade deficits.

The implications are not limited to the interest payments alone. Pakistan will have to ultimately find the foreign exchange to pay off the debt. Failure of export earnings to improve enough could lead the government into pressure on its reserves again and force it to borrow more to service its debt obligations. It will only lead to a vicious circle of borrowing to pay off debts, and not investing in productive areas.

Depreciation of the Pakistani rupee was estimated to be about three per cent during the last year, less than the average historical annual depreciation of about four to five per cent. While exchange rate stability helps in controlling inflation from imports and gives more certainty to the business environment, rigidity in the exchange rate can also pose problems to the economy. The key task here is to make sure that the exchange rate management helps the exports and does not hinder their competitiveness. What Pakistan needs is an effective

foreign exchange strategy in tune with its economic reality along with efforts aimed at improving efficiency, lowering production cost, and diversification of exports. Otherwise, stability of the currency will not provide Pakistan with a balanced external account.

The rising trade deficit in the first quarter of the current fiscal year is another sign. With the rise in economic activities and import needs, the country requires more foreign exchange. If the level of exports does not grow as much, balance of payments gets strained again and creates the familiar pattern of boom and bust cycle. Such a pattern has been observed in Pakistan many times before – the period of stability is followed by the growth of imports, depletion of foreign reserves, resorting to urgent borrowing and economic restraints.

Pakistan's frequent use of IMF programs is an indication of the severity of its structural problems. The country has made about 25 IMF arrangements over time, showing how often its economic policymakers have not succeeded in avoiding another balance of payments problem. Ever since 2019, each program has involved making tough up-front commitments and imposing policy conditions on the country. In addition, the government has had to deal with rolling over around \$10 billion that has been placed with the State Bank of Pakistan by three friendly countries.

The government has been converting some short-term debts into long-term debts to ease the pressure of repayment. While such a process will help in improving cash flow management, and avoiding problems with refinancing at short notice, it can also lead to increased interest costs being incurred over the



lifetime of the debt.

High interest rates in the domestic economy exacerbate the issue even further. Given that the policy rate is fixed at 11.5 pc, interest charges still amount to quite a bit when compared to those in many regional economies. Interest payments during the current fiscal year have been estimated at about 43 pc of total spending and 46 pc of current spending. This underscores the fiscal space taken up by previous years' commitments.

The government therefore needs to revise its fiscal strategy. A big budget deficit, projected to be in the region of Rs7 trillion for the current fiscal year, translates into further borrowing and higher debt-servicing costs. Decreasing this deficit involves much more than reducing developmental expenditure and raising taxes on compliant citizens. It requires

more revenue generation, improved targeting of public spending, effective governance, and eliminating wasteful expenditure.

Pakistan cannot finance its way to independence financially. It needs to promote its exports, make productive investments, collect taxes effectively, lower energy costs, and ensure that public borrowing adds to economic growth. Fiscal prudence must come with measures that increase income in the country and provide jobs rather than making people economically worse off. Pakistan's claim of breaking free from a series of fund programs will never materialize unless it tackles the causes of such programs becoming inevitable for the country. The true test will not be how much the government will borrow and what stability it brings through borrowing but how well it pays its bills through its economic growth.

Pakistan's economy: The gap between stabilisation and sustainability

Shahid Hussain

The economy of Pakistan has been trying to stabilise for many years to overcome the problems related to pressure on finance and balance of payments. Though there has been a change in recent times which helped in reducing the problems, still the country is very far from reaching the stage where it will have sustained growth to improve people's living standards, create jobs and overcome poverty.

The last World Bank report titled Pakistan Development Update talks about the great potential that is available in the economy and the reforms that need to be carried out in order to make it happen. According to the World Bank, the annual growth of economy of

Pakistan can range from 6.2pc to 6.9pc if the policies and institutions become like those of other middle income countries. With the help of this achievement, Pakistan would be able to reach the income level of Vietnam and triple the incomes till 2050.

The economy appears to be recovering. The real GDP rose by 3.65pc in FY26, and the primary fiscal surplus was achieved at the level of 2.9pc of GDP. This clearly shows that the government has taken some steps towards the restoration of fiscal discipline and control of economic imbalances. Nevertheless, the impact of the positive changes on the lives of ordinary people is rather limited since the growth of per capita income stands at the level of only 1.6pc.

The difference between stabilisation and

sustainability is crucial in the analysis of the economic situation in Pakistan. The international financial organisations and credit-rating agencies have already appreciated the efforts made by the country to restore macroeconomic stability. However, improved financial stability does not necessarily mean increased investments, exports, jobs, and personal incomes.

Most of the stability witnessed recently has been possible through economic policies that are quite restrictive in nature. The high interest rates, fiscal contraction and high costs of energy have resulted in a suppression of domestic demand, limited borrowing and decreased imports. While such policies may help alleviate the problems of foreign exchange reserves and the balance of payments, they have increased

the cost of conducting business activities. The policies may be a necessity during a period of crisis, they cannot be used as the basis of economic growth in the long run. It is not possible for an economy to depend on restricted demand and limited imports while at the same time encouraging companies to increase their production, adopt advanced technology and compete in the international market.

