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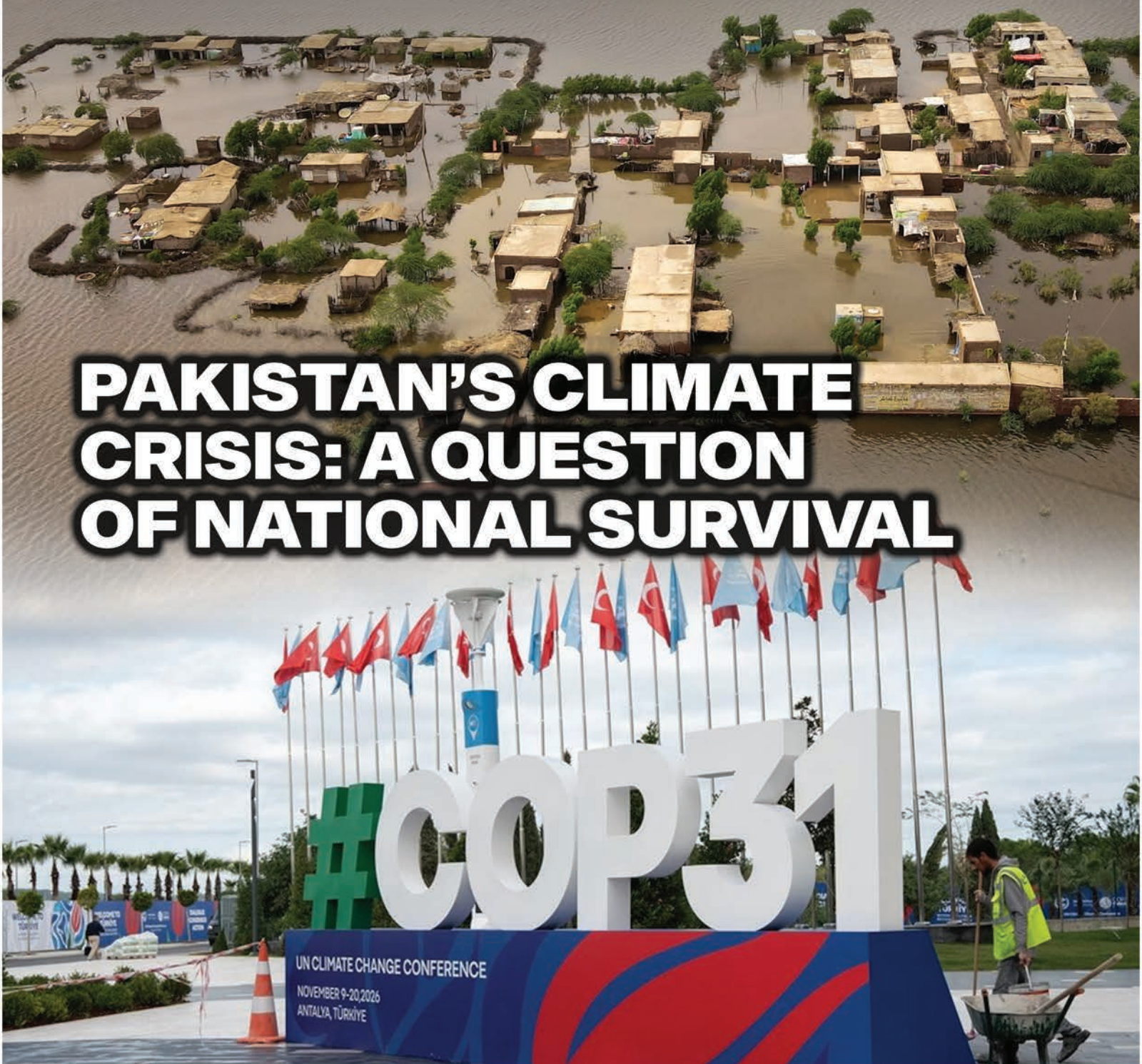

PAKISTAN'S CLIMATE CRISIS: A QUESTION OF NATIONAL SURVIVAL

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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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Pakistan's climate crisis: a question of national survival

Farhan Khan

The failure of COP31 in Antalya to forge a meaningful consensus on tackling climate change is another reminder of the widening gulf between global climate commitments and political realities.

The summit's inability to agree on an effective approach to phasing out fossil fuels, coupled with disagreements over climate finance and compensation for developing countries, has exposed the limitations of international climate diplomacy. While wealthy nations and major fossil-fuel producers remain divided over their responsibilities, countries such as Pakistan are paying an increasingly heavy price for a crisis they have contributed relatively little to creating.

For Pakistan, climate change is no longer a distant environmental threat or a subject confined to international conferences. It is an immediate economic, social and humanitarian emergency. Recurring floods, devastating heatwaves, prolonged droughts, water scarcity and erratic monsoon patterns are undermining agricultural production, destroying infrastructure, displacing communities and deepening poverty. Yet, despite repeated warnings and painful experiences, the country has failed to develop a coherent, adequately funded and effectively implemented climate strategy. The fundamental weakness of Pakistan's response is that it continues to treat climate disasters primarily as emergencies requiring relief and rehabilitation rather than as predictable risks demanding long-term planning, institutional reform and sustained investment in resilience.

The magnitude of the challenge is evident from the latest figures. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2025-26, the devastating floods of 2025 caused an estimated Rs822 billion in damages, claimed more than 1,039 lives and affected approximately 6.5 million people across 70 districts. Agricultural losses amounted to around Rs430 billion, while infrastructure damage accounted for another Rs307 billion. The 2022 floods had already affected 33 million people, killed more than 1,700 and caused over $30 billion in damages and economic losses.

The economic consequences extend far beyond the immediate destruction of crops, houses and roads. Floods disrupt supply chains, reduce agricultural output, destroy rural incomes and push vulnerable families deeper into poverty. Heatwaves reduce the productivity of outdoor workers, while water shortages threaten agricultural production and food security. An equally disturbing aspect is the unequal distribution of its consequences. Wealthier households can often fall back on savings, insurance and better housing, whereas poor families dependent on daily wages or small agricultural holdings can lose their entire livelihoods in a single disaster. Women, children, older people and persons with disabilities face additional difficulties in evacuation, healthcare and rehabilitation. Displacement, school closures, malnutrition and inadequate medical facilities inflict long-term damage on human development. Climate resilience must therefore be treated as a poverty alleviation and human development priority rather than simply an environmental concern.



Pakistan does not lack climate policies or institutional arrangements. The National Climate Change Policy 2021, National Adaptation Plan, climate-related commitments under the Paris Agreement and subsequent initiatives, including the Pakistan Climate Prosperity Plan, provide a framework for action. The government has also introduced a Green Taxonomy and undertaken measures to mobilise international climate financing. However, the fundamental problem is the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation.

A recent State Bank of Pakistan assessment identifies serious weaknesses in climate governance, including inadequate coordination between federal and provincial institutions, inconsistent provincial priorities, insufficient technical capacity and the absence of clearly defined implementation timelines. National policies often lack detailed regional action plans, measurable targets and effective monitoring arrangements.

The consequences are visible in the country's cities and rural areas. Unregulated urban expansion, construction on floodplains, encroachment on natural drainage channels, inadequate sewerage systems and poor solid waste management turn heavy rainfall into urban disasters. Lahore, Karachi and other major cities increasingly experience severe heat, water shortages and air pollution. In rural areas, inefficient irrigation, groundwater depletion, deforestation and inadequate water storage aggravate existing vulnerabilities. Another major weakness is the absence of a comprehensive disaster-prevention approach. Pakistan's early-warning and forecasting systems require substantial improvement. Equally important is the failure to translate warnings into timely action at the district and community levels.

