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SOUTHASIA

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US-ISRAEL-IRAN WAR

What Next?

As the Israel–U.S. alliance launches a relentless military campaign against Iran over its alleged nuclear ambitions, Pakistan — the world's only nuclear-armed Muslim-majority state — watches nervously. If a sovereign nation can be struck for pursuing nuclear capability, what precedent does that set?



AFGHANISTAN

Durand Fault Line



Afghanistan	Afg. 150
Australia	A$ 6
Bangladesh	Taka 100
Bhutan	NU 50
Brazil	BRL 20
Canada	C$ 6
China	RMB 30
France	EUR 45
Hong Kong	HK$ 30
India	Rs. 100
Japan	¥ 500
Korea	Won 3000
Malaysia	RM 6
Maldives	Rf 45
Myanmar	MMK10
Nepal	NcRs. 75
New Zealand	NZ$ 7
Pakistan	Rs. 250
Philippines	P 75
Saudi Arabia	SR 15
Singapore	S$ 8
Sri Lanka	Rs. 100
Thailand	B 100
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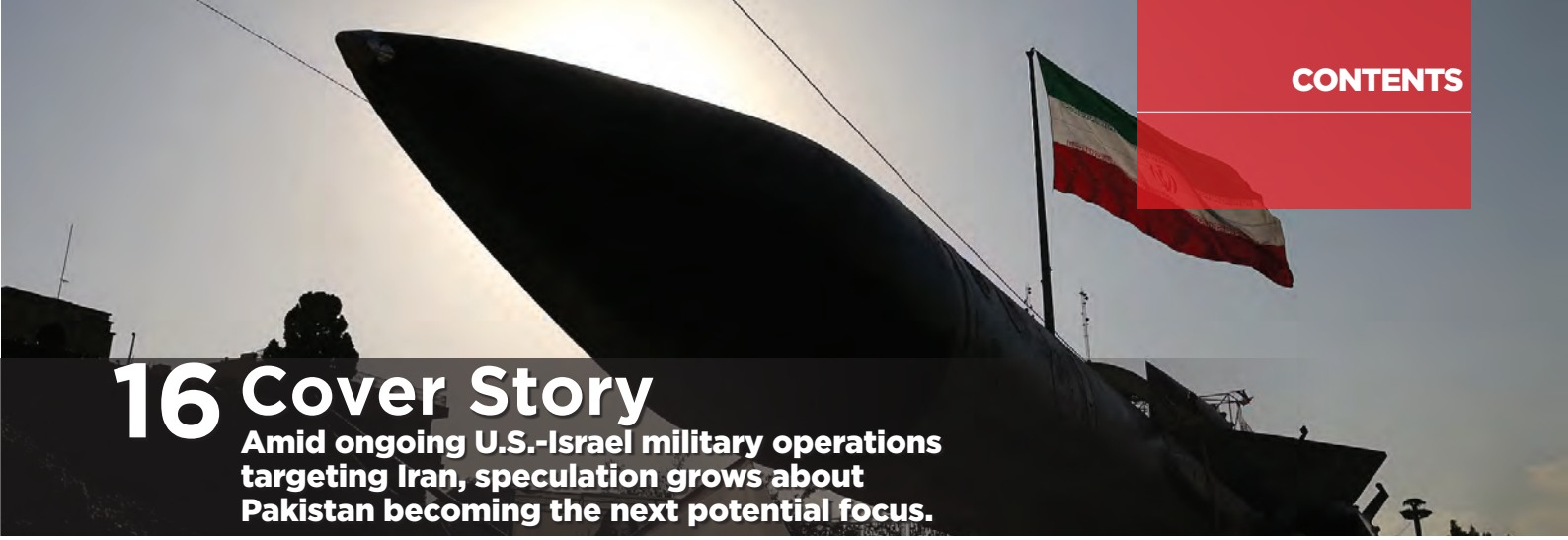
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Amid ongoing U.S.-Israel military operations targeting Iran, speculation grows about Pakistan becoming the next potential focus.

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History Doesn't Lie



The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history, says George Orwell, an English novelist and critic. Orwell's gem of wisdom best applies to the political denialism and historical revisionism at the hands of the current Taliban leadership. For instance, Afghanistan's Defense Minister, Mullah Yaqub, contends that the primary cause of escalating tensions with Pakistan is not cross-border terrorism but rather the dispute over the Durand Line, established by British colonizers between Afghanistan and British India. Taliban leaders share this perspective, considering the Durand Line a long-standing contentious issue since the partition of the Indian subcontinent. However, the question arises whether this dispute is grounded in reality or is a fabricated narrative used to justify contemporary conflicts. Kabul has articulated four reasons for rejecting the 2,640-kilometer Durand Line border: first, Amir Abdul Rahman Barakzai, Afghanistan's emir from 1880 to 1901, negotiated the treaty under pressure from British India; second, he reportedly misunderstood the treaty's provisions, which were drafted in English; third, Taliban leaders claim that the treaty expired after 100 years in 1993; and fourth, they argue that the treaty's legal standing ended when the British withdrew in 1947.

ہر ایک بات پہ کہتے ہو تم کہ تو کیا ہے
تمہیں کہو کہ یہ اندازِ گفتگو کیا ہے
مرزا غالبؔ

Conversely, historian Dr. Lutfur Rahman, who examined thousands of files at the British Library, offers an alternative viewpoint. He affirms that Amir Barakzai not only understood the treaty but actively sought it, corresponding with the British Viceroy to establish a border. He was pleased because the treaty secured territories such as Azmar and Lalpura. During the treaty signing, the Amir hosted a feast and awarded Sir Mortimer Durand the Golden Star in recognition of his role in negotiating the boundary, which originally delineated the border between Afghanistan and British India, encompassing parts of contemporary Pakistan. Furthermore, the assertion that the treaty expired after 100 years is a misconception; the original 1893 document contained no time limit and was intended as a sovereign external boundary. The Durand Line is an internationally recognized, legally binding border, reaffirmed on multiple occasions by Amir Habibullah in 1905, in the 1919 Treaty of Rawalpindi after the Third Anglo-Afghan War, and by King Nadir Shah in 1930. According to the 1978 Vienna Convention on Succession of States, Pakistan is the lawful successor to British India, rendering the border treaties definitive. If Afghanistan accepts territory acquired through the treaty, it must also accept the boundary.

The predominant concern at present is cross-border terrorism emanating from Afghan territory. Groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), BLA, TTA, and Daesh continue to carry out attacks despite assurances from the Afghan Taliban government. At the same time, Afghanistan is drawing parallels with Gaza in an attempt to position itself as a victim. The targeting of an ammunition storage site in Kabul has come to dominate the narrative, while the broader Pakistan–Afghanistan conflict—along with its underlying causes and conduct—has been pushed to the background. This shift in narrative risks undermining Pakistan's reputation and credibility within the international community. It is therefore imperative for Pakistan to engage proactively with the United Nations and call for an impartial investigation into the matter. In parallel, Pakistan must expand its international outreach by engaging third-party voices, including foreign diplomats and international organizations. The perspectives foreign diplomats from multiple countries will be critical in shaping a balanced narrative. Reliance solely on ISPR statements will not suffice. Timely and coordinated action will be essential to achieving this objective.

Syed Jawaid Iqbal
President & Editor in Chief

Balen, the Winner!

Led by Balendra Shah, a 35-year-old former civil engineer, singer, and rap artist known as "Balen," the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) secured victory in 182 seats within Nepal's 275-member lower house. In February, the RSP issued a manifesto promising to generate 1.2 million jobs and to address forced migration, tackling unemployment and low wages that have compelled many Nepalis to seek opportunities abroad. The party also aspires to elevate



Nepal's per capita income from $1,447 to $3,000 within five years, to double the national economy to $100 billion, and to establish social safety nets such as healthcare insurance. It is hoped that Mr. Balendra Shah's ascent to the position of Nepal's new Prime Minister will assist in alleviating the country's profound socioeconomic challenges.

Samanvita Keshav,
Kathmandu, Nepal.

World Peace at Risk

Given the current global situation, there is concern that the world is heading toward World War III. The US-Israel-Iran conflict, the Greater Israel project, and Pakistan's troubled relations with India and Afghanistan pose a threat to global peace. In this context, only effective international institutions, diplomatic solutions, and adherence to the rule of law can



prevent the world from falling into another war. The unstable situation in the Middle East is increasing the region's danger. Ignoring the risk of a third world war would be the greatest negligence, because without intervention from major powers, the effects of any local war in the region can be felt worldwide. Only global leadership, the United Nations, and other international organizations can play a crucial role in protecting human lives and maintaining global peace during such times.

Jamshed Ahmed,
Peshawar, Pakistan.

Fuel Price Hike

The rising tensions in the Middle East have once again put the global economy on the edge of uncertainty. When escalating crude oil prices affected Pakistan's fragile economy, the Pakistan government increased fuel prices all of a sudden, causing economic upheaval. However, this isn't just a price hike; it's a move that will burden millions of families. The government claims this increase was unavoidable due to rising global oil prices. While this explanation seems plausible on the surface, a deeper look reveals a harsh reality. The hike appears to be a deliberate strategy to sustain the ruling class's privileges while shifting the economic burden onto



the poor. Currently, Pakistan faces a severe economic crisis. Inflation has eroded people's purchasing power, unemployment has devoured the youth, and the declining rupee has widened the gap between rich and poor. In such a crisis, the government should tighten spending, cut unnecessary expenses, and focus on easing the people's hardships. Instead, the rulers have prioritized their luxury and bureaucratic perks, worsening the plight of the common people.

Bushra Minhas,
Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Pakistan - Afghanistan War

Pakistan has repeatedly called on the Taliban government to act against terror groups operating from Afghan soil. However, Kabul's continued silence has pushed Pakistan to consider a military response. Since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, the TTP has increased



its terrorist activities because it has found a safe haven in Afghan territory. Border disputes between Pakistan and Afghanistan peaked in 2024, with Pakistani forces closing the border and repatriating Afghan refugees. Pakistan's recent airstrikes in Afghanistan have targeted areas where TTP commanders are believed to be hiding. Now, the question is whether these strikes are merely military successes or part of a broader

political strategy. Pakistan should focus on diplomacy alongside military actions. Afghanistan is not our enemy; it is our neighbor and fellow Muslim country. We should extend the hand of friendship, but it is also essential to challenge the Taliban's undemocratic rule.

Prof. Razzaq Zikriya,
Charsadda, Pakistan.

Red Line Dream

Creating modern public transportation in Karachi remains a distant goal. The Karachi Red Line BRT project is designed along the city's main artery, stretching approximately 26 kilometers from Malir Halt to Numaish to serve millions of commuters. However, the question arises: who bears the cost of this delayed project? Initially estimated at over Rs 78 billion, the project's cost has risen to Rs 103 billion, more than Rs 4 billion per kilometer. In a



country where many lack basic civic amenities, with about 29% of the population living below the poverty line, roughly 70 million people are unable to meet their needs, and one in three Pakistanis is under the poverty line; this figure is staggering. Is such an expensive project truly necessary? The government has set a new deadline of 2026 to finish the Red Line project. However, it still doesn't appear that the project will be completed this year.

Rashid Ali Khan,
Karachi, Pakistan.

A New Bangladesh



This letter pertains to the cover story featured in the March 2026 edition of SouthAsia Magazine. Bangladesh's 13th parliamentary elections in 2026 represented a momentous milestone in the nation's history. Conducted amidst a backdrop of political turmoil, economic strain, and institutional discord, these elections were the first since the civil unrest of 2024, which not only influenced the trajectory of power but also exposed inconsistencies in global political standards. For the first time since Sheikh Hasina's extended tenure concluded, the populace was afforded a relatively open political environment. Approximately 65% of the 127 million registered voters participated in the electoral process, exemplifying heightened political consciousness and a collective aspiration for reform. If the public mandate is honored, transparency is maintained, and constitutional reforms are carried out, Bangladesh can progress toward a stable and sovereign political system.

Muhammad Sakib,
Lahore, Pakistan.

Long Live Iran

No one knows when the ongoing Iran-Israel war will end or what the outcome will be. The kind of estimates once made to overthrow the Iranian regime and establish a new system now seem to have failed. However, in this war, a simple way to measure the opponents' success is



visible. If Tehran refuses to surrender and its resistance persists, then it will consider this a victory despite all the human and military losses. Conversely, the American and Israeli victory does not depend on how much destruction they cause inside Iran or how many civilian lives they destroy. Their measure of success is the removal of the regime or political system under the shadow of Iran's religious leadership. Since Iran's political system remains intact, no one can see any sign of it collapsing. The system, which is rooted in the country under the supervision of the Revolutionary Guards, has support from many segments of the public, from the lowest levels to the highest decision-makers, in industry and the economy. Though there are opponents of the system within Iran, when it comes to Iran's security and stability, all Iranians will stand with their country. No Iranian, regardless of their opposition to the regime, can see their country divided into separate pieces.

Idrees Kazem,
Tehran, Iran.

Koi Sharm Hoti Hai, Koi Haya Hoti Hai!



At the height of the Pakistan-Afghan war, the Iran-Israel conflict, and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia crisis, only a few notice the silent, undeclared war on the poor. For the world's fifth-most populous country, with 259.3 million people, nearly half of whom are now considered poor, the Rs. 55-per-liter increase in fuel prices was just another routine move for the ruling class. Clearly, public interest was once again shamelessly sacrificed to placate the oil mafia and meet FBR's formidable tax collection targets. And of course, those in power are enjoying their rule to the fullest, with no opposition or public backlash in sight. At this miserable time, when an ordinary person is struggling to get a proper meal a day, in stark contrast, a luxury vehicle worth Rs. 90 million is being bought for the Senate chairman from the Senate's budget, as well as the purchase of a luxury 19-seater aircraft costing Rs. 11.7 billion for Her Highness Punjab's CM tells a different story. In the name of life, the general people, by and large, are dragging their hand-to-mouth existence every day, while the ruling elite is busy making the most of state freebies as their birthright. One wonders if they really have a word called 'morality' in their dictionaries.