Worker's remittances from abroad have constituted yet another important channel of assistance. The money earned by Pakistani expatriates has been used to finance imports and enhance consumption and economic strength abroad. External borrowing has served to ease some of the financial constraints faced by the country by meeting its financing needs and managing its short-term problems. However, these channels of assistance cannot be used as substitutes for an efficient domestic economy. Remittances earn foreign exchange, but they do not necessarily increase the capacity of industry or exports. While borrowing provides funds for the present, it creates future obligations for repayments. Likewise, while curbing imports may help the current account of balance of payments in the short run, it does not make the domestic economy stronger in the process.

This presents a familiar scenario for Pakistan in which every time there is an increase in economic activities, the demand for machinery, fuels, raw materials, and equipment imports increases. In case there is not a similar increase in exports, then the trade gap becomes wider, foreign exchange reserves become strained, and the government resorts to yet another round of restrictive policies. The ensuing slowdown again adversely affects investment and employment, leading to the same cycle being repeated.

A way out of this cycle lies in the reform of the economic structure, whereby

Pakistan is expected to achieve higher levels of efficiency, diversification of exports and reduction of costs which keep local firms non-competitive. Growth in this situation will have to come from increased productivity and production capacity. These difficulties are neither new nor hard to pinpoint. Costly energy makes production more expensive in farming, industry and services. A limited tax base imposes the cost of taxation more heavily on compliant firms and people, whereas much economic activity is lightly taxed. Complex rules, lack of competitiveness and policy uncertainty keep investors away from making the investments that require time to pay off.

Poor human capital is another major deficiency. Lack of skills among workers constrains the ability of firms to use advanced technology and improve their methods of production to shift to high value-added products and services. Without better schooling, training and health care, Pakistan cannot expect to make sufficient improvements in productivity to support growth. Meeting these challenges calls for a sustained and thoughtful approach to change. Taxation policies will need to widen the tax base by taxing those sectors that have been under-taxed, rather than imposing more tax on the same old taxpayers. A rational taxation policy will be better at collecting taxes and providing the government with more steady revenues.

The energy sector will need to address the problems of high costs of production of electricity and fuel. Simply shifting costs from consumers to the government will not solve the problem. The availability of cheaper and more efficient energy is vital for the development of industries, making exports more competitive and creating jobs.

Finally, the export policy should not depend on short-term incentives and subsi-

dies. The country should invest in technology, product improvement, exploration of new markets and developing stronger linkages between local producers and international supply chains. Value addition in agriculture and manufacturing along with a more competitive services sector may help the country in earning foreign exchange.

Just as crucial is the credibility of the public institutions. Changes in policies, lack of enforcement, and uncertainty about the regulations are disincentives to long-term investments. The business community needs assurance that economic laws and regulations will continue to be predictable and that contracts, property rights, and regulations will be honored. As such, institutional credibility is more of an absolute necessity and not just another thing.

It must be remembered that the World Bank's estimates should be considered a measure of success of the reforms and not necessarily an automatic route to prosperity. For Vietnam to achieve its current level of income, investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and technology by way of institutions that can deliver on their promises is vital. Growth that leads to job creation must also be achieved.

It is fortunate for Pakistan to have been provided with some breathing room owing to its recent attempts at stabilizing the country. This precious time can be rendered fruitless if the government goes back to its old practices. The crucial aspect is that of the ability of the government to transform good financial indicators into a sustainable economy. In the absence of tax and energy reforms, competitiveness in exports, productivity, and consistency in policies, any rapid growth can result in international pressure leading to the need for another adjustment.

Rooting democracy in Pakistani society

Raza Khan

Pakistan is officially and constitutionally a democratic state. It has an elected parliament at the federal level, and the government derives its legitimacy from that parliament. Likewise, all provinces and territories, including Gilgit-Baltistan, have elected governments. Despite this constitutional framework, many political analysts, both within Pakistan and abroad, argue that democracy in the country is either nominal, incomplete, or merely quasi-democratic.

Without entering the long-standing

debate over whether Pakistan is a genuine democracy or the precise nature of its democratic system, it is important to address a more fundamental question that is often overlooked by both experts and ordinary citizens: What is democracy, and what does it truly mean? Without understanding the essence of democracy, it is impossible to determine whether Pakistan can genuinely be described as a democratic state.

Many people in Pakistan equate democracy solely with the holding of periodic elections and the formation of governments

through the electoral process. This, however, is a narrow and distorted understanding of democracy. Democratic institutions, political forces, and civil society have collectively failed to recognize that democracy is not merely a political arrangement established through elections. A system that depends exclusively on elections may more accurately be described as an "electocracy" rather than a democracy. Elections constitute only one component of the democratic process. Democracy is, in fact, a comprehensive political and social culture built upon institutions, values, norms, and

public participation. It cannot be established solely through elections or parliamentary representation.

Pakistan has largely failed to lay the foundations of a genuine democratic culture by instilling democratic values, principles, and norms within society. Only when these values become deeply embedded in the thinking and behaviour of individuals can they be translated into collective actions that sustain democratic institutions. Consequently, it is essential to examine why Pakistan has failed to cultivate such a democratic culture. Only through this introspection can the country effectively counter anti-democratic tendencies that periodically threaten constitutional governance.