What is the way forward? It is time to shift from disaster response to disaster preparedness. The government must strengthen the National Disaster Management Authority and provincial disaster management institutions, improve coordination and equip district administrations with trained personnel and adequate resources. Modern weather radars, satellite-based monitoring, flood forecasting systems and reliable communication networks should be established or upgraded.

Social protection should become an integral part of disaster management. Existing channels such as the Benazir Income Support Programme should be used to provide anticipatory cash transfers to vulnerable households when credible warnings indicate an approaching flood or heatwave. Emergency healthcare, temporary shelter, food supplies and arrangements for the protection of women and children should be incorporated into district-level disaster plans.

Agriculture, which remains particularly exposed to climate risks, requires urgent adaptation. Farmers should be encouraged to adopt drought- and flood-resistant crop varieties, improve irrigation efficiency, diversify cultivation and use modern weather information to determine planting and harvesting schedules. Investment in water conservation, rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, small reservoirs and rehabilitation of existing water

infrastructure is essential.

Urban planning demands equally urgent attention. Construction on waterways and floodplains must be regulated, drainage systems rehabilitated and solid waste management improved. Cities need more green spaces, urban forests, water bodies and climate-sensitive building standards to reduce heat accumulation.

In the longer term, climate resilience must be incorporated into every major economic and development decision. Infrastructure projects, housing schemes, roads, dams, industrial zones and agricultural investments should undergo climate-risk assessments before approval. A national framework with measurable targets, implementation deadlines and independent performance audits should establish clear responsibilities for federal, provincial and local governments.

Financing remains a critical constraint. The State Bank estimates Pakistan's climate financing requirements at approximately $331 billion between 2024 and 2030, or around $47 billion annually, while actual international inflows have remained substantially lower. It also points to weak project preparation, bureaucratic delays and inadequate monitoring as obstacles to attracting and utilising available funds.

Pakistan must therefore become more effective in securing international grants, concessional loans and Loss and Damage funding. Green bonds, carbon markets and private-sector investment can supplement public resources. The COP31 impasse reinforces the need for Pakistan to pursue climate justice more vigorously. Having contributed less than one per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, the country has a compelling case for demanding greater financial and technological assistance from major polluters. But international advocacy cannot substitute for domestic responsibility. Pakistan must also reduce its own environmental footprint by expanding solar, wind and hydropower, improving energy efficiency, controlling industrial emissions and protecting its forests.

Ultimately, the climate challenge is a test of governance as much as environmental policy. The country cannot prevent global temperatures from rising on its own, but it can substantially reduce the human and economic damage caused by climatic shocks. Pakistan can no longer afford the luxury of treating climate change as a secondary policy concern. It is an economic emergency, a threat to social stability and a question of national survival.

Pakistan's rising external borrowing comes at a heavy cost

Muhammad Hassan



Concerns are rising about the sustainability of Pakistan's economic revival due to the rising dependency on costly foreign borrowings. Even though the recent numbers indicate a noticeable increase in foreign economic aid for Pakistan, the improvement is mainly associated with borrowing from the foreign bond market and commercial lenders rather than growth in concessional foreign assistance from development partners. The trend might help the government address its financial needs in the short term, but it will put additional pressure on Pakistan's balance sheet and make the economy more vulnerable to external shocks.

According to the recent figures released by the Economic Affairs Division (EAD), foreign economic assistance grew to $5.549 billion in the first four months of the current financial year (July-October), against $1.815 billion recorded during the same period of last year. On the surface, it seems that there has been a considerable improvement in foreign financial flows to the country. In reality, however, a closer look at the figures indicates that the improvement is not associated with enhanced development assistance from traditional development partners.

Foreign assistance through bilateral channels, on the other hand, has actually decreased from $50.56 million to $42.15 million in the same period. Assistance via multilateral sources has also not shown any improvement and stood at $36.06 million as compared to $50.56 million last year in the corresponding period. This clearly shows that the improved foreign assistance in recent times is not a result of increased concessional funds as concessional assistance is available on better terms and with longer repayment periods.

Bond issuance has been the main reason behind the increase and during the first four months of the current financial year, bond issuances worth $2.949 billion have taken place. Last year, bond issuances were not undertaken due to the poor situation prevailing in the economy where borrowing from international markets was considered quite expensive. The government has followed a different strategy by using the success story of its return to the international capital market as an indicator of increasing investor confidence. The finance minister has constantly expressed satisfaction regarding the record issue of $3 billion dual-tranche sovereign Eurobonds in September this year. The government has also noted that the bonds received almost double the number of bids that were received, which indicates that Pakistan has become an interesting market for international investors once again.

Although the success of the bond issue shows that Pakistan has somehow regained entry into the international capital market, there is a need for more analysis about the cost of securing financing. The bonds have substantially high interest rates compared to the financing normally made available by bilateral and mul-

tilateral organizations. In the first tranche of $1.75 billion for 5.5 years, the coupon rate is 7.5 percent, which means that the annual interest cost is around $131.25 million.

The second tranche, amounting to nearly $1.28 billion and maturing in 10 years, comes with a coupon rate of 7.9pc, giving rise to annual interest payment of $101.12 million. Both tranches will entail interest payment of nearly $232 million per year for Pakistan, apart from the eventual repayment of the total principal.

In addition, there have been claims of high effective pricing of the bonds above the coupon rates, with yields being estimated at 7.75 percent for the 5.5-year tranche and 8.25 percent for the 10-year tranche. Assuming the estimates are accurate, the cost of debt servicing would be even higher than the figures cited by the government.

Another source of borrowing leading to external inflows has been foreign commercial banks. Pakistan borrowed $300 million from this source during the first four months of the current financial year. There had been no such borrowing during the same period in the previous year. According to the budget estimates, the borrowing from commercial banks could have been as high as $3.1 billion, implying that there might have been more borrowing to fulfill its requirements. Commercial banks' borrowings are generally market rate based and depend upon credit rating and the terms offered.

However, a bigger issue is that Pakistan is building costly foreign debt without making any effort to raise its productive potential. Borrowing from abroad is financially rational only when it is used to finance activities that would earn money for Pakistan through exports and enhance Pakistan's capacity to pay back its debts. Borrowing costly money to fund its recurrent expenditures would create liabilities for the economy but would not produce any economic gains in return.

What is more worrying about this is that more than 93 per cent of federal government spending is always earmarked for recurrent expenditure, leaving little money for development. Despite all this, the government keeps on borrowing heavily, while interest payments, overheads, and other recurring expenditures take up a major portion of its resources. The development budget is usually cut down near the end of the fiscal year in order to curtail the fiscal deficit.

The situation gets even worse when one considers the possibility of rupee devaluation. Foreign debt repayment has to be done in foreign currency, but government receipts will come mostly in rupees. Even if the rupee devalues only by 4 to 5 per cent each year, it means that the cost of foreign debt repayments for Pakistan would increase significantly.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan needs foreign investment in order to meet its foreign debts and develop the country. But the main difference is that the former refers to acquiring relatively cheap development funding, while the latter implies taking costly commercial loans in order to pay for regular expenses.

Instead of rejoicing over increased levels of foreign investments without considering the nature of these investments and the price paid for them, it is important to reduce unnecessary spending from the budget, increase efficiency in revenue collection, expand the scope of exports and invest in domestic assets. Reduced wastage and increased allocation of funds to productive industries will decrease the demand for costly loans from external sources.

Access to the international loan market by Pakistan can prove to be a good move on the financing front, but mere access to money is not what constitutes an economic success story. The real thing that matters is borrowing on favorable terms and making profits through such funding. Otherwise, increased foreign aid can turn into another weakness for Pakistan's economy.

Pakistan needs a new growth model to break the boom-bust cycle

Muhammad Zain



Economic crises faced by Pakistan are not simply due to any exogenous factors, political instability or lack of finance. These are also the product of an economic model which time and again has fostered short-term growth at the cost of long-term stability.