Austerity For You, Luxury For Me!



True leadership demands leading by example, not by exception. Pakistan government preaches austerity measures, including shorter workdays, school closures, fuel conservation, and the like. In marked contrast, VIP convoys roll on, government petrol flows freely, elite privileges remain untouched, and the prime minister, by himself, is always found to be on a foreign tour. Citizens endure inflation, power cuts, and rising costs with quiet patience. But patience has limits. If sacrifice is truly national, it must begin at the top, not be reserved exclusively for the bottom. A government that demands belt-tightening from the poor while protecting the perks of the powerful is not practicing austerity but hypocrisy.

After 25 years of Waiting... Still Waiting



The term 'rebuilding' was repeatedly used by the Pakistan Cricket Board gurus following Pakistan's defeat in the 1999 Cricket World Cup final against Australia. After Pakistan's recent premature exit from the T20 World Cup in February, the notion of 'rebuilding' has reemerged with significant urgency. Given the frustration with an ongoing process that has persisted for over 25 years, we anticipate that this rebuilding effort will ultimately bear fruit. Best of luck, Pakistan cricket!

WHO SAID THAT!



"To stabilise the economy, we have taken difficult decisions."
Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's Prime Minister

"The entire world knows today that if you want to be part of the future, you must connect with and be in India."
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India





"Some people try to create confusion with sweet words. We must remain alert against those who want to create instability in the country."
Tarique Rahman, Bangladesh's Prime Minister

"Our system has only allowed for gradual reforms, normally two steps backwards and one step forward."
Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Sri Lankan President





"The international community must go beyond words of condemnation and ensure that international law is applied impartially."
Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, President of the Maldives

"We may hit it (Iran's Kharg Island) a few more times just for fun."
Donald Trump, US President





"It has been the greatest honour of my life to represent Pakistan."
Sarfaraz Ahmed, Pakistan's Former Cricketer

Pakistan's iconic brand HBL, unveils Refreshed Brand identity

HBL, one of Pakistan's most iconic brands, unveiled its refreshed brand identity, marking a defining moment in its evolution as Pakistan's premier financial services group.

For more than eight decades, HBL has shaped Pakistan's financial landscape and contributed meaningfully to the country's economic development. The refreshed identity honours this heritage while expressing clarity of purpose and confidence in the future.

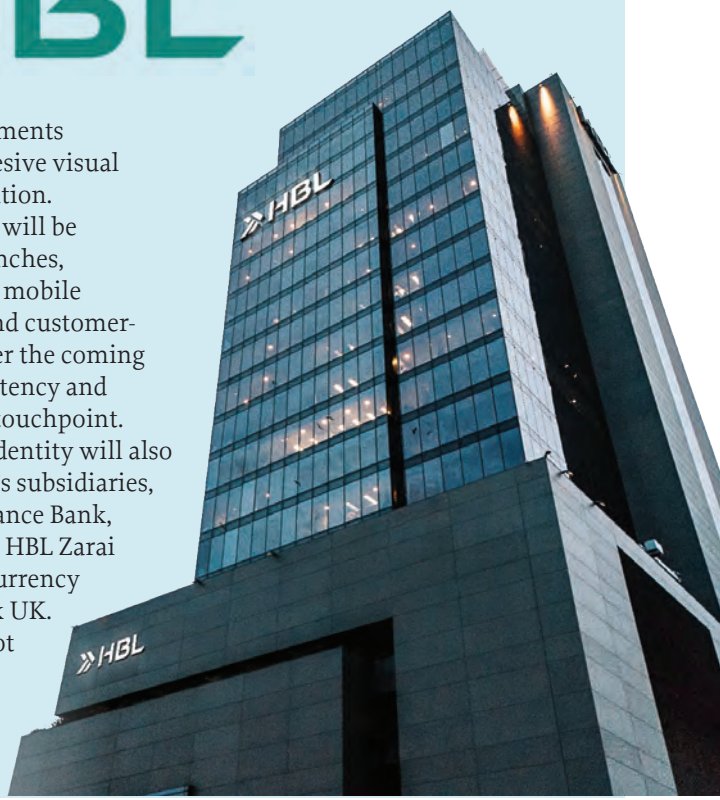
The 'HBL' wordmark remains unchanged, preserving the trust and institutional equity built over generations. The addition of a distinctive design device, inspired by the calligraphic precision of the HBL mark, introduces a contemporary visual language that conveys clarity, movement and progress.

HBL's signature 'Turquoise' color continues to anchor the identity, complemented by 'Light Lemon Yellow' color to enhance vibrancy while remaining unmistakably HBL. Together, these elements create a unified and cohesive visual system across the institution.

The refreshed identity will be implemented across branches, ATMs, digital platforms, mobile applications, websites and customer-facing environments over the coming months, ensuring consistency and recognisability at every touchpoint.

The Refreshed Brand identity will also be rolled out across HBL's subsidiaries, including HBL Microfinance Bank, HBL Asset Management, HBL Zarai Services Limited, HBL Currency Exchange, and HBL Bank UK.

The brand refresh is not a reinvention of HBL. It is a sharper expression of who it is today.

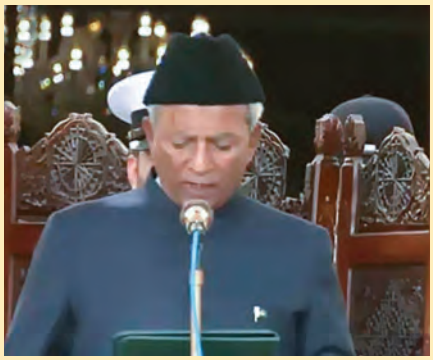


Nehal Hashmi sworn in as Sindh governor

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Nehal Hashmi has been sworn in as the Sindh governor during an oath-taking ceremony at the Governor's House Karachi.

Chief Justice of the Sindh High Court, Justice Zafar Rajput, administered him the oath. Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, provincial ministers, officials from the Bar Council, and PML-N leaders, along with individuals from various walks of life, also attended the ceremony.

Nehal has been sworn in as the governor of Sindh, replacing Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P)'s Kamran Tessori, following President Asif Ali Zardari's approval of his appointment on the advice of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.



Nehal, hailing from Karachi's Malir district, has maintained a decades-long association with the PML-N. The politician's career began as a legal adviser to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif from 1997 to 1999. The PML-N leader later took on key leadership roles within the party, serving as president of the PML-N Karachi chapter in 2012 before being appointed general secretary for the Sindh chapter in 2014. In 2015, he was elected to the Senate on a PML-N seat from Punjab. Although his party membership was briefly suspended in 2017, it was formally restored in 2021, marking his return to the party's core political circle.

China steps in to defuse Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions



China has stepped in diplomatically to help defuse the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, urging both sides to resolve their differences through dialogue as cross-border frictions continue to strain ties between the two neighbours.

According to a statement issued by the Afghan foreign ministry, China's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Yue Xiaoyong visited Kabul and held talks with the Taliban government's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to discuss bilateral cooperation as well as the deteriorating security situation in the region.

During the meeting, the Chinese envoy emphasised Beijing's desire to see tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. He stressed that preventing further escalation was important for regional stability and security.

Yue said China was in contact with both Kabul and Islamabad and was actively working to help reduce tensions between the two sides. S

Bhutan, Singapore launch four new climate projects

Bhutan and Singapore have launched four innovative climate projects under Article 6 co-operation to develop Bhutan's carbon market and low-carbon pathway.

The projects, announced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) under the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources (MoENR) include a nationwide clean cooking initiative, an integrated cooking and space heating mitigation programme, the Bhutan Rural Biogas Initiative, and the Thimphu Biogas and Bio-fertiliser Initiative.

During a three-day programme titled "From Agreement to Action: Bhutan–Singapore Article 6 – Capacity Building for Carbon Projects," various discussions were held to bring in more projects.



Nearly 100 participants from the public, corporate, and private sectors took part in the programme, which was jointly organised by the MoENR and TERRAMA PTE. Limited from Singapore. S

SBP maintains policy rate at 10.5pc

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) in March maintained its key policy rate at 10.5 per cent.

The announcement was posted on the central bank's X account. A detailed statement by the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) was issued late.

In its statement, the MPC said that while the incoming data was largely consistent with the macroeconomic projections shared after the January meeting, it was observed that the macroeconomic outlook had become "quite uncertain following the outbreak of the war in the Middle East".

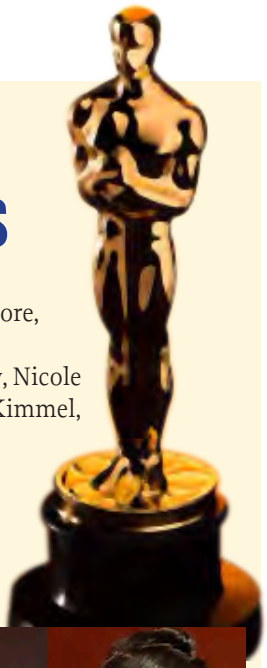


It noted that the conflict had led to a sharp increase in global fuel prices as well as freight and insurance costs, while also affecting cross-border trade and travel.

"Given the evolving nature of events, the MPC observed that the intensity and duration of the conflict will both be important determinants of the impact on the domestic economy," the statement said.

The MPC also acknowledged the "important role of the prudent monetary and fiscal policies in increasing the economy's resilience to shocks". It noted that the country's macroeconomic fundamentals were better compared to the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in early 2022. S

The Oscars 2026 took place amid controversies and conspiracy theories



Hollywood's best and brightest have been honoured with the most coveted awards in the film industry, the Oscars.

One Battle After Another was named best picture at the 98th Oscars held in March. That film took home six Oscars in total. Paul Thomas Anderson also won the award for best directing and best adapted screenplay, marking his first-ever wins. Sean Penn, who wasn't at the ceremony, won best supporting actor for One Battle After Another, setting a record with his win. One Battle also landed an Oscar for best film editing for Andy Jurgensen.

This year, the Oscars added a new category, the first since best animated feature was introduced in 2002, recognizing best casting. Cassandra Kulukundis won the Oscar for One Battle.



Elsewhere, Sinners took home four Oscars. Michael B. Jordan was named best actor, while Ryan Coogler won best original screenplay for his film, which also nabbed the award for best original score for Ludwig Goransson and best cinematography for Autumn Durald Arkapaw, who became the first woman to ever win the award. One Battle and Sinners powered Warner Bros. to a record night. Jessie Buckley was named best actress for Hamnet. Amy Madigan won best supporting actress for her role in Weapons.

KPop Demon Hunters won the Oscar for best animated feature, while the film's "Golden" became the first K-pop song to ever win an Oscar, for best original song. Frankenstein scooped up a trio of wins, for costume design, for makeup and hairstyling, and for production design. In the live-action short category, there was a rare tie. Norway's Sentimental Value was named best international feature, and Mr. Nobody Against Putin won the Oscar for best documentary feature. Also this year, the Academy has decided to feature live performances of two nominated songs — "Golden" from KPop Demon Hunters and "I Lied to You" from Sinners — citing a desire to keep the show moving and end on time. (Read all about the 2026 Oscars.)

In addition, a star-studded lineup of presenters, including past winners, past nominees, and even past hosts, will take the stage Sunday. Among them are last year's acting winners, Mikey Madison, Adrien Brody, Kieran Culkin and Zoe Saldaña. Other presenters will include Will Arnett, Javier Bardem, Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Anna Wintour, Anne Hathaway, Chase Infiniti, Paul Mescal, Demi Moore, Kumail Nanjiani, Gwyneth Paltrow, Nicole Kidman, Jimmy Kimmel, Delroy Lindo, Ewan McGregor, Wagner Moura, Pedro Pascal, Bill Pullman, Lewis Pullman, Channing Tatum, and Sigourney Weaver. Also, a special Bridesmaids reunion took place, including current Oscar nominee Rose Byrne, Ellie Kemper, Kristen Wiig, Maya Rudolph, and Melissa McCarthy. There was also a Marvel reunion with Robert Downey Jr. and Chris Evans.

The show also featured tributes to several stars who died within the past year, including Rob Reiner, Robert Redford, Diane Keaton, and Catherine O'Hara. The 98th edition of the awards, hosted by Conan O'Brien for the second year in a row, aired live on ABC and Hulu from the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles. S

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Paltry growth in exports to EU

Pakistan's exports to European countries experienced a modest year-on-year growth of 1.32 per cent in the first seven months of 2025-26, mainly due to increased shipments to southern and eastern European nations.

Official data showed that, in absolute terms, export earnings from the European Union increased to $5.436 billion in July-January, up from $5.365bn during the same period last year, according to figures compiled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

In FY25, exports to the EU increased by 7.44pc to $8.863bn, up from $8.249bn in the preceding fiscal year. In FY24, exports declined by 3.12pc to $8.240bn despite its GSP+ status, which allows duty-free entry into most European markets. Western Europe, which includes countries like Germany, the Netherlands, France, Italy, and Belgium, accounts for the largest share of Pakistan's exports to the EU. Exports to this region decreased marginally by 3.14pc to $2.622bn in 7MFY26, from $2.707bn in FY25.