A durable democratic culture requires citizens to develop both an objective and subjective understanding of democratic values and their individual and collective benefits. Unfortunately, democratic institutions and civil society have not adequately educated citizens about these values. Without a widespread appreciation of democratic principles, there can be little expectation that citizens will actively resist anti-democratic forces, including political actors who themselves may undermine democratic norms. In the absence of public commitment to democratic values, the political system lacks the internal resilience necessary for its long-term sustainability.

The foremost value of any democratic order is freedom. Democratic freedom encompasses freedom of belief, expression, speech, movement, association, assembly, and access to information. Freedom is not merely one feature of democracy; it is its very essence. Without freedom, democracy cannot exist in any meaningful sense. Democratic institutions—including an independent judiciary, Parliament, academia, civil society, and a free media—both protect and derive their legitimacy from the principle of freedom.

Pakistani society has traditionally been conservative, where individual freedom has not always been regarded as a paramount social value. The structure of families, clans, educational institutions, and social organizations has often prioritized conformity over individual autonomy. Consequently, democratic institutions should have played a more significant role in promoting personal liberty and protecting fundamental freedoms. Although some progress has been made, these institutions have been constrained by the same conservative social environment within which they operate. Furthermore, relatively low literacy rates and limited civic education have reduced society's capacity to fully appreciate and defend democratic freedoms.

Another fundamental pillar of democracy is justice. Justice and equality are closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Justice cannot be fully realized unless citizens are aware of their legal, political, constitutional,

and economic rights. In Pakistan, widespread illiteracy and inadequate educational standards have prevented many citizens from fully understanding their rights, let alone demanding their protection. Even many educated individuals remain unfamiliar with the constitutional guarantees available to them. This lack of awareness has often contributed to public indifference whenever constitutional governments have been overthrown or democratic institutions weakened. Indeed, Pakistan's history shows that several military takeovers were initially welcomed by sections of society rather than resisted.

Poverty has further restricted access to justice. The high cost of litigation places legal remedies beyond the reach of millions of citizens. Moreover, the complexity of Pakistan's legal framework often prevents ordinary people from understanding both their rights and the procedures required to enforce them. Democratic institutions therefore have a critical responsibility not only to deliver justice but also to educate citizens about their constitutional protections and legal entitlements. In this respect, considerable progress remains necessary.

Equality is another indispensable democratic value. Pakistani society continues to experience profound social and economic inequalities. Political power has historically remained concentrated among influential elites, while the broader population has exercised only limited influence over public decision-making. Economic opportunities have likewise remained disproportionately available to privileged social groups. These structural inequalities have contributed to persistent disparities in wealth, education, healthcare, and political representation.

Democratic institutions bear enormous responsibility for reducing these inequalities by ensuring equal access to justice, education, economic opportunities, and political participation. Unfortunately, progress in promoting substantive equality has remained limited, leaving significant segments of society marginalized from the benefits of democratic governance.

A democratic system also depends upon order, stability, and effective governance. Democracy thrives where institutions function efficiently, laws are enforced fairly, and governments are capable of delivering essential public services. Pakistan is a highly diverse country, comprising multiple ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and regional identities. Such diversity makes social cohesion and effective governance even more important.

However, Pakistani state institutions have frequently struggled to provide basic public services, maintain law and order, enforce regulations, and ensure effective administration. These institutional weaknesses have made the maintenance of social order increasingly difficult. Simultaneously,

widespread poverty and limited educational opportunities have prevented many citizens from fully appreciating the importance of civic responsibility, respect for the rule of law, and social discipline. Even when individuals desire stability, they often lack the civic awareness necessary to contribute effectively to it.

In this context, democratic institutions—particularly the media—have a vital role to play. A free and responsible media can strengthen democratic governance by serving as an effective watchdog, exposing corruption, monitoring abuses of power, and promoting transparency and accountability. Equally important, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the media must work together to promote civic education and democratic awareness. Citizens should understand not only their rights but also their responsibilities in maintaining social order, respecting the rule of law, and contributing to national development.

Political parties must also strengthen their internal democratic practices. Genuine democracy requires transparency, accountability, internal elections, policy-based politics, and merit-based leadership within political organizations. Parties that fail to practice democracy internally are unlikely to strengthen democratic governance nationally.

Similarly, educational curricula should incorporate civic education that familiarizes students with constitutional principles, democratic institutions, human rights, tolerance, pluralism, and responsible citizenship. Democracies are sustained not merely through constitutions but through citizens who understand and actively defend democratic values.

Ultimately, democracy is far more than an electoral process. It is a culture rooted in freedom, justice, equality, accountability, participation, tolerance, and respect for the rule of law. Elections provide legitimacy to governments, but democratic culture provides legitimacy to the entire political system.

In light of these realities, Pakistan's democratic institutions must undertake serious introspection if democratic governance is to endure. They must actively disseminate democratic values throughout society and strengthen civic education at every level. Only by building a genuine democratic culture can Pakistan establish a political system capable of resisting authoritarian tendencies and delivering lasting political stability, social justice, and economic development.

The sustainability of democracy depends not merely upon constitutions, elections, or elected governments, but upon citizens who believe in democratic values and institutions that consistently uphold them. Unless Pakistan succeeds in nurturing such a culture, democracy will remain vulnerable to repeated crises, and merely lamenting its setbacks will serve little purpose.