Governments of the past have used fiscal spending, monetary stimulation and artificial exchange rate stability in order to generate economic activity. Although these tools have sometimes helped in generating short-lived improvements, they have been unsuccessful in developing a robust production base for sustained economic growth. The remedy to the problem is a fundamental shift in economic policy orientation which should emphasize exports, domestic savings, investments and sound financial markets.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has clearly pointed out the link between economic policies followed by Pakistan and the boom and bust economic cycle that it has gone through many times. The tendency to keep the exchange rate artificially stable led to the development of several different exchange rates in 2022 and early 2023. The distortions thus created had significant ramifications. It is estimated that Pakistan lost some $4 billion worth of official remittances as expatriate Pakistanis resorted to private exchange rate services providing them better exchange rates. The country therefore found itself lacking foreign exchange and on the verge of default. The situation was later resolved through another IMF program, which was Pakistan's 24th. This should have made it clear to policymakers that exchange rate stability cannot be achieved through administrative measures when the underlying economic factors do not justify it.

The IMF has also raised issues related to

government intervention in pricing processes, especially in the areas of agriculture, petroleum, electricity, and gas. This type of government intervention, along with high tariffs and non-tariffs, has produced an unfair business environment where certain sectors and powerful lobbies are being favored. While such measures were supposed to create a competitive environment, foster innovations, and increase productivity, their main impact has been that of shielding the businesses from market forces.

Industrial sector in Pakistan, despite years of protection and incentives, does not seem to be a driving force of economic growth. Most of the industries are heavily reliant on foreign inputs and protection from the competition provided by the state. The export strategy of Pakistan has to be changed. The example of Japan and Germany shows how export-led industrialization can change an economy and create prosperity. However, Pakistan still focuses heavily on the exports of its traditional products, especially textiles, which, for the most part, are produced by excess of the internal demands. The majority of items in the list of exports has little added value.

The sustainable policy of exports has to include the creation of industries focused specifically at the foreign market. It means switching from production of the low-added-value items to engineering products, high-tech services and other items having added value. There is also the requirement to offer exporters stability in terms of policy, affordable energy, technology, and regulation. Protectionism should be temporary in nature and related to productivity.

Another serious flaw in the strategy is the failure to utilise savings domestically for productive investments. National Saving Centres accumulate savings of around Rs3 trillion, which the government utilises for its expenditures, thereby increasing the demand for borrowing by the government domestically. More savings could be utilised for economic growth if more of them are directed towards productive investments in the private sector.

The issue of saving-investments gap is another critical challenge facing the country. Savings within the country outweigh the investment. This means that the money is not being utilized properly in terms of generating sufficient productive capacity. In fact, the country has also been experiencing a steady decline in terms of flow of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) due to various reasons such as lack of certainty in policy-making and high taxation, among others. It is important for the country to increase levels of investment, whether domestic or foreign, in order to develop the required industrial infrastructure and enhance exports.

Another urgent issue which needs to be addressed is the condition of the financial market of the country. The truth of the matter is that the financial institutions such as banks are still exposed to many risks as a result of their exposure to debts from the government as well as industries that belong to the government, especially in the energy industry. This implies that there is little financing for investments in manufacturing, agriculture, technology, and export-oriented sectors.

Relying too much on indirect taxes will create an undue burden on the poor, whereas progressive direct taxes have not been utilized yet. In fact, a tax system that is based on the ability to pay should be developed. However, when broadening the tax base, reducing tax exemptions, and tightening tax collection procedures, there should not be any additional grounds to impose tax on those who are already heavily taxed.

In essence, it is not pragmatic for the country to attain economic success by borrowing or through the programs offered by the IMF which assist the country to deal with the repercussions of the economic policy that cannot sustain itself financially. In this regard, the country should find ways of allocating money that consumers spend for the purpose of developing an industrial sector for exports. In addition, economic policies should be consistent across the various governments.

It will never be possible for Pakistan to overcome the problems of boom and bust through individual administrative steps or financial manipulation. A new approach in economic management is needed. Export growth, saving, investment, good tax policies and resource utilization have to be the main elements of economic policy. Otherwise, Pakistan will continue to witness periods of revival being followed by new crises, resulting in its being caught up in the vicious circle of debt, instability and lost opportunities.

New provinces debate sparks serious rift between PML-N and PPP

Nasim Ahmed

A long-simmering debate over whether to carve smaller administrative units out of Pakistan's four sprawling provinces has erupted into a full-blown political confrontation, testing the fragile unity of the ruling coalition and pitting key leaders of the PML-N against their chief ally PPP.

What began months ago as policy musings by senior officials over administrative efficiency has snowballed into sharp public exchanges, legislative pushback, and warnings of street unrest. At the heart of the controversy lies a fundamental question of statecraft: Can Pakistan's governance crisis be solved by redrawing provincial boundaries, or does the answer lie in empowering existing local governments without tampering with the federation's delicate ethno-political balance?

The debate gained momentum in July 2026 when Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi floated the idea of creating smaller provinces to improve service delivery, a proposal reinforced in November by Defence Minister Khawaja Asif. Speaking to reporters in Sialkot and in subsequent television appearances, Asif argued that Pakistan's rapidly expanding population of over 240 million could no longer be effectively governed through four massive provincial capitals.

"This is an issue on which a consensus is being developed," Asif remarked, suggesting that Pakistan could eventually have as many as 12 administrative units. He stressed that such divisions must be drawn strictly on administrative rather than ethnic, linguistic, or political lines, expressing hope that smaller provinces would bring progressive political change and decentralize power. Proponents of new provinces, including policy researchers at institutions such as the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis and the Islamabad Policy Research Institute point to stark administrative bottlenecks. Provincial capitals like Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta struggle to oversee remote districts, leaving peripheral regions—such as South Punjab, Bahawalpur, Hazara, and parts of Balochistan—feeling neglected.

Advocates argue that creating new provinces would bring courts, secretariats, and public services closer to ordinary citizens. Financially, separate provinces would receive direct allocations through the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, preventing

major urban centers from absorbing disproportionate shares of development funds. Furthermore, analysts note that splitting Punjab, which accounts for roughly 56 percent of the national population, would help balance political representation in the federal legislature and ease long-standing perceptions of single-province dominance.

Despite these administrative arguments, the proposal has met fierce resistance from the PPP, which governs Sindh and forms the backbone of the federal coalition. Viewing rumours of a potential 28th Constitutional Amendment or a national referendum with deep suspicion, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari issued one of his starkest warnings to date during a press conference at the Karachi Press Club. While stating that the PPP supports creating new provinces where genuine public consensus exists and constitutional procedures are followed, Bilawal warned that any "forced" attempt to carve up Sindh would lead to bloodshed. He also rejected proposals for a referendum, insisting that the Constitution already provides a clear mechanism for altering provincial boundaries, and called for a "political and democratic reset" to tackle inflation and poverty instead of opening new fault lines.

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah echoed that defiance, declaring in the provincial assembly—which passed a resolution rejecting any division of the province—that splitting Sindh was "neither legally nor politically acceptable". Turning the tables on his coalition partners, Shah remarked that if the Punjab or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assemblies wished to create new provinces within their own territories, they were free to pursue them. Meanwhile, PPP Punjab General Secretary Syed Hassan Murtaza dismissed the entire exercise as a distraction, asking reporters whether redrawing maps would lower fuel prices or curb unemployment.

The sharp rhetoric quickly spilled into personal and political sparring between the allies. Following Bilawal's Karachi speech, federal ministers including Information Minister Attaullah Tarar and Talal Chaudhry reminded the PPP chairman that his party remained part of the same ruling coalition and questioned the Sindh government's own governance record. Khawaja Asif escalated the war of words by targeting the PPP leadership over property holdings in Lahore, prompting PPP senior leader Nadeem Afzal Chan to hit back on social media and the PPP to warn that it was well aware of past financial controversies surrounding the PML-N.