There will be a greater challenge for exporters to retain market share following the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, coupled with rising input costs in the country. Exports to northern Europe also slightly declined by 1.12pc to $435.085m



in 7MFY26, from $439.998m in the same period last year. However, there is a slight increase in exports to eastern and southern Europe.

Exports to southern Europe increased by 7.21pc to $1.920bn in 7MFY26, up from $1.791bn in the same period last year. Within this region, exports to Spain rose 8.93pc to $933.85m in 7MFY26, from $857.27m a year ago. Exports to Italy increased 5.02pc to $698.33m in 7MFY26 compared to $664.96m in the same period last year. Exports to Greece recorded an 8.45pc decline to $74.71m, down from $81.61m in the previous year. However, exports to Eastern Europe increased by 7.59pc to $459.293m in 7MFY26 from $426.885m in the same period last year.

Before Brexit, Pakistan's major export destination was the United Kingdom. In the post-Brexit period, Pakistan's exports to the UK slightly decreased to $1.272bn in 7MFY26 from $1.273bn over the corresponding period last year, a decline of 0.07pc. In FY25, Pakistan's exports to the UK increased by 7.19pc to $2.160bn from $2.015bn in the preceding year. Pakistan's exports to western Europe slightly declined by 3.14pc to $2.622bn in 7MFY26, from $2.707bn last year.

Exports to Germany dipped 1.76pc to $987.30m in 7MFY26 from $1.005bn. Similarly, exports to the Netherlands, the second-largest market for Pakistani goods, fell by 1.82pc to $866.05m in 7MFY26 from $882.08m over the corresponding period last year. Exports to France fell by 2.89pc to $320.21m in 7MFY26 from $329.76m, followed by a 3.29pc decline to Belgium's $332.77m against $344.12m. S

New Nepal govt faces same old challenges

Nepal's rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah is set to become the next prime minister after his centrist Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a commanding majority in parliamentary elections.

His meteoric rise, propelled by anti-establishment sentiment and youth anger over corruption, marks one of the most dramatic shifts in Nepal's political landscape in decades. The high-stakes March 5 election came six months after deadly protests that toppled the government, in which 77 people were killed.

Just 35, Shah rose from mayor of



the capital Kathmandu to defeat veteran four-time prime minister KP Sharma Oli in his own constituency. But the new government now faces the far harder task of fixing the Himalayan nation's ailing economy.

Shah faces the difficult transition from disruptive political outsider to governing leader.

"A serious challenge for the RSP is implementing the promises it has made in its manifesto, given the country's limited resources, infrastructure, and policy capacity," political analyst Krishna Khanal said.

"Now the party cannot blame anyone, because it has a majority government. From the day it forms the government, it must go into action." S



Iran war puts Trump's Gaza disarmament plan on hold

Talks to advance President Donald Trump's plan to end the Gaza war have been on hold since last week, when the US and Israel jointly attacked Iran, sparking a broader Middle East war, three sources with direct knowledge of the negotiations said.

The pause threatens to stall implementation of Trump's flagship Middle East peace initiative, which he has cast as a major foreign policy objective. It comes less than a month after he secured billions of dollars in pledges for Gaza from Gulf Arab states — countries that are now facing Iranian attacks as the conflict widens.

Trump's Gaza plan has hinged in part on whether Hamas would lay down their arms in exchange for amnesty, a step intended to pave the way for reconstruction and further Israeli military with-drawals. White House mediators have been backchanneling between Israel and Hamas on the disarmament question.

Negotiations on this and other issues were paused when the Iran war began on Feb 28, the three sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive talks. The pause in disarmament talks has not been previously reported.

Zaha Hassan, of the Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said countries, including the UAE and Qatar, which pledged funds for Trump's 'Board of Peace' mission, may be questioning if this is "really money well spent now that they are dodging rocket fire". S

Stranded Iranian sailors put Sri Lanka, India in diplomatic dilemma



Sri Lanka and India are providing sanctuary to 434 sailors from three Iranian naval vessels targeted or threatened by the United States, a diplomatic conundrum as the US-Israel attack on Iran and the subsequent war spills into the Indian Ocean.

The ships had taken part in a naval exercise organised by India off the coast of Visakhapatnam when the US and Israel began bombing Iran.

For Sri Lanka and India, wary of a US response, the dilemma of what to do with the ships and crew has sent legal officials scouring conventions and the laws of the sea.

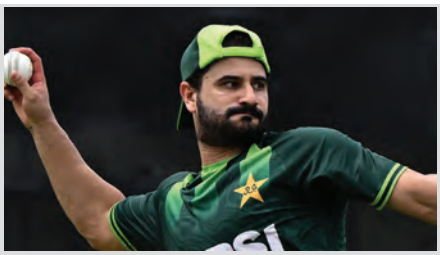
IRIS Dena, a frigate, was sunk with a torpedo fired by a US submarine, just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Between 130 and 180 sailors were on board, and at least 84 were killed.

Sri Lanka rescued 32 survivors, many of whom have since been discharged from the hospital to be hosted at the Koggala air force base in the island's south.

IRIS Lavan, an amphibious landing ship, docked in India's southern port of Kochi. It had 183 sailors aboard, now hosted in naval facilities.

IRIS Bushehr, a supply vessel, entered Sri Lankan waters, carrying 219 crew members.

Among those, 15 remain onboard to assist Sri Lanka's navy, which has taken full control of the vessel. The total of Iranian sailors hosted by Sri Lanka is currently 251. S



Sahibzada Farhan makes it to ICC's Team of the Tournament

The International Cricket Council (ICC) announced the Team of the Tournament for this year's T20 World Cup, with Pakistani opener Sahibzada Farhaan making the list despite the Green Shirts' dismal campaign.

Farhan became the only Pakistani player to be named in the 12-member team for his excellent performance during the tournament, sealing 383 runs – the highest a batter has scored in a single edition of the T20 World Cup.

"Though Pakistan were patchy in the tournament, Sahibzada Farhan was consistently brilliant," the ICC said.

The 29-year-old opener also became the first batter to score two hundreds in a single edition of a T20 World Cup. S

Former CEO of Sri Lankan Airlines arrested

Sri Lankan anti-graft officials arrested the former head of the national airline on charges of conspiring to accept bribes from Airbus in connection with a multi-million-dollar deal.

Kapila Chandrasena, who was CEO of Sri Lankan Airlines during a 2013 deal to purchase 10 aircraft worth $2.3 billion, was arrested and remanded in custody.



"He conspired to accept a bribe of $16 million and received 1.45 million euros into a bank account in Singapore," an official of Sri Lanka's anti-corruption commission said.

Prosecutors say Chandrasena created a shell company in Brunei in his wife's name and arranged for the kickback to be paid into its Singapore account.

Sri Lanka's national carrier is saddled with debt, with estimated accumulated losses of 596 billion rupees ($1.9 billion) at the end of March last year. Attempts to sell the airline have so far failed to attract a buyer.

Pakistan, India in same Hockey World Cup pool

Pakistan has been placed alongside arch-rivals India in Pool 'D' after the International Hockey Federation (FIH) announced the groupings for this year's World Cup, scheduled to be jointly hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands in August.



According to an official announcement, Pakistan will face India, England, and Wales in what is being viewed as one of the most competitive pools of the tournament.

The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF), in a press release issued, said the groups were finalised following a transparent draw process.

"The Pakistan hockey team has been placed in the challenging Pool 'D', where they will face formidable opponents including traditional rivals India, England, and Wales," the PHF stated.

The inclusion of both Pakistan and India in the same pool is expected to generate significant global interest, with the much-anticipated clash between the two sides set to take place at the world level after several years.

Pakistan's recent struggles and lower international ranking had limited opportunities to face top-ranked teams prior to their participation in this year's FIH Pro League.

Hockey followers are particularly looking forward to the Pakistan-India encounter, traditionally regarded as one of the sport's biggest rivalries.

FIH World Cup pools:

Pool 'A': Netherlands, Argentina, New Zealand, and Japan;
Pool 'B': Belgium, Germany, France, and Malaysia; Pool 'C': Australia, Spain, Ireland, and South Africa; Pool 'D': India, Pakistan, England, and Wales.

Shipping lines increase war-risk surcharges

Pakistani exporters are facing mounting cost pressures as new surcharges imposed by global shipping lines and air cargo handlers — triggered by the Middle East conflict — threaten to erode competitiveness, disrupt supply chains, and deepen external-sector risks.

Shipping giant Maersk has announced an increase in its Emergency Contingency Surcharge (ECS) for shipments from Pakistan and the wider subcontinent to West Africa, effective April 1.



Menzies RAS and Gerry's Dnata imposed Rs25-50 per kg "ad hoc charges" on export cargo, in addition to heavy war risk and emergency conflict charges by shipping lines.

A UAE-based airline has also announced supplementary freight charges of $0.70 per kg on exports from Pakistan, effective March 19, 2026, citing changes in market conditions.

The outbreak of war in the Middle East has led to the imposition of war-risk and emergency conflict surcharges ranging from $3,500 to $4,000 per twenty-foot equivalent unit (TEU), depending on the shipping line.



Iran Today, Pakistan Tomorrow?

In the event of Iran's collapse, Israel, India, and the United States may perceive an opportunity to target Pakistan with the objective of dismantling its nuclear assets and missile programs

BY DR. MOONIS AHMAR

Is Iran a defense line for Pakistan? If Iran surrenders, will it be Pakistan's turn? How Pakistan's nuclear and missile stockpile is considered a threat to Israel, and to what extent Islamabad is ready to face the implications of the Gulf War?

These are the questions that are raised following the U.S-Israeli attack on Iran on February 28. Pakistan's ostensible neutrality in the Gulf War will, however, not prevent a future attack on the world's only Islamic nuclear state. With a population of only 93 million and facing colossal U.S-Israeli destruction, Iran is resilient, courageous, and motivated, but can Pakistan, with a population of 225 million faces a predictable Israeli attack in connivance with the United States and India, or will it capitulate without fighting?

In a situation when the Pak-Saudi defense pact has been activated, and Islamabad has pledged to side with Riyadh in case of an external threat, one needs to examine the fact that such a position taken by Islamabad will cause a direct conflict with Tehran. The public opinion of Pakistan is heavily charged against the United States and Israel, and the sufferings of the Iranian people because of the U.S.-Israeli attack have led to local outrage. Walking a tightrope, Pakistan is facing a devil and a deep blue sea-like situation. If Pakistan fails to side with Saudi Arabia and the United States against Iran, it will face strategic and economic ramifications. If it covertly helps Iran to deal with foreign aggression, the outcome will be the activation of the Israeli plan to target Pakistan with Indian and U.S. assistance.

f it is Iran today, tomorrow it will be Pakistan, may not be a myth but a reality. For a long time, Pakistan's nuclear ambitions have been termed as a formidable threat to Israel. There is public pressure on the Pakistani establishment to activate its nuclear shield in favor of Iran and deter Israel from its ongoing attacks against Tehran. But in the last month or so, Islamabad has proved that it has tilted in favor of the U.S and Saudi Arabia by siding against Iran in the U.N Security Council. Pakistan's pro-Western elite knows that it cannot take a position against the U.S and Saudi Arabia because of economic and strategic reasons and must communicate to Iran that it should not target Gulf countries. For Iran, it is like a do-or-die situation. It cannot follow an opportunistic and cowardly approach in its war with the U.S and Saudi Arabia and agree to Pakistan's request of not attacking American bases and installations in the Gulf.

Analysts argue that given Pakistan's economic, political, and strategic vulnerabilities, it cannot take a position against the U.S and Saudi Arabia. Faced with insurgency in the restive province of Baluchistan and terrorism in KPK, the two provinces of Pakistan are already in turmoil. The other two provinces of Sindh and Punjab are also exposed to political fault lines in the shape



of governance issues. Economic consequences of the Gulf War, which compelled Islamabad to increase the energy prices, will further augment inflation, unemployment, and severe price hikes.

With low per capita income, GDP, economic growth rate, and meager foreign exchange reserves, Pakistan is unable to take a courageous stance in the Gulf War. Furthermore, the elite of Pakistan are unwilling to leave their comfort zones and want people to render sacrifices. Crackdown on the PTI-led Opposition and curbs on the media also prevent the Pakistani state from siding with the resilient people of Iran. In that case, Israel, India, and the United States may seize an opportunity if Iran collapses and target Pakistan to dismantle its nuclear and missile program.

In a news item, "Caught between Iran and Saudi Arabia, can Pakistan stay neutral for long?" published in Al-Jazeera by Abid Hussain, March 7, 2026 it is argued that, "As Iranian drones and ballistic missiles continue to target Gulf states, the question being asked with increasing urgency in Pakistan is what Islamabad will do next if it finds itself pulled into the war.

Islamabad's answer so far has been to work the phones furiously, engaging regional leaders, including Iran and Saudi Arabia. When US-Israeli strikes killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on February 28, Pakistan condemned the attacks as "unwarranted." Within hours, it also condemned Iran's retaliatory strikes on Gulf States as "blatant violations of sovereignty."

Following a policy of appeasement and compromising on its sovereignty because of economic fragility will further augment the threat of a combined India-Israel attack on Pakistan's nuclear assets and missile arsenal

For how long Pakistan will take the cover of neutrality and diplomacy to keep itself out from the Gulf war needs to be seen. Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, while speaking in the Senate on March 3, and at a news conference later the same day, disclosed that he had personally reminded Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi of Pakistan's defense obligations to Saudi Arabia. "We have a defense pact with Saudi Arabia, and the whole world knows about it," Dar said. "I told the Iranian leadership to take care of our pact with Saudi Arabia."