Sindh schools without basics, children without futures

Rasheed Ali

The school bell may ring across Sindh, but for millions of children, the journey to a classroom remains a distant dream. In some villages, the nearest school is too far to reach. In others, buildings stand without drinking water, electricity or proper toilets. For children who manage to enrol, absent teachers, poor learning conditions and examination malpractice can undermine the very purpose of education.

This is the troubling paradox at the heart of Sindh's education crisis: despite substantial public spending and repeated reform pledges, millions of children remain outside the formal school system, while many who attend school struggle to receive a meaningful education.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics' Household Integrated Economic Survey 2024-25 puts Sindh's out-of-school rate at 39 per cent among children aged five to 16, down from 42pc in 2018-19. The gender gap remains significant: 44pc of girls and 35pc of boys are out of school. In July 2026, a senior education official put the number of children excluded from formal education at approximately 7.6 million, underscoring the scale of the challenge.

Behind these figures are children whose futures are shaped by where they are born. In remote villages of Tharparkar, Dadu, Jacobabad and other underserved districts, the absence of a nearby functional school can determine whether a child receives an education at all. For girls, long distances, safety concerns, inadequate sanitation and shortages of female teachers can create additional barriers. Poverty and child labour further narrow the choices available to families struggling to make ends meet.

The infrastructure deficit makes the situation worse. Findings from Sindh's Economic Survey 2025-26, reported in June, indicated that only 32pc of public schools had electricity. Figures presented by the provincial education minister to the Sindh Assembly showed that, among 40,978 assessed government schools, 26,006 had drinking water, 13,013 electricity, 17,136 toilets and 20,913 boundary walls.

The deficiencies are particularly stark in rural districts. A school census report on Dadu, published in November 2025, identified 72 schools without buildings and 33 operating under trees. Of the district's schools, 439 buildings had been declared dangerous, while

843 lacked drinking water, 826 had no electricity and 268 had no toilets. The report also identified 49 completely closed schools and 20 closed temporary schools.

For children studying in such conditions, equal educational opportunity remains an empty promise. Extreme heat, unsafe buildings and inadequate sanitation make attendance difficult, while the absence of basic facilities undermines learning and dignity.

Yet the crisis cannot be solved simply by constructing more buildings. Sindh has also struggled with teacher attendance, school management and accountability. A monitoring report cited in the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's report on the state of human rights in 2024 identified 6,342 alleged ghost teachers on the government payroll and recommended action, including freezing salaries and initiating legal proceedings. The figure highlights a serious accountability concern but should not be interpreted as a verified count of teachers currently absent from duty.

The distinction is important. Some schools are closed or exist largely on paper; others operate with inadequate resources, while some have buildings and teachers but fail to deliver effective learning. Each problem demands reliable monitoring and a targeted response.

In major cities, the crisis takes a different form. Karachi's matriculation examinations in April 2026 faced allegations of cheating, paper leaks and administrative irregularities. Videos circulated on social media showing candidates using mobile phones and copying from notes. The Board of Secondary Education Karachi reported that hundreds of students had been caught cheating and announced disciplinary action against some examination-centre officials.

Sindh Education Minister Syed Sardar Ali Shah acknowledged in September 2026 that the challenge of out-of-school children could not be addressed by the Education Department alone. Speaking at an International Literacy Day event, he cited poverty, population growth and the limited involvement of other sectors as major obstacles, calling for sustained investment and a clearer federal role in supporting provincial efforts.

According to the minister, around 1.6 million children are born in Sindh annually, creating a need for approximately 30,000 new classrooms each year, based on Population Council data he cited. The figures illustrate the pressure on a system that must expand

access while improving the quality of existing schools.

The provincial government has allocated approximately Rs620 billion to education in its 2026-27 budget, including Rs25.86 billion for education development schemes. The government has also announced technology-based attendance monitoring and other initiatives to improve enrolment and school management. The real test, however, is whether spending translates into functioning classrooms, present teachers, adequate facilities and measurable improvements in learning.

There are encouraging signs. In October 2026, the education minister said non-formal education initiatives had connected nearly 100,000 out-of-school children to learning through 1,880 centres across six districts since April 2025. The department had also distributed 1,000 digital tablets to facilitators to support teaching, communication and attendance monitoring.

Chiho Ohashi, chief adviser for Education and Literacy at the Japan International Cooperation Agency in Pakistan, said the tablets would improve facilitators' access to teaching materials and enable more interactive learning. They could also support online training and professional development. However, technology cannot substitute for qualified teachers, adequate facilities or a coherent pathway into sustained education.

In August 2026, the Sindh government and the United Nations reaffirmed their commitment to a five-year plan focusing on enrolment, retention and learning quality. Its success will depend on measurable targets, transparent reporting and consistent implementation rather than announcements alone.

Reform must address access and accountability simultaneously. Rural schools need safe buildings, drinking water, toilets, electricity and sufficient teachers. Authorities must establish which schools are operational, which require urgent repairs and where alternative learning arrangements are necessary. Teacher attendance systems should be independently verified, while recruitment, transfers and promotions must be protected from political interference. Communities should have accessible channels to report absent staff, missing facilities and misuse of funds.