Recognizing the danger to coalition stability, senior figures on both sides moved to lower the temperature. President Asif Ali Zardari met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Lahore, where both leaders reportedly agreed to strictly adhere to constitutional provisions governing provincial boundaries. PPP Vice President Senator Sherry Rehman urged federal ministers to avoid provocative statements and focus on public relief.

Notably, dissent also emerged within the PML-N's own ranks. Senior PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique argued on X that merely creating smaller provinces would not cure Pakistan's structural malaise. Instead, he urged the government to prioritize long overdue reforms in the civil service, judiciary, electoral system, and local governments. Rafique's intervention mirrors the core arguments of constitutional experts and economists who warn against hastily redrawing Pakistan's map. Critics point out that establishing new provinces entails massive non-development expenditure—building new provincial assemblies, high courts, governor houses, and bureaucratic secretariats—at a time when Pakistan's cash-strapped economy is struggling under heavy debt.

Political commentators have also warned that redrawing boundaries in multi-ethnic hubs like Karachi risks inflaming ethno-linguistic tensions rather than resolving them. Constitutionally, the hurdle remains daunting: under Article 239, creating a new province requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament as well as a two-thirds vote in the affected provincial assembly—a threshold virtually impossible to cross without the PPP's support.

As the dust settles on the latest war of words, governance analysts at forums like the Sustainable Development Policy Institute suggest that the real solution lies closer to the ground. Rather than replicating centralized provincial bureaucracies on a smaller scale, the country's political leadership would serve citizens far better by fulfilling Article 140-A of the Constitution—devolving real financial and administrative power to elected mayors and district councils.

Economic stability must translate into jobs and higher living standards

Shahid Hussain

The positive development in macroeconomic indicators in Pakistan will be of little help if the growth rate does not improve enough to provide for sufficient job generation and improve living standards of people.

Undoubtedly, Pakistan has been successful in stabilizing the economy, but the positive development has not translated into economic growth, income growth and job generation. The annual report of the State Bank of Pakistan highlights the issues and argues that stabilization of the economy alone will not place Pakistan on the path to sustainable growth. What is required is a change in direction from economic stability to structural changes that can promote production, investments and employment generation.

The State Bank of Pakistan has pointed out the issues such as premature deindustrialization, lack of investment, skill deficits and informal sector employment that pose major constraints to sustained economic growth. It is why Pakistan still continues to find it difficult to maintain the pace of economic growth that would be necessary for absorbing the growing labor force and improving the income and living standards of households despite some improvement in economic indicators.

It is the result of the failure of the economic policies in making long-term investments towards building a productive economic base and the consistent application of measures that were meant only for fulfilling fiscal and external financing needs of the country.

It is therefore necessary for the government to create such conditions in the economy through which businesses are encouraged to invest and expand production and create employment. This requires addressing the infrastructure shortcomings, especially in areas of energy, transport and logistics, where high costs and underdevelopment are reducing the competitiveness of industries. Energy is essential for industrial manufacturing processes; without which these industries cannot remain competitive in international markets.

Also, there should be drastic change in the tax structure of the state since it has an extremely narrow and a complex taxation system, which makes doing business in Pakistan unfavorable. Changing the taxation system, introducing taxes on the non-taxable industries, and equal treatment of taxpayers will be the best strategy to earn money for the government without discouraging citizens from their work. Besides, it is important to mention that predictability plays a crucial role in the regulatory and economic policies of the

state. Changes in the governmental decisions decrease the investor confidence level and planning becomes harder both for domestic and foreign investors.

One more critical issue is the labor market situation. For instance, in Pakistan unemployment increased from 5.7 per cent in 2018 to 7.2 per cent in 2025. It shows the serious job creation issue as the number of unemployed people increases rapidly. Young people suffer the most as they remain jobless even having higher education and special skills.

However, each year new employees enter the labor market, and the economy does not produce enough jobs to be productively occupied. Many graduates have qualifications from the point of view of education, but not the necessary skills for employers. The situation is one of the causes not only of unemployment, but also of the fact that many educated people are forced to work in a position that does not correspond to their qualification.

Our system of education and vocational training needs drastic changes. It is necessary to change the methods of teaching at higher educational institutions and vocational schools, which will be directed at the development of skills required by the employers. Cooperation of educational institutions and the business world will make it possible to prepare graduates for the changing demands of the industry, information technologies, modern services and other sectors of the economy.

The low presence of women in the labor force will further limit the potential of growth of the nation. There is a large number of women who are out of the labor force, which will obviously limit the production capability of the country. There are many socio-cultural reasons, such as poor transport system, inadequate childcare services and working conditions which prevent women from participating in the labor force. An improvement in education and training facilities and employment opportunities will definitely help improve the economic potential of the country.

Another important aspect which needs to be taken care of is the agricultural sector. Despite employing a significant proportion of the population and contributing significantly towards the GDP of the country, there are still many problems in the sector such as traditional methods of cultivation, inefficient irrigation, low productivity and absence of technological advancement. All these have been further exacerbated by climate change, leading to flooding and droughts.

Investments in the most up-to-date technologies, including irrigation, agricultural research, mechanization and climate resistant farming techniques, are essential to boosting productivity as well as reducing cost of production. Availability of good quality seeds, credit, storage facilities and modern marketing networks is essential to the farmers. Advancements in the agriculture industry will help in ensuring food security along with providing raw material to the industries, as well as creating employment opportunities in the rural areas.

The other serious problem is premature deindustrialization since it has made our economy incapable of creating productive jobs and increasing exports. Industries are vital for advancing technology, improving productivity and promoting economic development. However, erratic policy-making, high energy costs, expensive capital and an uncertain tax regime have kept investors away from the industrial sector. Therefore, it is essential that the government create a conducive policy environment in order to encourage industries to produce more and export.

The most significant lesson to be learned from the SBP report can perhaps be that of continuity in the policy-making process. The structural reforms can only prove effective in case there is consistency in implementing them. This involves the continuous efforts of political commitment along with consistent implementation of the structural reforms through various government administrations. Every new government is not going to conduct a new experiment and discard all the economic policies that were pursued by the previous one. These economic reforms should be the responsibility of the nation rather than a government of any particular party.

The country should focus on enhancing its productive capacity rather than resorting to external financial means, short-run fiscal actions, or macroeconomic variables. Industrial development, investment, technology, and productivity are some key components of economic policy in the country. In the end, the true success of any economic reform cannot be gauged by the simple criteria of having greater foreign exchange balances, lower levels of inflation or even meeting fiscal targets. It is more important that economic reforms create jobs that are productive in nature and help increase household incomes and raise the standards of living of the people. Unless there is continued investment, industrialisation, development of skill sets and consistency in policies, the macroeconomic stability of the economy will always be precarious and growth will be sub-optimal.

Geopolitics still rules the roost

Raza Khan

Since the turn of the 21st century, the phenomenon of geopolitics has generally been considered to have become relatively irrelevant as geo-economics has become increasingly significant. However, it has always been a fallacious perception to discount the significance of geopolitics, as current international realities strongly suggest that geopolitics has made a strong comeback.

Geopolitics is the study of how physical geography, climate, natural resources, demographics, and spatial location determine and influence political power, foreign policy, and international relations—specifically global power dynamics and distribution. Since February 2022, when Russia launched an all-out attack on neighboring Ukraine, to the early October 2023 surprise attacks by the Palestinian armed resistance group Hamas on Israel—and Tel Aviv's massive response to the Hamas attacks killing more than seventy thousand Palestinians—and, above all, the US–Israel war with Iran since February this year, international power dynamics have undergone very vital changes.