Islamabad's back channel and shuttle diplomacy between Tehran and Riyadh has not yielded positive results because Iran has made it clear that it is only targeting Gulf states from where attacks on Iran are carried out from U.S bases.

One can figure out three reasons outlining how Pakistan will be the next target of Israel and the United States if Iran capitulates. First, since long for both the United States and Israel, along with India, Pakistan's nuclear and missile arsenal is a source of utter concern. 'Islamic bomb' is repeatedly mentioned by the three powers with an objective to get rid of Pakistan's nuclear and missile arsenal because they believe that Islamabad might use its nuclear assets in times of conflict with India and Israel.

The U.S-Israeli attack on Iran and the prolongation of the war tend to give an opportunity, particularly to the Jewish state target Pakistan. Israel believes that sooner or later it will have to target Pakistan's nuclear and missile installations because both can be used if Iran is on the verge of collapse. How will Pakistani pro-western elites, having their privileges

and interests at stake in the case of the Gulf war, react if they see the Jewish state, along with the U.S and India, on the verge of taking action against Islamabad? Second, so far, the Pakistani military and security establishment has not allowed jihadi forces to target American interests, but the attack on the U.S. Consulate in Karachi the other day reminds them that the losses of Iran will further galvanize the sentiments of people viewing America as responsible for destroying Iran. In that case, covering up the killing of nine protestors inside the compound of the U.S. Consulate in Karachi by American marines will not make things easier for Islamabad. That augments the vulnerability of Pakistan in the wake of the current situation emanating in the Gulf.

Finally, even if the Gulf war ends and Iran is able to survive U.S-Israeli attacks, supporters of Iran in Pakistan will get more confidence and strength in targeting American interests. The killing of thousands of people in Iran as a result of U.S-Israeli attacks and the elimination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, along with key personalities, will continue to keep up anti-American sentiments and rhetoric in Pakistan. Furthermore, the India-Israel nexus is now obvious as a result of the clear support rendered to the Jewish state by the Narendra Modi regime. For Pakistan, it is a lesson that they must follow the Iranian model of defiance and resistance to protect their sovereignty.

Following a policy of appeasement and compromising on its sovereignty because of its economic fragility will further augment the threat of a combined India-Israel attack on Pakistan's nuclear assets and missile arsenal. One can only hope that Pakistan will not be the next target in case Iran is severely weakened. Pakistan's nuclear deterrence will provide a shield against any foreign attack. S

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Pakistan Cannot Be Another Iran!

There are several reasons to believe that Pakistan cannot be subjected to targeting similar to Iran based on a perceived nuclear threat

BY DR. RASHID AHMAD KHAN

Following a brief India-Pakistan war from May 7-10 this year and subsequent standoff, Pakistan's diplomatic and power projection surged. It was not only the U.S. President Donald Trump praising Pakistan and taking the credit for averting a nuclear war in South Asia, but it also reflected Islamabad's renewed diplomatic surge in the Gulf, the Middle East, and other parts of the world.

How Pakistan, which was facing diplomatic isolation and charges of sponsoring terrorism, was able to strike back and re-establish its role in the global and regional setting? How is India perceived as following a defensive line and being unable to respond to the reality that it lost its armed conflict with Pakistan? How can Pakistan capitalize on its diplomatic resurgence and benefit from its prevailing pivotal role in regional and global affairs? Why is the BJP-led government, despite experiencing a military setback with Pakistan, unwilling to alleviate its politics of hate at the domestic level? These are the questions raised by those who see Pakistan's diplomatic resurgence as both a challenge and an opportunity, despite the BJP's belligerent posture internally.

Pakistan is trying to seize the opportunity of causing a blow to India during the May 7-10 war. But despite facing a defensive position since its last brief war with Islamabad, the BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has refused to reform its domestic agenda by mitigating the politics of hate. The politics of prejudice pursued by the Modi government adds to religious and communal polarization in India, which is least helpful for New Delhi to overcome its regional and



international limitations.

For critics, it may be a euphoria on the part of the Pakistani establishment that it has greatly benefited from its ostensible triumph in the May conflict with India and is now in a stronger position, thanks to its warm relations with major global powers, particularly the United States, Russia, and China. But the reality on the ground may be different. Pakistan remains in dire economic straits, with its foreign exchange reserves not exceeding $15 billion; its economic growth rate is marginal, and its exports have not surpassed $30 billion. Politically, the establishment, along with its subordinate civilian partners, attempted to capitalize on its claimed victory over India by imposing further curbs on the media, opposition, and taming the judiciary, while accumulating more power in the top echelon of military leadership under the 26th and 27th constitutional amendments.

Those who believe that praise from Donald Trump will enable them to strengthen their hold on power and establish a quasi-military hybrid regime that undermines the constitution, democracy, and the rule of law may, however, be mistaken. Those wielding real power confidently judged that by engineering constitutional amendments, they could ensure the supremacy of security forces in the mode of governance. Against this background, the introduction of the 26th and 27th constitutional amendments was aimed at undoing the supremacy of the constitution, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, and ending a level playing field for the opposition. However, while pursuing a hard road of authoritarian governance, those who rule the roost, along with their civilian stooges, are not mindful of the fact that similar efforts in the past have also failed to materialize.

When constitutional amendments are made not for national interests but to ensure the interests and privileges of individuals holding key positions of power, such efforts damage Pakistan's diplomatic position. The world will not take it positively if endeavors are made to weaken the constitution and judiciary at the expense of democracy, freedom of the press, and an inclusive mode of governance. By taking such measures, Pakistan's diplomatic edge, which was gained following the May 2025 armed conflict with India, may be diminished. International media and civil society will reject constitutional amendments and efforts to strengthen the position of a few individuals holding positions of power at the expense of democracy.

According to the Daily Parliament Times issue of November 9, "Pakistan's diplomatic offensive has reached its peak - particularly after decisively thwarting India's blatant and brazen military misadventure in May 2025. It would not be an exaggeration to state that such a vigorous and impactful diplomatic drive has rarely been witnessed in the nation's more than seven-decade-long diplomatic history. Recent constructive engagements and carefully coordinated initiatives, under the forward-looking leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and the country's Army Chief, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, merit genuine recognition. Through a proactive, soft power–driven strategy aimed at advancing both national and global objectives, Pakistan has significantly elevated its international standing, emerging as a prominent and respected voice on the world stage."

Pakistan's Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement with Saudi Arabia, along with its role in the Doha and Istanbul talks on Afghanistan, reflects Pakistan's diplomatic success. Pakistan's seat as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and its role in Arab-Muslim talks on Gaza held recently in Istanbul is another evidence of Pakistan's expanding diplomatic landscape.

The regional implications of Pakistan's growing diplomatic

success require examination from three angles. First, Pakistan is diplomatically active not only in the UN but also in the SCO and ECO. Likewise, its role in the D-8, a group of developing countries, is also paramount. Unfortunately, SAARC is in limbo, and the 19th SAARC summit, scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016, has not been held due to India's refusal to participate, given its contentious issues with Pakistan. Furthermore, Pakistan is active in Gaza peace endeavors and in resolving its conflict with Afghanistan.

Indeed, Pakistan's success in the May 7-10 armed conflict with India is instrumental in providing an edge to Islamabad in regional and global diplomacy. To what extent Pakistan has been able to utilize its diplomatic influence in recent years is yet to be seen. However, one thing is sure: after decades of stagnation on the diplomatic front, Pakistan is now in the mainstream of diplomacy. For years, Pakistan felt neglected and isolated at the international level and faced challenges from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on the issue of terrorism and money laundering. However, Pakistan was removed from the FATF's grey list in October 2022, but it still faces the challenge of ongoing monitoring. Second, Pakistan's breakthrough in mending fences with Bangladesh following the August 2024 regime change in Dhaka is termed another milestone in Islamabad's regional diplomatic achievements. With Nepal and Sri Lanka, Pakistan has also recently strengthened its relations. However, ties with the Taliban regime in Kabul are witnessing a downward trend.

Recently, India and Afghanistan have been in a friendly mode. The visit of the interim Afghan Foreign Minister to India and Kabul's support to New Delhi's stance on Jammu & Kashmir is a source of concern for Pakistan. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad, criticized Kabul's support to the Indian claim over J&K, terming it a negation of ground realities reflecting New Delhi's illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. It means Pakistan's diplomatic space in South Asia is challenged by Afghanistan, which has now emerged as an Indian ally.

A significant challenge to Pakistan's security and diplomacy in South Asia is the two-pronged water threat that it is facing from India and Afghanistan. If India has suspended the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) of 1960, Kabul is building a dam over the Kunar/Kabul River, which will cause a severe water shortage for Pakistan.

Like Iran, Pakistan does not suffer from strategic loneliness

Finally, as mentioned earlier, the only way Pakistan can ensure its diplomatic edge in foreign policy is by putting its own house in order. It means ensuring political pluralism, economic vibrancy, good governance, the rule of law, upholding the constitution, and democracy. It would also mean empowering youth, eradicating corruption and nepotism, as well as extremism and terrorism from society. Most importantly, what matters for a successful foreign policy is a leadership that is mindful of protecting sovereignty and national interest.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's track record in pursuing an independent foreign policy is questionable. Pakistan has not learned the lessons of putting all its eggs in one basket and then facing letdown by Washington. Recent warmth in Pakistan-U.S. relations is another manifestation of a marriage of convenience. Recently, the signing of 10 10-year defense cooperation agreements between India and the United States proves the contention wrong that the United States and India are not on good terms.

Cordial relations with neighbors and win-win ties with major powers will undoubtedly enhance Pakistan's prospects for successful diplomacy and its foreign policy. Although Pakistan cannot unilaterally take steps to better its relations with New Delhi, it certainly needs to focus on exposing Modi's years of sinister efforts to isolate Pakistan regionally and internationally and put the blame of terrorist acts on Islamabad for domestic political consumption.

Despite India's military setback and its failure to diplomatically isolate Pakistan, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not reversed the BJP's politics of hate and policy of exclusiveness. This is evident from the recently held state elections in Bihar, where, despite expectations, the Indian National Congress-led progressive alliance failed to outperform the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance. It also means that despite not securing a two-thirds majority in last year's general elections, the BJP managed to continue its politics of targeting religious minorities, including Sikhs, and promoting Hindu nationalism. As a result, despite its economic vibrancy, the image of Modi's India reflects negatively at the international and regional levels, which gives impetus to Pakistan's diplomatic resurgence. S



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In The Belly Of The Beast

Pakistan has to look within amidst a multitude of internal pressures and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Iran

BY FATHIMA SHEIKH

On 28 February, coordinated missile and air strikes by Israel with operational support from the United States struck military and political targets across Iran. The operation occurred while indirect negotiations over Iran's nuclear program were still ongoing, a timing that immediately raised concerns among diplomats and analysts. Within hours of the first wave of strikes, Iranian state media confirmed that the country's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, had been killed in a targeted strike in Tehran along with several members of his family and senior officials.

The assassination marked the most consequential leadership decapitation in the Middle East in decades. Iran declared forty days of mourning and established an interim leadership council before the Assembly of Experts selected Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, as the new supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. The transition occurred in the middle of an escalating military confrontation in which Iran's leadership has made clear that retaliation is not negotiable and that the conflict will be treated as a war of national survival rather than a diplomatic dispute.

Within this rapidly expanding strategic environment, the implications for Pakistan are unusually complex. With a population exceeding two hundred and forty million, the country occupies one of the most strategically sensitive corridors in the world–bordering Iran, Afghanistan, India, and China, while lying close to the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly twenty percent of the world's oil supply passes each day. At the same time, Pakistan is the only Muslim-majority state with nuclear weapons, a status that shapes its deterrence posture and embeds it in competing strategic calculations across Asia and the Middle East. This unique position amplifies Islamabad's security dilemmas and complicates its diplomatic options at a time of intense regional tension.

Pakistan's position in the crisis is further complicated by its relationships within the Muslim world. Islamabad maintains close relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia, two states that have historically competed for influence in the Middle East. Pakistan shares a long border with Iran and must cooperate with Tehran on trade and border security, while Saudi Arabia is one of Pakistan's most important economic and strategic partners. In 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia formalized their security cooperation through a strategic mutual defence agreement that commits both countries to assist each other in the event of external aggression. This creates a delicate diplomatic balance. If tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia were ever to escalate into direct confrontation, Pakistan could find itself navigating conflicting pressures between a neighboring state and a formal security partner, illustrating the complex strategic environment in which its foreign policy operates.

These realities indicate that Pakistan is not merely an observer of regional crises from afar; instead, it is situated at their convergence point. Instability in Afghanistan spills across its western frontier, and the escalation involving Iran carries immediate economic and

social implications. While its defence treaty with Saudi Arabia ties Pakistan to the Gulf and the West, neighboring Iran, a strong Muslim ally, has its own history of agreements, treaties, trade, and brotherhood. Furthermore, the dispute with India over Kashmir remains unresolved between the two nuclear-armed states. Taken together, these pressures create a strategic environment in which Pakistan sits at the center of overlapping geopolitical fault lines rather than at the margins of global conflict.

Apart from the global forum, it is primarily Pakistan's internal political landscape that has contributed to its consistent and now rapid institutional fatigue. Over the past two decades, power has largely alternated between the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, both of which have faced repeated allegations of corruption, patronage politics, and weak governance. Critics argue that this political usurping, combined with the enduring influence of Pakistan's establishment, has allowed structural weaknesses in the economy and governance system to deepen rather than be resolved. Quite frankly, the country is currently at the center of one of the most volatile geopolitical confrontations in the world while managing domestic divides that can easily be manipulated by any outside force because its governing bodies are compromised.