In urban centres, examination boards need stronger paper security, effective supervision and prompt investigations into malpractice. Findings should be made public, and penalties applied consistently. Students

must be assessed on what they have learned, not merely on whether they have completed a syllabus or sat an examination.

Most importantly, success must be measured beyond enrolment. A child registered at school but absent for months is not receiving an education. Nor is a pupil who attends regularly but cannot read an age-appropriate passage or perform basic arithmetic. Attendance, retention, foundational learning and completion rates must become central measures of performance.

The consequences extend far beyond classrooms. Children denied education face greater risks of poverty and exploitation, while Sindh loses future professionals, skilled workers and entrepreneurs. Girls excluded from schooling face particularly severe restrictions on their economic and social opportunities.

Sindh does not lack evidence of its education crisis or proposals to address it. What remains essential is the political commitment to implement reforms, the administrative dis-

cipline to monitor results and the willingness to hold those responsible accountable.

For children still waiting for a meaningful education, progress will not be measured by another budget announcement or inauguration ceremony. It will mean a functioning school within reach, a teacher in the classroom, a safe place to learn and the knowledge that attending school offers a genuine path to a better future. Until these conditions become the norm, Sindh's promise of education for all will remain unfinished.

The lifeline under threat: Global refugee crisis meets funding shortfall

Dr Fatima Khan

The current scarcity of humanitarian funding leaves millions of refugees and forcibly displaced people vulnerable to losing necessary aid in a system that is already ill-equipped to cope with simultaneous crises.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued a stark warning that 8.3 million forcibly displaced people may lose access to necessary services due to the lack of funding. As is often the case, humanitarian emergencies do not necessarily resolve themselves once the attention of the international community shifts away from them; their aftermath may last for years to come.

There are behind this number of vulnerable people – refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless individuals who rely on humanitarian agencies for their basic protection and chances to start afresh. Humanitarian aid for many means far more than just food and housing. Assistance in their case implies access to legal documentation, education, protection from abuse and exploitation, help with children, employment opportunities, and security that is necessary to live with dignity.

The financial data published by UNHCR show the magnitude of the problem. The budget of the organization has been reduced from \$5.2 billion in 2024 to \$3.9 billion in 2025 despite the fact that there have been exceptionally high humanitarian needs. UNHCR now needs \$8.5 billion to execute its programs. Up until July, however, it has managed to raise only \$2.7 billion which constitutes only 32 per cent of what it needs.

Such a difference between required amounts of money and the budget is likely to affect the process of humanitarian actions in the countries with a lot of displaced people.

Organizations now are forced to concentrate on the priorities and cut programs as well as reconsider the level of assistance. While this helps save the budget, it does not solve the problem of many communities which do not receive the necessary services.

These impacts are beginning to be felt in a number of countries. In Chad, hundreds of thousands of refugees are facing delays in being registered, and consequently, could end up missing out on the documents required for accessing key services. Without proper documentation, refugees may find it difficult to access help, create means of livelihood, and go

vulnerable children may be at risk of losing crucial protection services due to a humanitarian crisis that is continuing to unfold. For victims of sexual violence, specialized services could become necessary in order to obtain access to health care, counseling, and legal protection. Children who lack these protections are at risk of becoming victimized and exploited.

This shows how the provision of protection services cannot be a low priority compared to emergency relief efforts. Food, water, and shelter are crucial, but people also require security, legal recognition, and institutions that will protect their rights. Lack of such protections leaves people vulnerable to exploitation through displacement, thus rendering humanitarian intervention useless.

The financial crisis has further contributed to a reduction in the institutional capacities necessary for providing assistance. UNHCR cut down its staff by almost 5,000 employees in 2025, which constitutes over one-fourth of its staff strength. Such a drastic reduction is not just an issue related to administration; instead, such a cutback has an impact on registering refugees and responding to their protection needs, etc.

Efforts have been made by UNHCR to restructure itself and ensure efficiency, as well as focus its energy on its core competencies. Nevertheless, such a process cannot replace financial deficits indefinitely. Assistance requires people who are trained and have resources and functioning institutions within the locality. If these elements are weak, provision of assistance becomes difficult, less effective and less accessible to those who require it the most.

It would be wrong to feel a misplaced sense of relief because of the reported fall in



about other business. Thus, registration does not simply entail bureaucracy; it is the first step towards protection and stability in the new environment.

In Ethiopia, too, child protection coverages have been reduced in certain regions. Children who have been displaced due to conflicts and persecution are most vulnerable to being exploited, trafficked, abused and forced to labor. Protection programmes become weaker and children who have already suffered trauma and disruption of normal family lives are put at further risk.

In Sudan, victims of sexual violence and

global displacement from 123.2 million to 117.8 million in 2024 and 2025, respectively. While the reduction is indeed a good thing, the number remains huge. Millions of people are still suffering from conflicts, persecution, insecurity and homelessness. Besides, no numbers can tell us how hard people are suffering and how much is needed to help them rebuild.

Humanitarian aid should be considered an investment in social stability and human development. Giving refugees documentation, education, vocational training and access to work enables them to gain independence. Helping displaced people also alleviates the burden of the hosting population as it allows people to make economic contributions instead of depending on humanitarian aid.