In the first case, Russia launched an attack on Ukraine in order to demonstrate that it was still a superpower. Moreover, any moves by Ukraine, which was once part of the Russia-dominated Soviet Union, to move closer toward the United States-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and create a strategic threat to Moscow in its backyard were to be met with an iron fist. Meanwhile, the US has been trying to expand NATO eastward and thus trying to rope in Ukraine in order to prove that it, along with its allies, dominates the world. In the case of Hamas's attack on Israel, a non-state actor has been trying to unmake a state that was created in 1948 and which since then has been struggling to survive, thus ferociously responding to the Hamas attack. The US–Israel war on Iran was originally aimed at effecting a regime change in Iran and defanging Iran of its nuclear capabilities; however, the former have been unable to achieve either of the stated aims of the war, and there is a strategic stalemate at the moment. In this process, Iran has made extensive use of its geographical location and strengths to hold its own—for instance, its control of the Strait of Hormuz. This demonstrates how significant geopolitics still is.

It is important to understand here that since the end of the Cold War, most of the great

powers have been pursuing foreign policies focusing on geo-economics while shunning geo-strategic aims and ideals. The rise of China—and with it, state capitalism—also contributed to the emphasis on geo-economics over geo-politics. Geo-economics means that economic tools like trade, aid, and investment are used to achieve geopolitical objectives, such as controlling the behavior and policies of other states. There is also another aspect of geo-economics: using geopolitical tools like war, diplomacy, and border management to attain geo-economic objectives, such as GDP growth and improving the economic condition of people.

China seems to be the main advocate of geo-economics and, therefore, has come up with mega-projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aiming to economically integrate around 60 countries across the Afro-Eurasian landmass. Thus, the geo-economic focus of Chinese foreign policy has made it a true great power, and it is on the course of becoming a great power center of the world.

However, another important global power, the Russian Federation, is still very much engrossed in the geopolitics of the past. This may be because President Vladimir Putin has been in power for more than two decades. Therefore, instead of focusing all-out on improving its economy, Moscow has been looking for ways and means to increase its territory—a key geopolitical objective—by continuing to occupy Crimea, which historically is Ukrainian territory. Although Russia may have some geo-economic aims in holding on to Crimea, the strategy is mainly geostrategic in formulation.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world practically became strategically unipolar. In the post-Soviet and Cold War era, America has nearly dominated the international political scene. However, this dominance has had its advantages and disadvantages. In the post–Cold War era, the greatest challenge to US power came from non-state actors rather than any other state.



The non-state challenge to the US-dominated unipolar world mainly came from Muslim militant organizations, particularly Al Qaeda, which attacked the American mainland on September 11, 2001. In response to Al Qaeda's attack, America launched the Global War on Terror against Muslim militant organizations spread around the world, particularly in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and South Asia. This Global War on Terror came to an official end as the US, after 20 long years, was not able to defeat the Afghan Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and had to completely withdraw from the country even before the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in August 2021.

On the other hand, the international political scenario has been slowly and gradually changing toward a kind of another Cold War. This is fundamentally because of the rise of China as a new global power center. Moreover, China has also been adopting soft economic expansionist policies, as is evident from President Xi Jinping's BRI program. Through this initiative, as mentioned above, China under Xi wants to economically integrate the Afro-Eurasian landmass with Beijing at the center to get maximum advantage out of it. Consequently, once again, American global dominance is under threat—now from state actors—and in this regard, the biggest threat comes from China. The growing trade standoff between China and America, occasional clashes between them in the South China Sea, and polemics over Taiwan and Hong Kong are symptomatic of the new Cold War.

In this global scenario, India, which wants to be another power center, is siding with America because China, India's neighbor, is not only the strategic rival of Washington but also a potential economic antagonist. Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union, is looking at this situation very carefully, does not want to jump to either side, and is playing its cards close to its chest. Like others, Moscow would like to get maximum advantage out of this rivalry between America and China. Smaller countries like Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, and Turkey are allying with one side or the other keeping in view their economic and security needs.

In a nutshell, geopolitics still rules the roost; therefore, every country and the people within it must understand what the concept really means and what the new contours of today's geopolitics are.

The final bell

Rasheed Ali

The morning bell at Al-Khair Education Centre in Peshawar's Dir Colony had barely finished ringing at 8:48 a.m. on October 15, 2026, when the sky fell in. Inside three cramped classrooms, 110 students—most of them under thirteen years old and from low-income families—had just opened their notebooks for first-period lessons. Seconds later, a low, sickening groan of stressed mud and brick gave way to a deafening roar. The roof caved inward, swallowing dozens of wooden desks, schoolbags, and children in a suffocating cloud of grey dust.

Neighbours sprinting into the narrow alley reached the wreckage minutes before the sirens of Rescue 1122 pierced the morning air. Clawing at twisted iron and broken masonry with their bare hands, bystanders found a scene of unimaginable horror. "Around 10 to 15 children were trapped beneath the debris, with debris piled up to their necks," recalled one eyewitness whose niece narrowly escaped the collapse. When the dust finally settled over the deadliest school building collapse in

Pakistan's history, 34 young students and a female teacher were dead, while more than 50 others were rushed to Lady Reading Hospital with severe head trauma and broken bones.

In the sterile corridors of the hospital that afternoon, shock curdled into bitter fury. Mothers clutched blood-stained uniforms and tiny shoes, confronting officials with a question that echoed across the country: how had a sanctuary meant to nurture their children's futures turned into a mass grave? Relatives later revealed they had repeatedly warned the school's management about the visibly deteriorating structure, only for their concerns to be brushed aside.

For families across Pakistan, however, the tragedy in Peshawar felt less like a freak accident and more like the latest chapter in a relentless, preventable nightmare. The year 2026 has already left a grim trail of falling concrete across the country's educational landscape. On June 30, residents in Lahore's Kahna area woke up to a nearly identical horror when the T-R girder roof of an unregistered private tuition centre—operating inside a privately owned residential house—suddenly buckled during ongoing construction, crushing 14 children to death and severely injuring several others. Just two days later, an under-construction expansion at a private school in Lahore's Baghbanpura neighbourhood collapsed mid-work, killing another young boy.

The pattern stretches across provincial boundaries and into religious seminaries as well. In May 2026, four children died in Dera Ghazi Khan when a classroom roof gave way during unauthorised construction. That same summer in Sindh's Umerkot district, three young girls—aged between three and thirteen—were walking home from a local seminary when the dilapidated outer wall of a closed government primary school toppled onto them, killing all three before rescuers could lift the stones. A year earlier, in Multan, several girls were pulled injured from the wreckage of a collapsed madrasa roof. Each headline follows a depressingly familiar script: a weakened structure, an illegal extra storey added to squeeze in more fee-paying students, a heavy downpour that softens mud-and-brick walls, and dozens of children seated directly underneath.

Behind every collapsed ceiling lies a chain of institutional failure. In Peshawar, police chief Mian Saeed confirmed after preliminary inspections that the three-storey Al-Khair school—which housed over 1,200 students and staff—was structurally weak and dangerously overloaded, its integrity further compromised by recent heavy rains. In Lahore's Kahna tragedy, District Education Authority officials admitted the tutoring centre was unregistered, slipping beneath the radar of municipal and educational regulators alike while operating inside a house never



designed to bear the concentrated weight and vibration of dozens of students.

The crisis is equally acute in the public sector, where bureaucratic inertia leaves tens of thousands of children studying under ticking time bombs. In Sindh, the lingering scars of the catastrophic 2022 floods continue to haunt classrooms four years later. Figures highlighted in March 2026 revealed that out of 19,808 schools damaged across the province during the deluge, 14,343 were still awaiting full restoration. By August 2026, the Sindh Education Department's Monitoring Wing had declared 6,220 school buildings across all 30 districts dilapidated and unsafe, prompting urgent orders to relocate students ahead of monsoon rains. In Larkana district alone, 93 government schools were flagged as dangerously hazardous—threatening the lives of roughly 5,230 students who had been attending classes beside cracking walls or under makeshift shades.