In recent years, the country's constitutional framework, particularly its judiciary, has undergone significant revisions. The Twenty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan introduced a new framework for judicial appointments and created a federal constitutional court, expanding parliamentary and executive influence in a domain that historically functioned as an independent check on political authority. In most constitutional systems, the judiciary serves as the final safeguard against the concentration of power, and its legitimacy depends on clear institutional distance from political actors. When political institutions gain greater influence over judicial appointments or tenure, that separation becomes harder to preserve. In a political environment already corrupted by persistent governance illegitimacy, this change has eroded judicial independence and created new avenues through which political interests shape legal outcomes.

It is primarily Pakistan's internal political landscape that has contributed to its consistent and now rapid institutional fatigue

Institutional fragility alone, however, does not explain Pakistan's vulnerability. The country also sits atop several internal and regional fault lines that require careful political management. Two of the most significant lie along its western frontier: the Pashtun belt along the Afghan border and the province of Balochistan.

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan has always been complex. Ethnic, tribal, and familial ties stretch across the Durand Line, particularly among Pashtun communities living on both sides of the frontier. Instability in Afghanistan rarely remains confined within Afghan territory; it inevitably spills across the border and reshapes Pakistan's internal security environment. Those dynamics resurfaced late February 2026, when Pakistan launched a series of airstrikes in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar and Paktika provinces, targeting camps and hideouts alleged to belong to the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The Afghan Taliban government condemned the strikes as a violation of sovereignty, and engagements soon expanded into broader cross-border clashes involving artillery, aircraft, and drone incidents.

Balochistan represents another sensitive pressure point. As Pakistan's largest province by land area and one of its most resource-rich regions, Balochistan has long experienced tensions between local political movements and the central government. Periodic insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations have created a fragile equilibrium that requires constant political attention. Analysts across Pakistan's political spectrum acknowledge that sustained confrontation in Balochistan could produce consequences far more serious than localized unrest.

While these internal pressures unfold and Israel's war with Iran continues to cause severe destruction within the region, Pakistan has to look within. It should not go unnoticed that a neighboring Muslim state is currently being subjected to Israeli aggression, backed by the United States, largely due to its pursuit of nuclear capability, while Pakistan, itself a Muslim nuclear power, already possesses such deterrence. In an increasingly volatile regional landscape, this contrast is instructive. It underscores how easily the interests of actors embedded within compromised institutions can be influenced or redirected, particularly in a country that may not outwardly appear to be the next target, yet, in strategic terms, may well be central to it. Pakistan does not have the luxury to sit idly and observe for long, for even silence comes at a cost.

With its fragile institutional fabric that threatens to rip at the seams, the erosion of political legitimacy, and the cultural divide that pulls its citizens towards provincial identities rather than a single national identity, Pakistan is sitting in the belly of the beast. It is not the question of whether it is next, but rather, was it Pakistan all along? S

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Walking a Tightrope

Maintaining a delicate balance between Arabs and Persians, Pakistan continues to please all and sundry with a carefully calibrated language of neo-realism

BY ISHTIAQ ALI MEHKRI

Islamabad was never in a dilemma as it is these days. The State of Pakistan is on a tightrope as it has to balance its relations with the aggrieved Iranians as well as the Arabs in a state of shock and awe. At the same time, there is a self-cherished warfront deep inside Afghanistan for reasons of realpolitik. And, of course, a constant self-appraisal to be seen in Chinese and American camps alike.

The aggression over the Islamic Republic has exposed the fault-lines of our foreign policy. The bogey of 'nuclear umbrella' for the Muslim world; 'defence' of the holy lands in adversity; and the 'Mutual Defence Pact' with the Saudis are all in a faux pas of their own. Yet, Pakistan performed superbly by maintaining the delicate balance between the Arabs and Persians, as it kept on pleasing all and sundry with a carefully calibrated language of neo-realism.

Yet, there was a slip evident as Pakistan failed to condemn the United States for its trigger-happiness over Iran. That bit of appeasement, many say, was inevitable, though.

The shadows of war were never an issue for a resilient nation, but the petrol bomb that was ruthlessly dropped on them. The 'Little Boy', a reference to the 1945 atomic bombs, came with an Rs55-per-litre hike in petroleum products as a bolt from the blue. It was quite enough to seal the common man's fate with destitution. It was an unwarranted decision by the gurus in the federal cabinet, made out of callousness.

That was tantamount to fleecing the nation, coupled with sordid lectures of 'austerity,' as the ruling tetra-elite found themselves on board G-Series supersonic, newly-bought aircraft.



They have the audacity to air-dash capitals in Europe, and indulge in extravagant merry-making as the nation reels under political instability and pestering inflation.

There was none to remind the autocrats that oil stocks were sufficient for the next 45 days for a product bought on subsidised rates of less than $65 a barrel. Not once did it cross their minds that a cushion of Rs400 billion is also available from the IMF, which could be used for succour, bailing out the downtrodden from an inevitable oil price slump. The point is, who cares as the have-nots remain engrossed in misery, and the elite have better things to think of! The raised tariff shall never be undone in Pakistan, even if the US and Iran garland each other!

The political mosaic remains muddy, with PTI stalwarts hiding beneath an 'Iron Dome' for reasons of complicity. Their chest-thumping to nail down the Establishment was an illusion. Achakzai and Allama Abbas are perhaps in a thought-process, and sitting fingers-crossed. Sohail Afridi apparently is learning to bowl over the wicket without stepping on the crease. The Opposition is clueless as the 'coalition-of-the-powerful' is unrelenting.

Imran Khan has his own destiny to decide, and it is a universal truth

that he cannot be cowed down. The fighter in him keeps on going, putting his allies and adversaries in an arithmetic game of chicken. If history is any criterion, from Che Guevara to Nelson Mandela, the Skipper is going to have the last laugh as his party has literally abandoned him.

The only exceptional grit is from veteran Aitzaz Ahsan. The barrister-cum-politician has courageously come out of Parkinson's to write an epilogue for his democrat colleague, now in solitary confinement for over 100 days. The octogenarian is eager to twist the judicial confines on the right side of history, only if someone is listening to his logic.

As Thomas Paine, the great American author of 'Common Sense', wrote: "These are the times that try men's souls." Aitzaz is simply pushing the envelope further. His stepping in reminds many of the 2007 lawyers' movement, in which he received a call from then-ISI Chief Ashfaq Pervaiz Kiani, which stemmed the rot, and normalcy was restored. Will history repeat itself, enabling better sense to prevail even in this case?

Postscript: The Supreme Court has ruled that the privacy of individuals is inviolable. The dictum says that any attempt to violate it or to bypass it by use of force, lawful or otherwise, is a criminal act. It went on to declare that any surveillance "effectively transforms even a victim into an offender". Flashback: six honourable judges and many more in civil society are complainants. They are unheard of to this day. S

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Dangling Republic

Pakistan's economy seems to be suspended between stabilization and collapse, repeatedly negotiating external assistance while struggling to implement structural reforms at home

BY ASIF JAVED

Pakistan's economic trajectory has long resembled a pendulum, swinging between brief spurts of growth and prolonged phases of crisis. Each recovery is often followed by fiscal stress, external borrowing, and renewed stabilization programs. Since 1958, Pakistan has entered more than twenty arrangements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), reflecting persistent structural weaknesses in the economy. Today, the country is again operating under a $7 billion, 37-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreed with the IMF in 2024. The central question remains: is Pakistan trapped in a cycle of dependency, or can it break the pattern and move towards sustainable stability?

The current IMF program aims to consolidate the fragile stabilization achieved after the 2023 balance-of-payments crisis. The EFF focuses on restoring macroeconomic stability, rebuilding foreign exchange reserves, reducing inflation, and creating conditions for sustainable growth. Its reform agenda



includes broadening the tax base, strengthening fiscal discipline, restructuring state-owned enterprises, reforming the energy sector, and improving governance and transparency in public finances.

Fiscal consolidation lies at the core of the program. Pakistan has committed to increasing tax revenues by expanding the tax net, reducing exemptions, and bringing undertaxed sectors such as retail and agriculture into the formal system. At the same time, federal and provincial governments are expected to coordinate through a proposed National Fiscal Pact to strengthen revenue collection and rationalize public spending responsibilities. These reforms are intended to place public finances on a more sustainable footing while safeguarding social protection and development spending.

Despite these efforts, structural vulnerabilities remain. According to recent IMF assessments, Pakistan's fiscal deficit is projected at around 4.1 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year, an improvement from 5.3 percent last year but still above official targets. Long-term pressures from rising pension and healthcare costs also threaten to widen fiscal gaps unless structural reforms are sustained. Encouragingly, increased tax collection and fiscal consolidation could gradually reduce the country's public debt ratio from about 71.6 percent of GDP to around 60 percent by the end of the decade, but only if reform momentum is maintained.

However, domestic reforms alone may not determine Pakistan's economic future. External shocks, particularly those linked to global energy markets and geopolitical conflicts, continue to shape the country's economic vulnerability. Recent developments in the Middle East illustrate how quickly global instability can spill over into Pakistan's economy.

The escalating conflict in the Middle East has already begun to affect Pakistan through energy prices and financial markets. In response to rising global oil prices linked to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, the government recently implemented an emergency Rs55-per-litre increase in petrol and diesel prices, highlighting how quickly global shocks translate into domestic economic pressure. Analysts warn that this may only be the first of several adjustments if volatility in oil markets persists.

Pakistan's economy is particularly sensitive to energy shocks. Past episodes, such as the oil price surges of 2008 and 2022, show that attempts to shield consumers through subsidies often worsen fiscal deficits and fuel inflation once price adjustments eventually occur. In both cases, delayed price corrections contributed to macroeconomic instability and exchange-rate pressures.

The current crisis carries additional risks because Pakistan's external sector is closely tied to the Middle East. A significant share of remittances comes from Gulf economies, while much of Pakistan's west-bound exports transit through ports in the region. Any prolonged disruption to shipping routes or economic activity in Gulf states could therefore reduce remittance inflows, disrupt trade, and place further pressure on the exchange rate.

Energy supply risks are another concern. Industry sources warn that diesel imports, crucial for agriculture and transport, could become difficult to secure if disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz persist. With the wheat harvest approaching, diesel shortages could push up food prices and intensify inflationary pressures across the economy.

These external shocks highlight a deeper structural reality as Pakistan's economic stability remains heavily dependent on factors beyond its control. A narrow export base, heavy reliance on imported energy, and dependence on external financing continue to expose the country to global volatility.

Yet Pakistan's long-term potential remains considerable. With a population exceeding 240 million, a large youth demographic, and a strategic geographic position linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, the country possesses structural advantages that could support sustained growth. Expanding exports, improving industrial productivity, and investing in human capital could gradually reduce vulnerability to external shocks.

Ultimately, Pakistan's latest IMF program should be viewed not merely as another bailout but as a test of reform credibility. If the commitments embedded in the EFF translate into durable institutional changes, particularly in taxation, fiscal management, and energy governance, the country could gradually escape its recurring cycle of crises.

If not, Pakistan risks remaining what some observers increasingly describe as a "dangling republic", suspended between stabilization and collapse, repeatedly negotiating external assistance while struggling to implement structural reforms at home.

The choice between these two futures will depend less on external financing and more on domestic resolve. Sustainable recovery will require political consensus, institutional discipline, and a willingness to pursue reforms that extend beyond immediate crisis management. Only then can Pakistan transform its periodic stabilization efforts into a durable foundation for economic resilience.. S

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Islamabad



Day of Reckoning

A defeated, fragmented Iran would leave Israel as the Middle East's unchallenged hegemon, controlling lands up to the Euphrates and arriving as a rogue power on Pakistan's doorstep

BY AMBASSADOR M. ALAM BROHI

Pakistan's chronic economic dependency on Western financial institutions and affluent Arab friends has systematically undermined its will and resolve to stand up as a sovereign nation. Its flawed Afghanistan policy, from the Saur Revolution onwards, including its involvement in the US war against the Soviet Union, hosting and training so-called Islamic warriors, and later helping the Taliban gain control of Afghanistan, has compounded this vulnerability. Internal political gerrymandering since the 1971 debacle and the resulting political instability have further eroded Pakistan's capacity to make sovereign decisions, address challenges independently, and reckon honestly with moments of truth — both within the region and beyond.

The world has been fast-changing. It will change drastically after the ongoing USA and Israeli aggression against Iran. The war is bound to have far-reaching consequences for the Middle East in terms of geography, economic resources, and political sovereignty. The war was not prompted by the immediate prospects of Iran going nuclear or posing any immediate, existential threat to the security and territorial integrity of Israel or the United States. They have been blatantly lying to justify their invasion of a sovereign nation, and the brutality unleashed by the carpet bombing of Iran, targeting and killing the senior political and military leadership. The Mongolian barbarity, as preserved in history, pales in comparison to the brutality of these modern Genghis Khans.

The purpose of the war was to realize the Jewish dream of Greater Israel. This is borne out by the systematic elimination of the powerful Arab nationalist and autocrats from Iraq, Libya, Syria, and the destruction of the organizational infrastructure and power of nationalist Ikhwan, Hezbollah, and Hamas. The latter was patronized by Israel to undermine the PLO or the Al-Fatah after Yasser Arafat. These autocrats and organizations were known for their resistance to the expansion of Israel. Lebanon suffered

a lot at the hands of the Israeli leaders since the early 1980s. The current pounding of the Lebanese cities and towns has caused a lot of devastation in terms of infrastructure and the displacement of over 700,000 people. All this is being perpetrated in flagrant violation of international law, the UN Charter, and war conventions adopted by the international community.