On the other hand, drastic cuts in assistance may worsen the plight of people living in poverty and make them insecure and

pose additional difficulties to the host nations. Children may lack the prospects of a good future since they do not get an education and families lack livelihoods and therefore they become more susceptible to exploitation. In the end, the costs incurred may surpass the money saved through reduction of humanitarian budget.

The idea is not to ensure that there will be indefinite reliance on the international community but rather to assist the people to build back their lives and make them independent once again. This needs better coordination between humanitarian organizations, donor nations, the host nation, and development agencies. Also there should be constant commitment in the communities receiving the refugees in order to avoid competition for scarce public funds.

Donor nations are burdened by conflict-

ing interests and cannot provide full funding for all humanitarian needs. However, they must be aware of the repercussions of depriving people of help without viable alternatives. Predictability in funding, involvement of more donors and cooperation with local organizations can guarantee provision of basic services despite unstable times.

Finally, the UNHCR statement is evidence of the fact that the level of humanitarian engagement should not be assessed only based on budget allocation. The decisions on how to use money will define the legal status of refugees, the safety of vulnerable minors and the assistance provided to victims of violence. For millions of displaced people, these issues are crucial for safety, dignity and their future life. It is necessary to take measures in order not to make the problem even worse due to funding shortages.

Why is Gen Z revolting?

Oscar Berglund

We are currently experiencing a wave of protests across Europe and beyond. Many have been dubbed “Gen Z protests”, with young people aged roughly 13 to 29 leading demonstrations over issues that particularly affect their generation.

In France, protests started several weeks ago over deteriorating conditions in severely underfunded schools. They have been growing in strength, with between half a million and 800,000 protesters reportedly taking part in them across the country last weekend.

In India, the Cockroach movement has emerged as the strongest challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s increasingly authoritarian leadership. Last week, its leader was arrested as anger grew over the removal of more than 130 million names from electoral rolls. In Spain, anger has arisen over a broken housing system and laws that fail to protect households against eviction. First there was the forcible eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal. Then parliament voted down widely popular legislation that would protect households against evictions, prompting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez to call snap elections. Maricarmen died two weeks after her eviction.

While the context in each country is different, grievances over inequality are at the centre of the current protest wave. This inequality has two aspects. One is about class and one is about generation.

Across Europe, inequality has increased significantly since the 2008 crisis. This can be seen in growing income inequality and spiralling

wealth inequality. The effect on people’s lives is worsened by the erosion of the once-proud European welfare states. High-quality public services for all were once meant to offer a guaranteed minimum standard of living and a meritocracy in which everyone had the chance to succeed. But years of austerity have eroded the state’s capacity to deliver good education, healthcare, social care and other services. The gradual retreat of the state exacerbates growing income and wealth inequalities, as some can pay for better services while many cannot.

These growing inequalities are often felt more acutely by young people and are compounded by other challenges they face. In one area after another, young people are experiencing failures in governance that give them a bleaker outlook and much worse prospects than their parents and grandparents had.

Underfunded education systems have no doubt played a significant part in the sharp decline in reading and maths skills laid bare by the most recent PISA results. A common explanation for this decline is worsening mental health and associated school absences, with social media often cited as a contributing factor.

Another driver of declining educational attainment is the rapidly increasing use of AI. These are governance failures of another kind. Efforts to regulate both social media and AI have been slow and hampered by strong lobbying from tech giants. The AI revolution also affects young people as they seek to establish themselves in the labour market. While AI’s impact on employment is still in its infancy, it is already clear that entry-level work in particular is increasingly being done by machines.

Housing is another essential aspect of life in which young people are disadvantaged. Today’s young people spend a much higher proportion of their income on rent than any previous generation did. This is, again, a failure of governance.

On top of all this comes the climate crisis, which perhaps represents the largest governance failure of them all. The latest IPCC report illustrates starkly how much more precarious life will be for those born in 2020 than for their parents and grandparents. More equal societies would be much better placed to withstand the instability that climate change brings as they would offer collective forms of adaptation. Instead, the increasingly unequal societies we now see will put the burden of adaptation on individuals and households.

In other words, multiple governance failures and the erosion of state capacity have created an explosive situation for young people. This is the anger being expressed on the streets of Paris, New Delhi, Rome and Madrid. Predictably, the main government response has been repression. This follows a global trend of criminalising and repressing protest. Whether through anti-protest laws, arrests or police violence, repression is on the rise. Repression sometimes succeeds in killing off protest movements. At other times, it instead inflames them. That has certainly been the case in both France and India so far.

What is really needed are genuine efforts to address the inequalities and governance failures that motivate young people to take to the streets. Without them, political crises are bound to ensue.

Regressive taxation

With the recent amendment to the Punjab Private Educational Institutions Act, the provincial government has brought home-based tuition centres, which are mainly run by young women, under the definition of 'private institute', bringing them into the tax net. This regressive taxation to the vulnerable lower-middle-class women must be viewed critically.

This debate over registering home tuition centres highlights a strife between state regulation and the socioeconomic realities of Pakistan. While the state argues that registration provides legitimacy and institutional oversight for these academies, it is a financial burden on these coaching centres, and an economic injustice. The state cannot sustainably increase its revenue by burdening the economically weaker segments of society.