"A school should be a place of learning and security, not one where children risk their lives," wrote Jacobabad resident Ghulam Mustafa Soomro in an impassioned public appeal, capturing the frustration of parents nationwide. Civil society advocates and structural engineers point out that private academies and madrasas frequently mushroom inside cramped, rented residential buildings without engineering clearance, while provincial regulatory authorities remain understaffed, underfunded, or compromised by routine negligence during registration renewals.

Whenever television cameras converge on a mound of rubble, official condemnation arrives like clockwork. Following the Peshawar collapse, President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif issued statements of profound sorrow, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi visited the site, promised an investigation report within a week, and demanded province-wide safety inspections of public and private schools. Police arrested the school's owner, mirroring arrests made in Lahore after the Kahna collapse.

Yet parents and education activists have heard these pledges before. In Sindh, while provincial authorities instructed deputy commissioners to arrange temporary alternative premises for students from unsafe schools, reconstruction backlogs persist in remote districts where children either study in hazardous ruins or drop out altogether. "The real measure of government actions is not how many inquiries are announced after a collapse, but how many lives it protects before a tragedy strikes," Soomro noted, echoing a sentiment shared by grieving fathers from Peshawar to Larkana.

Structural engineers and child rights campaigners insist that breaking this cycle does not require reinventing the wheel—only enforcing the laws that already exist on paper. Every public school, private academy, and madrasa must undergo mandatory, independent structural audits by qualified engineers before registration and ahead of every monsoon season. Buildings declared hazardous must be evacuated and sealed immediately, with authorities providing safe temporary classrooms so students do not lose an academic year. Publishing district-wise structural safety ratings online, ring-fencing dedicated maintenance budgets, and establishing an accessible helpline where parents and teachers can report cracked pillars or illegal rooftop construction could stop tragedies before they unfold.

Until those safeguards move from editorial columns into concrete enforcement, millions of Pakistani parents will continue to say goodbye to their children at the front door each morning with a silent prayer—hoping that the roof over their heads holds until the final bell rings.

Screams of dying babies in Gaza heard in Pakistan, written in blood

Dr Zaheer Ahmad Babar

Picture a tent in Deir al-Balah after days of heavy rain. Inside, a mother has pulled her children close, as mothers do when the wind finds every gap in the canvas. Above them, a sand dune, soaked and loosened, gives way. According to UNICEF, the mother and her three children, aged four, five and eight, died.

It was not a bomb. It was the weather, falling on people with nowhere else to go. That is what makes Gaza's winter so hard to tell: the dangers no longer come from one direction alone. n Nov 12, international media reported that a nine-month-old baby had died of hypothermia, and a UNICEF spokesman cautioned that the worst of winter is yet to come. UNICEF's winterisation plan says nearly 84 per cent of Gaza's population, more than 1.76 million people, live in overcrowded displacement sites or damaged shelters. Save the Children says about 70,000 tents flooded in a single day during the first winter storm, and that more than 560,000 children live in "critical or catastrophic" shelter conditions. At least 11 children, including infants, reportedly died of hypothermia last winter.

The cold is not the only threat. Armed strikes in June killed at least six people, including two children, according to Palestinian health officials, and strikes in July killed three children and six adults. And Al Jazeera reports that children with diabetes are struggling to find insulin, with some families forced to use expired supplies.

That is the backdrop to World Children's Day on Nov 20, UNICEF's global day of action for children, by children. This year's theme is "My day, my rights, my future," and around 190 countries take part each year. UNICEF is urging leaders to "choose a future for children," and is appealing for US$97.5 million to reach 540,000 children in Gaza and the West Bank with winter clothing, thermal blankets and shelter materials between October 2026 and March 2027. A blanket has become a matter of life and death.

Far from the flooded tents, in Gujranwala, two young Pakistanis have been listening. Ghulam Bishar Hafi and Ubaydah Al Fiddhah Hafiah, guided by their father and mentor, Prof Dr Aurangzeb Hafi, launched "Voice for the Voiceless" in 2024, on the UN's International Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression. Their method was one, perhaps no child would think of and many adults would struggle to watch: protest notes and open letters written in their own blood, sent to the United Nations and other global bodies. One note read, "Humanitarian eyes are needed to see the humanitarian crisis in Gaza." Another: "Shredded bodies of innocent children in cradles beg for peace."

On Nov 20, 2024, World Children's Day, the UN-KAKHTAH Postdoctoral DRR Multiversity gave them the "Grace de Monaco" International Medal and the "Eglantyne Jebb Platinum Pen for Peace." Rather than keep the honours, they dedicated both to the children of Gaza. On Nov 29, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, they presented blood-written notes and an open letter.

Then came a petition. Around International Human Solidarity Day in December 2024, they launched "Stop Infanticide in Gaza," addressed to UN Secretary-General António Guterres and UNICEF's Catherine Russell; it



had gathered lakhs of signatures at last check. It coincided with a UN exhibit, "Gaza, Palestine – A Crisis of Humanity, A Cry for Justice," on show in the Visitors' Lobby of the UN General Assembly building from late November 2024 into January 2025. The siblings extended it virtually, so the world could not look away.

When the Gaza ceasefire came, they revived the campaign for Palestinian amputee children, appealing to Guterres and Russell for emergency mobilisation. Their efforts reached the Palestinian Embassy on March 7, 2025, when the Embassy of Palestine hosted a reception for them, then aged 11 and 13. Ambassador Dr Zuhair Zaid, accompanied by his young daughter, presented an official letter of recognition calling them a symbol of justice and humanity. "Your blood has mingled with the cries of the innocent," he wrote, praising their non-violent approach as "a beacon of humanity amidst the darkest times."

The most emotional moment came when Dr Zaid declared that Ubaydah and Ghulam Bishar would be considered his own children, alongside his five biological children. Prof Hafi quoted him as saying Palestine "owned" the pair, along with their petitions, resolutions and protest notes. The two men also discussed protecting and resettling orphaned Gaza children, particularly amputees. The invitation was followed by a Karachi ceremony where a documentary showcased the siblings' blood-written notes.

The work has not paused. On World Humanitarian Day in August 2025, they condemned the criminal silence and global shamelessness over what they term as the "Systematic Infanticide" of Gaza's children. In September, World Peace Day brought another renewed vow. On June 4 this year they wrote again to the UN Secretary-General, the Security Council, UNICEF and governments with influence over the conflict, seeking a ceasefire, unconditional humanitarian access, protection of schools and hospitals, and accountability for crimes against children. They cited UNICEF figures of over 64,000 children killed or maimed in Gaza since October 2023, and called child starvation a weapon of war. They have also spoken for children in Congo, Mozambique, Myanmar, Syria, Sudan, Yemen and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

This World Children's Day, their appeal is renewed. "The theme tells every child that they have a right to be heard," they said in a statement issued by their father on Nov 20. "For the children of Gaza, that right is being drowned out by bombs, hunger and now bitter cold. We ask the world to hear them." They urge world leaders and the UN to ensure unhindered, sustained access to food, clean water, medicine, winter clothing, blankets and shelter materials; to protect children from attack in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child; to treat starvation and exposure as a grave violation; to provide long-term care for the orphans, the left-alone amputees and other injured children; and to fund UNICEF's winter response in full.

Prof Hafi puts it simply: "They will keep going until no child anywhere has to shiver, starve or flee in fear." On World Children's Day, Prof Hafi and his children ask every parent, teacher, leader and institution to stand with, in order to become a 'voice the voiceless'.