We don't know how or in what way the war will end. We can apparently foresee that a new landscape of political, economic, and strategic conditions would emerge in the Middle East. If Iran survives the current military onslaught and strikes a deal with the US-led Western world under international guarantees, the depth and nature of the strategic threat to the Gulf States and Pakistan would be less challenging, as historically speaking, Iran has never posed any threat to the security and the territorial integrity of the Gulf States. Like all other states, it was increasing its area of influence with a view to resisting Israel's expansionism. If the war goes in the way of these modern Mongols, with Iran battered, fragmented, and forced into submission to the control of the USA and Israel, Israel would emerge as the unchallenged dominant power in the Middle East, controlling all the states and lands up to the Euphrates, and becoming a rogue neighbor of Pakistan.

To all ultra-right Jews, Pakistan poses a bigger threat to their country than Iran or Türkiye. In the latter nightmarish scenario, we would have limited options - either to acquiesce in what our Arab brothers would do, accepting the dominance of Israel in the region, or to align with any other alliance, perhaps spearheaded by China and Russia. The political sovereignty of our Arab brothers would be drastically reduced and their economic resources fully controlled by the modern Mongols. They would choke the Iranian oil supply to all the countries that remain out of their sphere of control or refuse to wear the scented robe of the Abraham Treaties. China would be the first to face this restriction on the flow of Iranian oil.

Pakistan has been following a longstanding foreign and security policy of neutrality in any intra – Arab and intra-Muslim conflict. We should avoid giving any impression of being with this Muslim country or not supporting that Muslim country. Iran has made it plain that, exercising its right to self-defence, it attacked the US military bases in the Gulf States, and has not intentionally targeted any other infrastructure or place. Israel wants to divide the Muslim countries in the region. The Western policy of divide and rule has been at play during all Arab-Israeli wars, including the 'Yom-e-Kippur' war.

This policy of divide and rule has been reactivated by trying to create an unbridgeable wedge between Iran and the resource-rich Gulf States. Some believe that these countries are being targeted by Israel to provoke them to join their war against Iran. This would directly benefit Israel and the USA, weakening Iran's resistance, and precipitating its capitulation, paving the way for the achievement of the main objective of the war - the dream of Greater Israel. The Arab leaders would be well advised to understand the concealment, deception, and subterfuge employed in war. Israel dragged the US into the war and now wants the Gulf States to jump into the arena.

Pakistan has never been in a more difficult situation than it is at present. India, licking its wounds from the brief air clash of May last year, will never miss an opportunity to avenge its humiliation; we are in a war with the Afghan Taliban on our northwest; Iran on our west is burning in a brutal war imposed on it by the USA and Israel; the insurgency in Balochistan has gathered steam, and ominously coincides with the TTP's accelerated terrorist attacks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Our economy continues to be dependent on foreign loans, and remittances dispatched by our compatriots from the Gulf States, which would certainly be drastically cut given the economic fallout of the war; the intensifying stances of the ruling class and the opposition in the political arena at this critical juncture ridicule the political wisdom of our political leadership. It is the responsibility of the ruling party to address the political grievances of the Opposition, which was genuinely elected by the people of Pakistan.

The ruling elite regretfully prioritizes the decimation of the Opposition over the national situation. An Anti-Terrorist Court has recently handed down harsh punishments to dozens of high-ranking leaders and activists of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, including its founding chairman Imran Khan, on charges generally believed to be politically motivated. The courts should function even in emergency situations, but the nature of the cases, the prosecution's purpose and intent, and the timing of judgments always matter.

Any system of governance that relies more on coercive state measures than on public service is bound to create political agitation, confrontation, and instability. We found ourselves in a deepening political quagmire since April 2022, when the PTI regime was removed by a vote of non-confidence backed by the Establishment. It seems this political confrontation suits the elite and certain power-wielding institutions. This may be so provisionally, but it is always harmful in the long run. Public support is a sine qua non for the success of national missions. Let us be a nation and not a crowd of bystanders. We are as concerned for the territorial integrity of our land as any institution. It is bad governance to try to test the patriotism of citizens living in any part of the federation.

The difficult times are ahead. The war in the Middle East would create new political and economic

landscapes, with both opportunities and challenges. Pakistan, being a strong, nuclear Muslim country, can emerge as the leading power in the new emerging region from the vast steppes of Kazakhstan to the Mediterranean shores. However, this can never happen until we unite the nation and address internal political challenges that undermine the federation, find a negotiated solution to the festering insurgency in Balochistan, and iron out our strategic differences with the interim administration of Afghanistan.

We should rehabilitate our economy by doing away with all the luxury concession and privileges extended to the elite (recently reported to be $17.5 billions), shun our chronic habit of begging loans and roll-outs, drastically cut our overhead expenditures reducing the size of bureaucracy, and cabinet in the federation and provinces, curb corruption, and mismanagement of resources and pilferage of funds. We should focus on building a vibrant nation rather than managing a flock of lambs; free our political system from gerrymandering and ensure fair and transparent elections, letting national and local political dynamics determine the voters' verdict, as in civilized nations.

Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun vociferously complain about the erosion of their political and economic autonomy. There would be no harm if the whole situation of political and economic autonomy were reviewed by a non-controversial committee from across the national political spectrum. The leaders of the Baloch Yakjehti Council and PTI need to be set free to play their part in the political reconciliation process. There is no threat to the state from these leaders. Their continued incarceration has been fueling public anger and political bitterness. S



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National Government?

Is there any real basis for the rumors about a national government in Pakistan, or is this just another chapter in the country's ongoing history of political speculation and elite bargaining?

BY DR. M. ALI HAMZA



Calls for a "National Government" have once again entered Pakistan's political debate. The latest proposal came from former federal minister Muhammad Ali Durrani. He urged major political leaders to set aside personal ambitions and unite around a national agenda. His remarks quickly sparked speculation in political circles. Commentators began discussing the possibility of forming a broad-based national government that would include all major parties. According to these discussions, the proposed arrangement would focus on economic stabilization, constitutional reforms, and national security. Elections would then be held after a transitional period of two to three years.

Such ideas have also been accompanied by calls for dialogue to reduce political polarization. These conversations have created what analysts often describe as corridor talk. In other words, the idea of a national government is circulating informally among political observers and media commentators.

Is there any truth behind these speculations? Or are they simply another episode in Pakistan's long history of political rumours and elite bargaining? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine Pakistan's political history and institutional framework.

Historically, Pakistan has never experienced a formal multiyear all-party national government during a democratic period. There have been moments of political cooperation, but these arrangements were limited and temporary. They did not resemble a full national unity government. One example emerged after the 2008 elections, when the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) formed a government and initially included the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in a coalition. However, this partnership did not last long. Political differences soon

resurfaced, and the coalition collapsed. Similarly, after the tragic attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar in 2014, political parties united behind the National Action Plan. This initiative created consensus on counter-terrorism policies. However, even this cooperation did not translate into a unified national government. These examples illustrate an important point: Political cooperation in Pakistan has existed, but it has rarely evolved into institutional power-sharing.

Why then, such speculations repeatedly emerge? One explanation lies in the structure of Pakistan's political system. Factually, the country's military establishment has played a significant role in politics. During periods of political instability, analysts often speculate that the establishment may support political arrangements that stabilize governance without imposing direct military rule. In this context, the idea of a national government appears attractive. It promises political stability while preserving civilian authority. Whether such assumptions are accurate is another matter, but the perception itself fuels speculation.

Political scientists also identify structural reasons within Pakistan's democratic system that fuel such speculation. Firstly, fragmented electoral outcomes. When parliaments are divided and governments appear fragile, discussions about broader political arrangements become common. The situation after the 2024 Pakistan general election reflects this pattern. Since 2024, Pakistan has been experiencing one of the most polarized political periods in decades. The confrontation intensified after the 2022 vote of no confidence against former prime minister Imran Khan, which led to his removal from office. Since then, political conflict has continued through protests, arrests, and legal battles. In such an environment, a temporary political truce could reduce instability. A national government, in theory, could bring major parties together and calm political tensions. However, political reality suggests otherwise.

Trust between the main political actors remains extremely low. The relationship between the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and the ruling coalition is deeply confrontational. Meanwhile, Nawaz Sharif and the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party are already part of the current governing alliance. Given these dynamics, forming a joint national government appears politically difficult.

Secondly, economic pressures also shape this debate. Pakistan continues to face high inflation, fiscal constraints, and structural economic challenges. Programs with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) require politically unpopular reforms. Subsidy reductions, higher taxes, and rising energy prices often provoke public dissatisfaction. Observers, therefore, argue that a national government could distribute the political cost of reforms. If all major parties share responsibility, no single party would bear the entire burden of unpopular decisions. This logic partly explains why the idea of national government surfaces during economic crises.

Thirdly, security concerns further strengthen calls for national unity. Terrorism threats and regional instability sometimes push political leaders to emphasize collective decision-making.

Despite these arguments, the current speculation appears weak. Why? First, the creation of a multi-year national government would require constitutional or parliamentary arrangements. Pakistan's political system is based on elected parliamentary governments with a defined electoral cycle. Any deviation from this structure would require formal legal procedures. So far, no constitutional process towards such an arrangement has been publicly initiated.

Second, political polarization remains intense. The conflict between the government and Imran Khan's party continues in courts and on the streets. Without mutual trust among major parties, forming a unified government would be extremely difficult.

Third, there has been no official confirmation from the government or state institutions. Public statements and diplomatic briefings currently focus on economic reforms and security policies rather than political restructuring. For these reasons, many critics argue that proposals for a national government often emerge during periods of uncertainty but rarely materialize into institutional arrangements.

In Pakistan's political history, power-sharing ideas frequently remain speculative because political actors prioritize electoral competition and partisan advantage. Nevertheless, the repeated discussion of a national government reflects a deeper concern. Many citizens and analysts worry about the country's political polarization and economic fragility. In such circumstances, calls for unity appear appealing, even if they are difficult to implement.

For now, however, the idea of a national government remains largely a topic of political debate and media commentary. It is not yet a confirmed plan within Pakistan's constitutional or parliamentary framework. In reality, such an arrangement would likely emerge only under extraordinary circumstances. Major political crises sometimes force reluctant rivals to compromise. One hopes that Pakistan never reaches a point where such drastic measures become necessary. Stability achieved through democratic consensus is always preferable to stability imposed by crisis. S

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Patna

Modi's Man

The appointment of Nitin Nabin as the new national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) raises many questions about the BJP's carefully choreographed succession, characterised by a cadre-based network and the ideological training of the RSS

BY DANIYAL TALAT

The appointment of Nitin Nabin as the new national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), succeeding Jagat Prakash Nadda, marks a significant moment in the evolution of India's most powerful political party. After nearly two years of anticipation and internal consultations, the transition was formally announced during the BJP's organisational celebration, Sangathan Parv, at the party headquarters in New Delhi. Though presented as a democratic internal election, the process followed a familiar pattern that has defined the BJP since its formation in 1980: a consensus candidate files a nomination unopposed and is declared elected.

The elevation of the 45-year-old Nabin, now the youngest president in the party's history and the first from the eastern state of Bihar, signals both generational change and strategic recalibration within the BJP. Yet it also raises a broader question about the trajectory of Indian political parties: whether the era of multiple internal power centres and heavyweight leaders is fading, and whether the BJP is gradually moving towards a model of tightly controlled leadership once associated with its principal rival, the Indian National Congress.

Within the BJP, the presidency has traditionally been more than a ceremonial role. Historically, it served as a powerful organisational position that shaped the party's ideological direction, election strategies, and grassroots mobilisation. Leaders such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani represented an era when the party contained multiple influential personalities capable of shaping policy debates and public messaging.

The BJP of the 1980s and 1990s was defined by such ideological stalwarts, whose stature within the organisation allowed them to influence both internal decisions and national politics. Over time, however, the balance of power within the party has shifted. The emergence of Narendra Modi as the dominant political figure after the 2014 Indian general election transformed the BJP into a more centralized political machine, with strategic authority increasingly concentrated around the prime minister and a small group of senior leaders, including Amit



Shah, Rajnath Singh, and Nitin Gadkari. In this context, the party president's role has evolved from an independent political heavyweight to an organisational coordinator responsible for implementing the broader vision set by the central leadership.

The selection of Nitin Nabin reflects this contemporary structure. Known within party circles as a disciplined organiser with a "party-first" approach, Nabin's rise has been closely tied to his long record of grassroots political work. Beginning his career in the party's youth wing, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, he steadily climbed the organisational ladder while simultaneously building an electoral base in Bihar. He first entered the Bihar Legislative Assembly in 2006 from the now-defunct Patna West constituency and subsequently secured repeated victories from the Bankipur seat, establishing himself as a five-time legislator. Along the way, he served in various capacities within the state government led by Nitish Kumar, handling portfolios such as law, road construction, and urban development. These administrative roles, combined with nearly two decades of organisational experience, have shaped Nabin's reputation as a pragmatic political operator capable of navigating both governance and party management.

Beyond his personal trajectory, Nabin's elevation also carries important regional symbolism. By appointing the first national president from Bihar, the BJP has signalled its intention to strengthen its presence in eastern India—a region that remains politically crucial yet electorally competitive. States such as West Bengal, Assam, and Odisha have emerged as key battlegrounds where the party seeks to expand its influence.