First, this policy impacts small-scale, home-based tuition centres that cannot be compared to large commercial private institutes. Second, these tax and compliance costs would eventually be passed on to students in the form of rising fees, further blocking access to education for marginalised students.

Regulating tuition centres is a positive step. However, registering the centres must not be paired with financial strain, but with grants, access to better educational materials, and digital training for these centres. The government must establish a fiscal benchmark below which micro-tuition centres should be fully exempted from taxation and registration fee. Furthermore, the registration process should be online and simplified. The state must incentivise and protect these micro-pillars of its economy instead of treating them as tools to bridge its fiscal deficit.

Momina Akba
Lahore

Karachi family tragedy

This is with reference to the report "Doctor, wife and three daughters found dead in Karachi apartment." The tragedy has deeply disturbed people. Reports indicate that the doctor was suffering from a serious illness, had left his employment and was facing severe financial difficulties. The family lived in an apartment building, and people around them apparently remained unaware of the extent of the family's sufferings. It is hard to imagine how an entire family was going through such distress in an apartment block in the middle of a densely populated city.

We have built apartment buildings, housing societies and gated communities, but have we built communities in the true sense of the word? We communicate constantly through mobile phones and social media, but many people have never sat down with their neighbours. We may know what someone has

posted online, but we may not know the family living next door. Our urban centres urgently need to rediscover the concept of community. Every sizable neighbourhood and district should have easily accessible community centres, not merely as halls for weddings and meetings, but as places where people can regularly meet, talk and seek assistance without feeling that they are being judged. Such centres could provide community gatherings, counselling referrals, social activities, basic welfare information, employment guidance, medical and financial assistance linkages, and emergency support networks. Most importantly, they could create an environment in which people do talk to one another. We need to restore the human connection.

The most painful aspect of the tragedy is not the loss of lives; it is the possibility that suffering can remain completely invisible even in a city of millions. We should not wait for another locked door, another unbearable tragedy or another family to disappear before asking whether someone needed help. Society surely needs stronger institutions, better economic opportunities and effective public services. But alongside these, it needs something fundamental: people who know one another.

Nasir A. Qureshi
Karachi

Substandard chargers

Type-C chargers are becoming a part of our daily lives. People buy chargers just by looking at their finishing and size. In Pakistan, unregistered and uncertified companies manufacture aesthetically nice chargers without following proper safety and certification standards which guarantee correct and compatible charging. Due to this reason, a large number of smartphone batteries get damaged and their charging circuits fail, resulting in e-waste. Every charger should carry a unique QR code and serial number. Scanning it should open the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) website confirming if a charger is certified or not.

Muhammad Uzair
Rawalpindi

Dispensary without staff

Mullachat is one of the most important border areas of Mand, comprising three union councils. The provincial government had established a Civil Dispensary some 30 years ago, and posted a doctor to provide basic healthcare facilities to the local population. However, for the last several years, neither a doctor nor a health official has been posted at the dispensary. It is disheartening to note that an entire dispensary meant to serve thousands of people is being run by a single medical technician. The authorities concerned should upgrade Mullachat Civil Dispensary to a basic health

unit (BHU) and provide essential facilities, including doctors, nurses, lady health visitors and medicines.

Mir Junaid Ahmed
Mand

Non-functional elevators

The Punjab Mass Transit Authority has introduced e-tickets at the Rawalpindi-Islamabad Metro stations, which is another initiative towards digitalisation of the intra-city transport system. It has also been observed that most elevators and escalators at the stations have been either undergoing maintenance, or are completely non-functional. It has become inconvenient for the elderly and the physically challenged passengers to reach the bus bays. The authorities concerned must urgently ensure a convenient commute for the masses.

Salman Ahmed
Islamabad

Transnational terrorism

Every time someone mentions 9/11, people globally tend to share superficial observations. Nobody discusses the real motive or cause behind the attacks, or who their 'political beneficiaries' happen to be. For instance, on the technical side, proponents of controlled demolition theory, like physicist Steven E. Jones, architect Richard Gage and software engineer Jim Hoffman, claim that the aircraft impact and resulting fire alone could not have weakened the building sufficiently to initiate a collapse. Jones suggested that thermite or super thermite may have been used to demolish the Twin Towers. His suggestion is based on undeniable evidence because active thermite material as well as evidence of nanothermite were found in the dust of the collapsed towers.

On the political side, soon after the Twin Tower attacks, the idea of transnational terrorism was floated and prompted by the United States, and the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) hurriedly adopted Resolution 1373 on Sept 28, 2001, which bound all member states to prevent, suppress and criminalise the financing of terrorism. This resolution provided solid basis and authorisation to the US and its Nato allies to attack any country they consider a 'terrorist state'. Some other countries, too, took much advantage of Resolution 1373 to join Washington against the so-called 'radical Islam'. For instance, India has been using it to hide its own Hindutva agenda practised by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Last, but extremely dangerous, is the use of military power as the main arbiter of disputes between two countries. The US and Israel have committed the folly of using military force against Iran, but this time it has backfired strongly with telling effects.

Abid Mahmud Ansari
Islamabad

Mars has a mysterious cloud that stretches 1,100 miles across the sky

Eric Ralls

Clouds on Earth need something to grow on, and water vapor settles onto specks of dust, salt, or soot before it turns into droplets or ice.