Back in Deir al-Balah, the cold is only beginning. Between a tent and a treaty stands the question the siblings keep putting to the world: is a child's right to be heard also a right to be kept warm, fed and safe?

Creating new provinces: A constitutional gap that needs to be addressed

Ubaidullah Naeem

The increasing controversy about the creation of new provinces in Pakistan has raised many constitutional questions. Although various parties such as politicians and constitution experts have been discussing the possibilities of restructuring the present provinces, yet it seems that no concrete knowledge is available on the constitutional method through which a new province can be formed.

Various constitutional provisions have been used as the basis of this proposition and some people have also proposed the idea of holding a referendum. However, the case needs a proper review of the Constitution. In connection with the discussion about the formation of new provinces, Article 239(4) of the Constitution has been mentioned time and again. But when one reads it, this article is only concerned with constitutional amendments through which limitations or boundaries of province are affected or altered.

This clause is essentially a constitutional check on any amendment to the provincial boundary without the consent of the representatives of the province itself. This clause does not make any provisions about how a new province may be created from scratch and which agency would be empowered to do so.

Article 1 is also under discussion because of its provisions about the territories of Pakistan and admission of new states or territories in the Federation. But Article 1(3) pertains to the admission of new states and territories in Pakistan, not to the formation of new provinces by splitting up the old ones. Accordingly, the reading of Article 1 together with Article 239(4) cannot, in itself, settle the constitutional problem.

This is significant since the Constitution should, in addition to conferring power to create a new province, set out clearly the procedure to be followed, the conditions to be satisfied and the constitutional arrangements necessary following the creation of a province. The establishment of a new province would have far-reaching effects on representation in the National Assembly and Senate, in provincial legislatures, on the financial arrangements, administration, judiciary and federal-provincial relations. All this cannot be achieved simply by reliance on a provision which provides for the alteration of provincial boundaries.

This is a constitutional weakness that needs to be corrected through an appropriate amendment to the Constitution. Instead of trying to interpret existing provisions to cover issues that were not meant to be covered by them, Parliament should first consider inserting a provision in the Constitution conferring the requisite powers and providing the necessary procedure.

It would be equally important that the amendment spells out the responsibilities of the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies, especially when it involves carving out a new province from an existing one.



A referendum may indeed be a very important tool in the hands of a democracy to seek the view of citizens on an important issue of national importance where there is no provision in the Constitution. Article 48(6) allows the Prime Minister to refer such a question to the people after obtaining the consent of the joint sitting of Parliament.

The reason why a referendum cannot, by itself, make changes to the constitution or change the provisions of the constitution in any way is that it provides legitimacy and public endorsement to a proposal, but the amendment to the constitution would require the approval of the people through a referendum process in any case. Thus, a referendum can complement the constitutional process in some way.

It is also essential to note that the creation of new provinces should not be considered as only an administrative matter. This issue involves several political, geographic, financial, linguistic and historic aspects. Any decision about creating a new province from an existing one should consider the desires of the people of the regions, the economic stability of the new province, natural resource distribution and financial implications.

In this regard, it may be considered by the government to constitute an independent and representative commission consisting of experts of constitutional law, economists, administrators, and representatives from the affected regions. The commission would be able to analyze the possibility of new provinces and boundaries, finances required, and take views from the political parties and local population before coming to a conclusion.

The purpose is not only to make more provinces but to ensure good governance, make administration close to the people, have balanced distribution of resources, and enhance the Federation. Otherwise, the exercise would add to the administrative complexities rather than resolving them.

There have been many such discussions in the past in Pakistan, yet they could never reach any conclusion due to political disagreement and lack of consensus. At present, there is yet another chance to look at the issue and resolve the constitutional ambiguity regarding it.

The core of the issue is that there should be a clear constitutional provision for the formation of new provinces. Article 239(4) acts as a check on arbitrary change in the provincial boundaries; Article 1 deals with the territories of Pakistan and states about the admission of new States or territories into the Federation. However, neither Article mentions anything about the formation of new provinces in the Federation.

For this reason, rather than having to find a way of interpreting these provisions for political purposes, Parliament needs to fill this lacuna in the Constitution via a proper amendment process. A plebiscite may also be considered to get public approval.

It is an issue of such serious importance that it cannot be dealt with via political convenience or constitutional ambiguity. It requires clear laws, democratic approval, and national consensus. Only a proper constitutional framework can assure that the reorganization of the Federation, whenever undertaken, would be legitimate and beneficial for the people.

Agony for families of patients

While patients from outside Karachi receive medical care at the Sindh Institute of Urology and Transplantation (SIUT), their accompanying family members, including elderly relatives and children, face extreme physical and mental agony on streets and pavements outside many hospital blocks. Many families travel from far-off regions of Balochistan and interior of Sindh for long-term treatments, like dialysis and kidney transplants. Having no shelter or relatives in Karachi, they are forced to sleep on open footpaths. They endure the lack of shelter, heavy traffic noise, severe dirt, unbearable foul smell, and a massive swarm of mosquitoes owing to poor sanitation in the area. Instead of protecting their health, caregivers and small children themselves are at constant risk of falling ill with diseases like malaria while waiting outside. It is heart-breaking to see parents trying to comfort their sleeping children with hand-woven fans on bare pavements amidst seriously harsh conditions. The provincial government, local health authorities and SIUT management should urgently establish proper sheltered waiting halls equipped with fans, clean drinking water, proper sanitation and mosquito protection across the massive health facility to ensure basic human dignity for families.

Ahmad Khan
Karachi

Environmental concerns

Karachi is already struggling with air pollution, poor drainage and the loss of green spaces. Construction work at the Nehr-i-Khayyam in Clifton has now raised serious environmental concerns among residents and environmentalists. Nehr-i-Khayyam is an important water-way in Karachi. Concerns have been raised that changes to its structure could affect rainwater drainage and increase the risk of urban flooding. Residents have also been calling for greater transparency about the project and its environmental impact. The metropolis needs better drainage and cleaner surroundings, but development should not create new environmental problems. Before making major changes to any waterway, the authorities must carry out proper environmental assessments and make the project details available to the public. On their part, people also have a responsibility to protect the environment and speak up when natural resources are at risk. We cannot continue to ignore some revenue-generation schemes of someone at the cost of environmental damage until it becomes a crisis.

Development should improve our city, not put its environment at a grave risk. The authorities must ensure that Nehr-i-Khayyam is protected while addressing Karachi's sewage and drainage problems. Environment is a shared responsibility, and the decisions we make today will affect our future generations. Has the government ensured transparency, proper environmental planning and public consultation before proceeding with the changes that are likely to affect this important waterway?

Muhammad Shahmeer
Karachi

Bus stop

People living near Seaview in Karachi used to have very few options of public transportation, especially around Saba Avenue and Badr Commercial areas. A few coaches used to ply along the Abdul Sattar Edhi Avenue for a few hours till they, too, were re-routed. These buses used to facilitate the labour class, including maids, servants, security guards, watchmen, etc. We now have red buses, green buses and pink buses serving the area, which is great for the community of commuters, but we do not see any bus stops across the strip in front of the Seaview Township. The authorities should provide covered bus stops for the residents of this township as well.

Nehal Alvi
Karachi

Bumpy road

The N-5 route between Halani and Sukkur has been under construction for nearly two years. The work is fragmented across multiple sections, forcing two-way traffic onto a single lane. These unpredictable, alternating diversions create severe safety risks. As a resident of Mirzapur village and a student at a Sukkur university, I witness these struggles daily. Tragically, more than 30 casualties have already been reported here, and accidents remain a frequent occurrence. The core issue is a glaring lack of safety precautions. Many construction zones lack adequate warning signs, reflectors and barriers. The authorities must implement strict traffic management.