At the same time, the BJP's alliance dynamics in Bihar, where it shares power with Nitish Kumar's regional leadership, make the state strategically significant for national politics. Elevating a leader from Bihar, therefore, sends a message of regional inclusion while reinforcing the party's organisational network in the east. Another factor that contributed to Nabin's rise was his role as an electoral strategist. Party insiders frequently cite his work in the 2023 assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, where he served as the BJP's election in-charge during a contest widely expected to favor the incumbent government led by Bhupesh Baghel of the Indian National Congress. Contrary to many predictions, the BJP secured a decisive victory. Observers attributed the outcome partly to meticulous groundwork carried out under Nabin's supervision, including organisational restructuring, booth-level mobilisation, and targeted campaign messaging.

For a party that prides itself on disciplined electoral management, such organisational successes often carry significant weight when leadership positions are considered. Despite these achievements, Nabin's appointment has also reignited debates about internal democracy within Indian political parties.

By appointing the first national president from Bihar, the BJP has signalled its intention to strengthen its presence in eastern India—a region that remains politically crucial yet electorally competitive

Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized during the announcement that the leadership transition was conducted through a "completely democratic process," highlighting the BJP's organisational discipline and commitment to procedures. Yet critics note that the party has never witnessed a genuinely contested presidential election since its founding. The selection process typically involves consultations among senior leaders and the ideological parent organisation, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, after which a consensus candidate emerges. Once nominated, that candidate is elected unopposed. Supporters argue that such a consensus reflects unity and organisational maturity, while detractors view it as evidence of a controlled leadership structure that discourages open competition.

The comparison with the Congress party inevitably arises in this context. For decades, the Congress was criticised for concentrating authority around the Nehru-Gandhi family and limiting internal contestation for leadership roles. Today, the party is led by veteran politician Mallikarjun Kharge, whose age and long career have often been contrasted with the BJP's effort to promote younger leaders. Ironically, however, the BJP's own system of consensus appointments raises questions about whether it, too, is evolving towards a model in which a central core tightly manages leadership decisions. The key difference, proponents argue, lies in the BJP's organisational ecosystem. Unlike the Congress, where leadership has often been linked to dynastic succession, the BJP's pipeline draws heavily from its cadre-based network and the ideological training of the RSS. In theory, this structure allows leaders from diverse backgrounds to rise through organisational work rather

than family connections.

Nevertheless, the broader transformation of Indian politics cannot be ignored. Across parties, the trend has increasingly favoured strong central figures who dominate both electoral campaigns and party structures. In the BJP's case, Narendra Modi's personal popularity and political authority have become central to the party's national narrative. The president's role, therefore, functions primarily as an organisational extension of that leadership rather than an independent power centre. This dynamic does not necessarily imply the disappearance of capable leaders within the party, but it does suggest that their influence is exercised within a more coordinated hierarchy.

As Nitin Nabin assumes his new responsibilities, he faces the task of steering the BJP through an ambitious electoral calendar that includes crucial state contests in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Uttar Pradesh, as well as preparations for the 2029 general election. The party already enjoys a formidable grassroots network and a strong electoral record, but sustaining that momentum will require careful management of regional alliances, organisational discipline, and ideological coherence. For Nabin, the challenge will be to maintain unity among the party's diverse factions while ensuring that its extensive cadre remains mobilised.

Ultimately, Nabin's rise encapsulates both continuity and change within the BJP. On the one hand, it reflects the party's longstanding tradition of consensus-driven leadership selection and organisational discipline. On the other hand, it signals a generational shift designed to keep the party aligned with a younger electorate and evolving political landscape. Whether this model represents the decline of heavyweight political figures or simply a new phase in the institutionalisation of party leadership remains open to interpretation. What is clear, however, is that the BJP's internal structure—and the role of its national president—has adapted to the realities of a political era defined increasingly by centralized authority, strategic coordination, and the enduring influence of a dominant national leader. S

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Brothers in Arms

The deepening India-Israel relations will have significant implications for the region, and this nexus can be highly dangerous for Pakistan



BY SAJAD JATOI

The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi landed in Israel on 25 February for a two-day official visit, just 48 hours before Israel and the US started a war against Iran by killing its top leadership in the middle of ongoing negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme. The sensitive timing of PM Modi's visit to Israel has made it necessary to analyse the nature and implications of the trip. The questions arise: What does it indicate in view of India's policy of strategic autonomy and non-alignment? Has India quit its ideological posturing on the Palestinian cause, and has it decided to join the US-Israel camp while compromising its position on the forums of the Global South?

Before discussing these questions, it is essential to shed light on the regional situation prior to this controversial visit. Before PM Modi arrived in Israel and signed 16 agreements and 11 joint initiatives spanning science, technology, trade, and labour mobility, Israel had been planning to attack Iran and eliminate its top leadership. In this unlawful and illegal mission, it had the backing of the U.S. President Donald Trump. The attack was grounded on the fears that if it did not take action by this time, it would be too late, as Iran had been actively engaged in upgrading its defensive and offensive capabilities following the 12-day war of June 2025. Israel believed that once Iran upgraded its military capabilities, it would become untouchable and invincible. Such were the circumstances when PM Modi landed in Israel.

While the tour is significant, it is being viewed from multiple lenses. Some analysts view it as a decisive turning point in Indian foreign policy. They opine that India has decided to join the US-Israel camp and has decided to take this relationship deeper. What makes them say this is the timing of the visit. After 7 October 2023, Israel has been facing international isolation over the issue of the genocide of innocent Palestinians. In fact, its own allies have shifted their stance on the matter. To illustrate, Spain, France, Canada, and other countries have recognised a Palestinian state and criticised Israel for its actions. However, PM Modi ended this isolation. He not only paid a visit but also became the first foreign PM to address the Israeli parliament, called the Knesset.

Some analysts view this visit in light of the existing cooperation between Israel and India. These two countries share ties in defence cooperation and trade. To illustrate, India imported radars, drones, and other critical military technology worth over 20 billion USD between 2020 and 2025, accounting for 34% of Israeli exports of military equipment. For example, during the May conflict between India and Pakistan, India had relied on Harop drones imported from Israel. Therefore, some analysts think that the visit emphasises the continuation of that cooperation.

However, the visit has drawn domestic ire. Opposition parties in India see this as a weakness in India's foreign policy. Leaders of the Indian National Congress, such as Rahul Gandhi, criticised PM Modi, saying he has compromised the independence of India's foreign policy. They believe India has given in to U.S. coercion. This is because India has always followed a policy of non-alignment. Historically, it has rallied behind the Palestinian cause as it has enjoyed closer relations with the Palestinian Liberation Organization. However, India under the BJP seems to have shifted from this stance. For example, during his speech at the Knesset, PM Modi did not condemn the killing of over 72,000 Palestinians by Israeli forces.

India has slowly but definitely leapt into the U.S. camp

What's more, the failure of India to condemn the illegal attack of the U.S. military on the Iranian warship called IRIS Dena in international waters near Sri Lanka has also put it in the limelight. The ship was struck by an American torpedo after it was returning from maritime drills hosted by and held in India. The incident resulted in the loss of over 87 marine soldiers. Nonetheless, India did not issue any statement, further confirming its capitulation at the hands of the U.S.

While some analysts want to view India-Israel relations from a broader perspective, given that both Israel and India are part of the proposed India-Middle East Economic Corridor, the U.S. administration's public statements reveal a different picture. To illustrate, following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the wake of the Iran-Israel-U.S. war, the spokesperson of the US stated that the U.S. had granted a 30-day waiver to India to buy Russian oil. This was pointed out by INC leader Rahul Gandhi, who criticised the statement, saying that the U.S. president will now decide from whom India should buy oil.

From these developments, it can be deduced that India has slowly but definitely leapt into the U.S. camp. The days of an independent foreign policy for India seem to be days of the past. This strategic shift will have a widespread impact on India's claim to represent the Global South. This is because India has sided with Israel at a time when an important ally, which is part of BRICS, was under attack from the rogue states of the Global North. This will definitely diminish India's influence on the forums of the Global South.

Given this historic turning point, the deepening India-Israel relations will have significant implications for the region. This nexus can be highly dangerous for Pakistan, which is an adversary of both New Delhi and Israel. New Delhi can utilise Israeli military equipment and intelligence. It can also strengthen its air defence system by importing Iron Dome. This may embolden India and could trigger another Pakistan-India war in the future. . S

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Mandate With Minefields

A sweeping election victory has brought the BNP back to power in Bangladesh. However, the path ahead may be far more complicated than the triumph itself.

BY ATIF SHAMIM SYED

February elections in Bangladesh delivered more than just a change of government; they ushered in a new political moment filled with both promise and uncertainty. After nearly two decades on the margins of power, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, has secured a resounding parliamentary majority. Yet the victory brings with it a complicated mandate. The BNP must now navigate a landscape shaped by high expectations for domestic reform, a resurgent Islamist political presence, and the urgent need to recalibrate relations with India, China, and the United States. How the party manages these intersecting challenges will shape not only its own legacy but Bangladesh's trajectory for years to come.

The election results were decisive. The BNP and its allies captured a decisive parliamentary majority, marking the party's return to power after years of political confrontation and instability. The vote was widely interpreted as a public response to the prolonged political crisis that followed the mass protests and student-led uprising of July 2024, which ultimately ended the long tenure of Sheikh Hasina's government.

During the elections, voters were also asked to approve a list of constitutional and governance reforms aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and limiting the concentration of executive power. Many of these proposals, such as introducing term limits for the prime minister and creating additional institutional checks, received



significant public support. However, the precise mechanism and timeline for implementing these reforms remain subject to debate.

This situation creates a paradox for the new government. On the one hand, the electorate has given the BNP a powerful mandate to govern. On the other, it has expressed strong support for reforms designed to reshape the very architecture of executive authority.

The BNP's own policy framework, often framed around a "Bangladesh First" approach, reflects this tension. The party has laid out ambitious economic goals, including the aspiration to transform Bangladesh into a trillion-dollar economy over the coming decade, expand infrastructure, strengthen governance institutions, and improve judicial independence. It has also pledged stronger anti-corruption measures and accountability for abuses linked to the political unrest of recent years.

Yet translating these promises into reality will require navigating a more pluralistic political environment.

Among the notable developments of the election cycle has been the renewed electoral presence of Islamist parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, which have regained parliamentary representation after years of marginalization. Their re-entry into national politics reflects shifting electoral dynamics and the fragmentation of the opposition landscape.

For the BNP, this creates a delicate balancing act. The party must pursue governance reforms and economic modernization while maintaining social stability in a political environment that now includes actors with significantly different ideological visions for the country's future.

Foreign policy presents another complex challenge. Bangladesh's diplomatic posture under the previous

administration was widely viewed as closely aligned with India. The new government appears likely to pursue a somewhat more diversified strategy of external engagement, seeking productive relations with India while also strengthening ties with China, the United States, and other partners.

Relations with India will remain particularly sensitive. Key issues, including border security, water-sharing agreements involving major rivers such as the Teesta, and cross-border trade, have long shaped the bilateral agenda. Managing these concerns will require pragmatic diplomacy, particularly given the deep economic and geographic interdependence between the two countries.

At the same time, China has become a major partner in infrastructure development across South Asia, including Bangladesh. The challenge for Dhaka will be to continue benefiting from Chinese investment while avoiding the perception of strategic alignment that could heighten tensions with India or Western partners.

Washington, meanwhile, has signaled interest in working with Bangladesh's new leadership on economic cooperation, governance reforms, and regional security issues. For the BNP government, strengthening ties with the United States may also depend on demonstrating credible progress on democratic governance, human rights, and institutional reforms.

Beyond great-power diplomacy, Bangladesh continues to face a major humanitarian and security challenge along its southeastern frontier. The Rohingya refugee crisis remains unresolved, with more than a million displaced people living in camps in Cox's Bazar. With Myanmar still gripped by internal conflict, prospects for large-scale repatriation remain uncertain. The new government will likely need to pursue broader regional and international cooperation to manage the humanitarian burden while maintaining stability in the host communities.

Taken together, these dynamics mean that the BNP returns to power at a moment when Bangladesh's political system may be entering a more competitive and fluid phase. The era of overwhelmingly dominant single-party politics may be giving way to a more contested environment characterized by coalition-building, debates over institutional reform, and greater public scrutiny.

For the BNP leadership, success will ultimately depend less on electoral victory and more on the delivery of governance. If the government can translate its mandate into economic progress, institutional strengthening, and a balanced foreign policy, Bangladesh could enter a new period of stability and growth. If it falters, the country risks exchanging one cycle of political turbulence for another.

A new dawn has indeed arrived in Bangladesh's politics. Whether it leads to a clear day or another storm will depend on the choices made in the months ahead. S

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Nepal's Gamble

Nepal's Generation Z has received its mandate—what's next? Can the RSP deliver and transform this landslide victory into a lasting legacy?

BY DR. PUSHPA R. JOSHI

The Gen-Z uprising-backed election yielded incredible results in Nepal, with the alternative claiming political force - the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) - claiming almost two-thirds of the electoral majority. In fact, RSP is just one seat of the illustrious two-thirds majority in a 275-member House of Representatives (HoR). A two-thirds majority is an extremely rare achievement in a parliamentary democracy.

In an electoral system with participatory representation (PR), like in Nepal, the RSP's electoral achievement is astonishing. The post-election analysis reveals that the people have expressed anticipation and support for RSP, expecting it to address the issues raised during the Gen-Z uprising.

The ball is now solely in RSP's court. Hence, it is apparent that the RSP responds to people's endorsement and works exclusively towards people's well-being. To that end, the RSP and its leadership should establish a task force to develop strategies to implement the promises made during their election campaign. These include preparing a dialogue paper on constitutional amendments within three months, reducing the number of ministries, initiating investigations into the assets of public office holders since 1990, reimbursing the pending savings of small-scale cooperative depositors



within 100 days, and depoliticizing universities, among other commitments.