Ice can theoretically form directly from water vapor without dust or other particles, but the conditions required are so extreme that scientists have never confirmed the process in a planetary atmosphere. On Mars, one cloud appears to be the exception. A white streak forms every morning beside a giant volcano, and its ice may have formed directly from water vapor with nothing to freeze onto, according to a new modeling study. If the model is right, it's the first time that process has been found in any planet's atmosphere. Jorge Hernández-Bernal of the Laboratoire de Météorologie Dynamique in Paris, a lab shared by CNRS and Sorbonne Université, led the work. His team's conclusion rests on a computer model of the Martian atmosphere checked against years of spacecraft images, not on a direct measurement of the ice itself. "It certainly hasn't been seen in action before," Hernández-Bernal said. The cloud appears beside Arsia Mons, a volcano about 12 miles (20 kilometers) tall. For several months of the dusty southern spring and summer it comes back every morning. It starts forming at sunrise, spreads sideways for about three hours, and then breaks away from the volcano and fades. At its longest it stretches about 1,100 miles (1,800 kilometers), farther than the straight-line distance from Chicago to Houston. It forms roughly 28 miles (45 kilometers) above the surface.

What happens in the body when you give up exercise

Caitlin Carlson

If you think it's hard to keep patients exercising, it may comfort you to know that even exercise researchers have problems getting people to stick with it. Even in carefully designed exercise studies, attrition rates can range from 25% to 50%, and the average adherence rate for those who do complete the study is about 66%.



The motivational message of physical activity always focuses on the positives: Here's what will happen if you start exercising — stronger heart and lungs, better balance, flexibility and mobility, lower blood pressure and lipid scores, improved brain health, quality of life — and more!

How long before gains reverse? How long to become deconditioned? How long will it take to bounce back to reach previous levels? Your cells tell the tale. Not much would happen in the first couple of days, possibly within the first week, said Andrew M. Jones, PhD, DSc, professor of applied physiology at the University of Exeter, Exeter, England. That's especially true if you've been training intensely before you stop, which could help you get more fit as your body recovers and adapts.

After that point, however, things do start to go downhill, Jones said, starting with plasma volume. "When you start to exercise, one of the first things that improves is that you get a larger blood volume, and that's helpful to your cardiovascular system," he said. And while there's not as much evidence around detraining — and genetics and other factors may determine exactly how quickly the process occurs — he suspects that plasma volume would also be the first thing to go when someone stops training. This, in turn, may start to lower your maximal oxygen uptake.

Why pumpkin deserves a place on your plate

Jenna Dyckman,

Many people buy pumpkins for fall décor and carving. But the next time you buy pumpkins, consider buying extras for cooking. Pumpkins are low in calories and packed with key nutrients that help keep our bodies healthy, especially during cold and flu season.



The Cleveland Clinic notes five benefits of pumpkin: Good for eye health. Pumpkins are a great source of vitamin A and other nutrients that help protect our eyes from age-related degeneration and cataracts. Good for heart health. Heart disease is a prevalent chronic disease in America. Eating foods that are good sources of heart-healthy nutrients can decrease the risk of heart disease. Pumpkins are rich in potassium, fiber, and antioxidants, all of which are beneficial for heart health. Boosts the immune system. Vitamin C is usually the first nutrient we think of when it comes to preventing colds or flu. Pumpkins are a great source of vitamin C and other immune-boosting nutrients, including vitamins A and E and iron.

Contains carotenoids. Carotenoids are the pigments produced by yellow, orange, and red plants. Carotenoids may help protect against certain types of cancer. Great for snacking. If you don't want to cook your pumpkin, save the seeds when you scoop them out for carving. Clean the seeds, season them lightly, and roast them in the oven for the perfect fall snack.

Drones discover ancient rock art hidden in Australia's Blue Mountains

Rodielon Putol

Finding an Aboriginal rock shelter in Australia's Blue Mountains has usually meant pushing through dense scrub on foot, one steep slope at a time.



That work is so slow and costly that most of the region has never been checked. Now, archaeologists using laser-equipped drones have located three shelters missing from the state's official site list.

All three hold rock art, including red hand stencils, along with stone artifacts. The researchers see the approach as a faster way for Aboriginal communities and heritage managers to find and protect cultural sites across Australia. Jacob Bongers, a digital archaeologist at the University of Sydney, led the drone research. He worked with colleagues from the Australian Museum and alongside the Dharug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation. "This work is exciting because it offers an efficient and accurate way to locate sites in rugged environments, which are notoriously arduous, expensive and time-consuming to survey," Bongers said. Rock shelters are shallow overhangs in cliffs. In Australia, many of them hold evidence that Aboriginal people lived there and made art. In the Blue Mountains, thick bush and trees block the view from above. A laser on the drone fires rapid pulses down at the land. The light that comes back is turned into a detailed 3D map. That map shows the shape of the ground even where trees would hide it from a camera. The method is called LiDAR, short for Light Detection and Ranging. Archaeologists elsewhere have used laser mapping to find lost structures under the jungle. Bongers's team built computer models that searched two kinds of laser scans for likely shelters.

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