Ali Murtaza
Mirzapur

Advance tax

Advance income tax is an adjustable tax by nature; it can be credited against a taxpayer's total annual income tax liability. But salaried individuals suffer due to non-refund of tax amount by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The other classes of taxpayers, like companies, usually get their claimed amount or adjust the figure against their final tax liability. The FBR should only collect final tax and exempt salaried individuals from the levy of advance income tax — neither from their parent department in the shape of tax credit nor from the FBR in the form of tax refund.

Vijay Kumar Talreja
Karachi

Governance challenges

The recent remarks by some ministers about Pakistan's governance system having collapsed have reignited calls for creating new provinces in the country. However, resistance in Sindh as well as concerns about the potentially high cost of any such project show that redrawing boundaries risks political and administrative polarisation.

Global experience offers a clear lesson. Expanding states — as in Nigeria's 36-state model — multiplies administrative overhead and financial dependence without empowering citizens. Conversely, China's growth proves that true economic dynamism stems from fiscally autonomous city governments. Rather than carving out new provinces, Pakistan must bring into play all the provisions in its Constitution related to the devolution of administrative, policing and revenue-retention powers directly to elected mayors in major urban hubs, alongside strict, performance- based accountability for due public service delivery. Simultaneously, the state does need to curb unsustainable expenditure at the Centre to rescue the stagnant economy from its chronic reliance on foreign loans and remittances. Trimming Islamabad's footprint requires abolishing overlapping ministries in devolved sectors, privatising loss-making state-owned enterprises, and halting parliamentarians' discretionary development funds. Pakistan's crisis does not owe its origin to a deficit of provincial maps, but to a lack of local empowerment and fiscal discipline. Empowering cities while right-sizing the Centre appears to be the only available and practical path towards self-reliance.

Arshad Kamal
Karachi

Insecurity at university

The lack of security at Sindh University in Jamshoro has become increasingly alarming for its students. A university should be a place where students feel safe in pursuing their education. Sadly, there is a growing concern among students about weapons being brought onto the campus and the way ordinary disagreements quickly turn into serious confrontations. A recent incident at the Faculty of Engineering and Technology was particularly alarming. A dispute between students reportedly escalated, and weapons were unveiled during the altercation. What may have started as a minor disagreement could have ended with someone seriously injured or even killed. This incident should not be treated as a mere dispute. It raises an important question about campus security. The university administration needs to take the issue seriously before a much more tragic incident occurs. Security checks at entry points, better monitoring of the campus and a proper system for reporting threats or disputes could help prevent such situations. Students also have a responsibility to avoid carrying or using weapons, and to resolve disagreements peacefully. Students go to university to study for a better future. No student should ever have to worry that an ordinary argument could turn into an armed confrontation. This much must be ensured by the authorities concerned.

Abdullah Jhatial
Jamshoro

Always feeling tired but blood tests look normal? You may have undiagnosed iron deficiency

Sumit Jha



The American Society of Hematology has raised ferritin thresholds for diagnosing iron deficiency, warning that existing cut-offs may miss people who need treatment, even before they develop anaemia.

A person can experience persistent fatigue, headaches, poor concentration or reduced exercise tolerance and still be told that their blood test results are normal. One reason could be iron deficiency that has not progressed to anaemia. New guidelines from the American Society of Hematology (ASH), published in Blood Advances, recommend higher ferritin thresholds to diagnose iron deficiency in adults, children, menstruating individuals and pregnant women. The recommendations challenge the use of lower diagnostic cut-offs that may leave some people with iron deficiency unidentified.

The guideline authors noted that laboratory reference ranges can contribute to underdiagnosis. They warned that the "lack of standardization as well as laboratory reference ranges that include values within a deficient range" can delay diagnosis and access to treatment. Iron is essential for several bodily functions, including the production of haemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen. It also supports DNA replication, energy production and neurotransmitter synthesis. Iron deficiency occurs when the body's iron supply is insufficient to meet its needs.

This magic mushroom can kill

Tina Hesman Saey



People who eat this tiny magic mushroom may hit a lethal low instead of getting high.

The fungus makes hallucinogenic psilocybin and deadly amatoxin, researchers report in Current Biology. Dubbed "dark magic mushrooms," it is the first species of fungus discovered to make both types of compounds.

Chemist and fungal biologist Andrew Kunik found the dark magic mushroom in 2025 growing on a decaying moss-covered palm trunk in a central Florida wetland. Kunik, who was then doing post-baccalaureate research in the lab of fungal biologist Matthew Smith at the University of Florida in Gainesville, identified the mini mushroom as Galerina indica.

That species had not been reported in Florida before, Kunik says. "It's quite rare and unusual." He also found two other new related species, tagged with the placeholder names Galerina species 1 and Galerina species 2. Other researchers had previously described G. indica's appearance and found DNA signatures that distinguish the fungus from related species. But no one had cataloged the mushroom's complete chemical or genetic makeup. Related Galerina species make amatoxins, deadly chemicals that can kill in even tiny amounts and are found in death cap mushrooms and other species. Kunik and colleagues looked for those toxins in G. indica and the two other new Galerina species. G. indica makes a previously undiscovered form of amatoxin the team is calling alpha-proamanitin, the chemical analysis revealed. The small mushroom also had blue bruises, a clue that it might make psilocybin, a psychedelic chemical being tested as a treatment for mental health disorders. Fungi usually make either amatoxin or psilocybin. Not both. Galerina species 1 also makes psilocybin but doesn't make amatoxin, and species 2 makes neither.

Sleeping longer may be a warning sign for heart disease patients

Dr. Liji Thomas



A recent paper published in the journal PLOS One reports that sleeping nine or more hours a day is associated with an approximately 50% higher risk of death from all causes, including heart-related and non-heart-related causes, among adults with heart disease, compared with sleeping seven to eight hours. People with heart disease continue to have higher mortality rates despite preventive efforts focused on conventional risk factors such as blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol levels, and smoking. Lifestyle interventions focusing on modifiable factors have thus gained importance. Sleep is among the most attractive candidates for lifestyle modification, as sleep duration is potentially modifiable and can be assessed easily and inexpensively. Sleep plays a critical role in regulating metabolism, inflammation, autonomic function, and cardiovascular recovery. Both short and long sleep durations have been shown to be linked to higher rates of cardiovascular disease and premature death. Studies involving the general American population show a nonlinear association between sleep duration and all-cause, heart-related, and non-heart-related mortality. The current study examines whether such patterns occur in a population with self-reported heart disease.

Toxic secrets are hiding in Arctic ice

Katherine Kornei



Ice cores record Earth's secrets, even the dirty ones. Some of the cylindrical sections of ice extracted from the Arctic contain elevated levels of arsenic, lead and other heavy metals that circulated in our planet's atmosphere in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Those pollutants, which have been tied to declines in IQ and higher rates of certain cancers, were probably emitted by a mining and smelting company in Montana whose grounds are now designated as multiple Superfund sites, the researchers report in Nature Sustainability. The ice cores contain tiny particles that were once airborne — including pollutants, volcanic ash and salt from ocean spray — and fell to our planet's surface within a few days or weeks. In polar regions, that fallout combines with snow and is preserved as ice. Joseph McConnell, an environmental scientist at the Desert Research Institute, and his collaborators recently analyzed 10 ice cores collected across Canada, Greenland and Russia. The cores contained material that had fallen to Earth as early as 210 BCE, but the interval spanning the Industrial Revolution in the United States — from roughly 1870 to 1914 — was what caught the team's collective eye. In the ice layers from that period, arsenic concentrations in some of the ice cores were up to 15 times higher than pre-Industrial Revolution levels. Because the heavy metal exposure has been tied to upticks in the rates of certain cancers, McConnell and his team set out to determine the most likely source of all that pollution. The largest increases in arsenic existed in the ice cores from Greenland. That finding was a big hint, McConnell says, because atmospheric circulation patterns tend to move material from west to east.

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