The landslide electoral victory of RSP can be credited to only one individual: Balendra Shah, the former mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City and RSP's proposed prime ministerial candidate. The rapper-turned-politician, Balendra Shah, has remained a somewhat enigmatic political figure, as he rarely appeared at public events or interacted with the media during his tenure as mayor. Although Shah was unable to fulfill his major pre-election commitments as mayor, the public responded positively to his visible, albeit cosmetic, achievements. Hence, Balendra Shah was perceived as the poster boy of good governance, and the people sensed him as the savior of the nation.

Until a few months before the election, Balendra Shah remained a vocal critic of the RSP and its leadership. People had expected that Shah would establish his own political party to contest the federal election. The stakeholders of the Gen-Z uprising had already expressed their confidence in him during the movement. In fact, the Gen-Z protesters had called on Shah to take charge of the nation after the incumbent prime minister and his ministers fled following the storming of their official residences by violent protesters. Hence, it was believed that Balendra Shah's political outfit would perform well in the election.

Unlike people's speculations, the tables turned just before the election, and two politically opposite poles - Balendra Shah's team and RSP - converged together to form a sturdy political force. This provided a fresh gust of wind to the deteriorating reputation of RSP that was carrying the fraudulent baggage of its chairman, Rabi Lamichhane.

Despite the current government's soft corner for RSP and Lamichhane, the party's political campaigning was not picking up pace due to Lamichhane's dubious reputation and internal party conflicts. However, the integration of Balendra Shah and his team into the RSP abruptly elevated the RSP's political standing. The final result of the election shows that this strategy seems to have worked extremely well.

Pre-election reports indicated that voters were overwhelmingly focused on a single figure—Balendra Shah. This was also evident during his extravagant roadshows across the country. In many cases, the respective RSP candidates were of secondary importance to voters, as Balendra Shah himself remained their primary focus. Hence, whoever the candidate was, they were accepted as Balendra Shah's candidate, and the people poured their votes only on RSP's symbol on the ballot paper.

People have given their verdict. Now, this is the responsibility of RSP to work for the people. The notion that a new, alternative political force is needed to steer Nepal towards prosperity requires justification. However, the majority of elected RSP parliamentarians were previously associated with traditional parties. In addition, many convicted criminals and individuals with dubious morals have also been elected to parliament. This, however, presents an opportunity for these individuals to restore their reputation and make a fresh start.

As authority entails accountability, RSP has a thorny path to follow after its landslide victory. Nepal's socio-politico-economic status has plummeted to its lowest point at the moment. The state machinery, including the bureaucracy and the judiciary, remains old-fashioned. The morale of the security forces is at its lowest ever after the trauma they suffered during the Gen-Z uprising. The people seem divided by their political beliefs. Moreover, partisan politics is entrenched throughout state institutions. Over that, the RSP does not have participation in the upper house, as well as in provincial and local governments. Hence, RSP faces a mammoth challenge and, at the same time, a great opportunity to reform Nepal. It can be achieved only through good governance, meritocracy, and the leaders' willpower.

With people's overwhelming electoral endorsement, RSP has only one course of action - to deliver. The People of Nepal have great expectations from the RSP, as traditional political parties have repeatedly betrayed them for many decades. However, with two exclusively opposite careerist and populist characters - Balendra Shah and Rabi Lamichhane - at the leadership, it would be interesting to see how RSP proceeds further.

The endorsement RSP has received is the result of the incompetence of traditional parties. The initial days of the government will likely indicate the direction in which it intends to govern. Backed by overwhelming public support, the RSP is well-positioned to pursue reforms in Nepal's governance system. Nevertheless, the journey ahead is unlikely to be smooth, as significant challenges remain. It remains to be seen how the RSP and its leadership will navigate the obstacles that are likely to emerge at every step in the coming days.S

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Settlement Under Siege

The diplomatic rupture between Mauritius and the Maldives exemplifies a wider trend in global politics: when a dispute appears to be resolved, someone tends to shift the focus

BY GULNAZ NAWAZ



Mauritius has cut diplomatic ties with the Maldives after Malé refused to recognize its claim to the Chagos Archipelago. Port Louis says the move defends its sovereignty. The timing is sensitive, as the UK is preparing to transfer the islands under a 2025 agreement. The Maldives' stance threatens to reopen a dispute thought to have been resolved after years of negotiation.

In the 1960s, Britain took the Chagos Islands away from Mauritius just before it became independent. The islands were designated as the British Indian Ocean Territory, allowing the British to build a base on Diego Garcia. Between 1968 and 1973, 2,000 people who lived on the islands, called the Chagossians, were forced to leave their homes and move to Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Britain. Families were separated, and people lost their jobs. A whole community was left without a home. Fifty years later, people still remember what happened, and it continues to affect the argument over the Chagos Archipelago.

Mauritius has been working hard to make its case. In 2019, the International Court of Justice ruled that Britain should not be in charge of the islands and that they should be returned to Mauritius. After the United Nations General Assembly voted to say that the process of decolonization should be finished.

Another decision from the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea helped Mauritius more, saying that Britain was not entitled to control the Chagos Archipelago. Even though these decisions did not immediately change who was in control, they definitely helped Mauritius in the talks.

After years of talking, there was finally a breakthrough. In May 2025, London and Port Louis signed an agreement stating that Mauritius could be in charge of the Chagos Archipelago, and that Britain and the United States could still use the Diego Garcia base for 99 years. The Chagos Archipelago is still an issue. The Chagos Archipelago presents a complex situation. Mauritius is working hard to resolve the issue of the Chagos Archipelago.

For British officials, the deal preserved a crucial security asset. Diego Garcia has long been a logistical and intelligence hub for Western military operations, serving NATO and US forces for more than five decades. From surveillance flights to counter-terrorism missions, the base has quietly played a pivotal role in regional security.

For Mauritius, the agreement felt like the finish line after a marathon. Decades of legal petitions, diplomatic lobbying, and international campaigning had finally borne fruit. It was not a perfect victory, but it was widely considered the closest thing to closure the dispute had produced.

Yet the calm proved short-lived. Mohamed Muizzu, the current president of the Maldives, has rejected both the treaty and Mauritius' claim outright. In recent remarks, he dismissed Port Louis' decision to cut diplomatic ties as "naive and immature," arguing that such gestures do nothing to change what he

describes as the underlying reality of sovereignty.

Muizzu has wrapped the argument in his government's "Maldives First" policy, insisting that any settlement regarding the islands must involve Malé directly. In his view, past agreements between Britain and Mauritius cannot substitute for what the Maldives considers its own historical entitlement.

Former Maldivian president Mohamed Nasheed has echoed that sentiment, though in a slightly softer tone. Nasheed called the diplomatic rupture worrying but urged Malé not to abandon its position. At the same time, he expressed hope that dialogue might yet prevent the dispute from spiraling further.

What makes the situation particularly puzzling is that the Maldives once appeared to support Mauritius. In 2022, Maldivian officials indicated their backing for the ICJ advisory opinion at the United Nations. The shift in policy under the current government has therefore raised eyebrows, turning what had largely been a bilateral matter between Britain and Mauritius into a triangular diplomatic tangle.

Beyond the legal arguments lies a wider geopolitical chessboard. The Chagos Islands sit at a strategic crossroads between Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. In recent years, the Indian Ocean has become a stage for quiet but intense competition among major powers.

India, a longtime partner of Mauritius, has generally supported Port Louis' sovereignty claim while emphasizing the need for regional stability. Analysts note that India's backing, though often understated, has helped Mauritius frame its case within a broader narrative about rule-based order in the Indian Ocean.

Across the Atlantic, former US president Donald Trump sharply criticised the UK-Mauritius deal, calling it "an act of great stupidity" that could complicate future security arrangements. His remarks were blunt, even by Washington standards, but they reflected a lingering unease in some strategic circles about shifting sovereignty around such a critical military hub.

In the 1960s, Britain took the Chagos Islands away from Mauritius just before it became independent

Legal challenges are also simmering. In March 2026, the High Court of England and Wales declined permission to bring a case seeking to block the sovereignty transfer. The claimants argued that displaced Chagossians had not been properly consulted before the agreement was finalised. The court acknowledged the injustices suffered by the islanders but found no sufficient legal basis to halt the deal. The applicants have said they will appeal.

Meanwhile, some United Nations bodies have voiced concerns about the fate of the Chagossians themselves. A committee in Geneva warned that the new arrangement might not adequately guarantee their right to return or fully address the historical wrongs inflicted upon them. In other words, even if sovereignty changes hands, the human story at the heart of the dispute remains unfinished.

This information indicates that the Chagos question remains far from settled. Beneath the diplomatic statements and legal arguments lies a tangle of competing interests: sovereignty claims, strategic military calculations, and the unresolved grievances of a displaced community.

The diplomatic rupture between Mauritius and the Maldives is more than a spat between two small island states. The diplomatic rupture between Mauritius and the Maldives exemplifies a wider trend in global politics: when a dispute appears to be resolved, someone tends to shift the focus.

The Maldives has every right to present its arguments. Reopening an issue that international courts have examined and the United Nations has debated could potentially muddy already troubled waters. International law may not always move quickly, but when it does produce a measure of clarity, ignoring it sets an awkward precedent.

Mauritius' claim rests on years of legal rulings and sustained diplomatic effort. The 2025 agreement with Britain was, in many ways, a pragmatic compromise, one that balanced sovereignty with strategic realities. It was hardly perfect, but it nudged the dispute closer to resolution.

On the other hand, the Maldives' challenge could complicate matters. Every established ruling subject to political reconsideration erodes the credibility of international norms.

Ultimately, the Chagos archipelago is about more than lines on a map. It is about whether the international system can correct historical wrongs without creating new ones. It is about whether small states can rely on law rather than power politics to defend their rights.

Stirring the pot again may be a risky gamble in a region already crowded with strategic rivalries. The Indian Ocean has enough storms brewing as it is. The last thing it needs is for an old dispute to turn into a brand-new fault line. S

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Prisoners of Conscience

Behind Bhutan's global pursuit of "Gross National Happiness" hides a grim truth: dozens of political prisoners are enduring decades of imprisonment

BY MUHAMMAD OMAR IFTIKHAR

International human rights organizations have intensified pressure on the Bhutanese government to free dozens of political prisoners who have been behind bars for decades, many of them serving life sentences under harsh conditions.

During the 16th World Social Forum held in Nepal in March 2024, members of South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR) urged Bhutan to release individuals they described as "prisoners of conscience" immediately. The group said these detainees were jailed for their peaceful political expression or identity, and under Bhutanese law, only King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has the power to pardon them. The appeal was echoed by Human Rights Watch (HRW), which documented at least 37 political prisoners detained between 1990 and 2008, of whom about 34 remain imprisoned, many without the possibility of parole.

HRW highlighted the case of Ram Bahadur Rai, a 66-year-old man who was released in July 2024 after spending 30 years in prison for distributing political pamphlets. Rai, a member of Bhutan's Nepali-speaking minority, was among nearly 90,000 people forced to flee Bhutan in the 1990s amid widespread discrimination and violence. He told HRW that he was arrested in 1994 while distributing leaflets on behalf of a banned group and later convicted under fabricated charges without legal representation. During his trial, he was allegedly tortured and given a sentence of more than 31 years. Upon his release, he was expelled from the country.

Rai described severe prison conditions, including limited food, lack of medical care, and poor living facilities, where detainees rely on rice sacks for bedding and receive low-quality blankets only once every few years. HRW said such treatment amounts to inhumane and degrading punishment, calling for the immediate release of all remaining political prisoners.

As per a report on HRW.org, "The physical torture was merciless," said one man, "so we had no option but to present ourselves to the court based on [the security forces'] demands and their statements." "They would beat me up, so I confessed, although it wasn't true," said another.

Such accusations are not new to Human Rights Watch, which has documented similar cases globally. Yet, few would expect them to emerge from Bhutan — the Himalayan kingdom often celebrated for pursuing "gross national happiness" rather than economic gain. The concept, embedded in Bhutan's 2008 Constitution, has captured global attention, influencing economists, the United Nations, and even inspiring the annual World Happiness Report.

In a submission to the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in April 2024, HRW noted that independent reporting on human rights in Bhutan remains severely restricted. The group said local media outlets operate under heavy government influence through the

Bhutan Media Foundation, and that defamation and libel laws are often used to silence dissent. Journalists have reported pervasive self-censorship and fear of retaliation when covering politically sensitive topics.

Bhutan's standing in the World Press Freedom Index 2024, published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), dropped from 90th to 147th place. RSF cited the government's tight control over information access and a culture of self-censorship among journalists. "Everyone fears speaking openly, even our sources," journalist Yangyel Lhaden of Kuensel told RSF, emphasizing that access to official data remains extremely limited.

Civil society organizations face similar challenges. In 2023, the government dissolved the Bhutan Civil Society Network, restricting NGOs representing marginalized communities, especially those advocating for the rights of the Nepali-speaking Lhotshampa minority.

In 2024, UN human rights experts joined the chorus of concern, urging Bhutan to release 32 prisoners detained for decades following protests against the mistreatment of the Lhotshampa community. The experts said these individuals were convicted under broad and vaguely defined national security and terrorism laws, resulting in sentences ranging from 34 years to life imprisonment.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention previously ruled in 2024 that the imprisonment of several of these detainees was unlawful. The experts have now called on King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to use his constitutional authority to pardon and release the prisoners, noting that similar acts of clemency in the past set a positive precedent.

They further urged the Bhutanese government to revise its National Security Act and Penal Code, ensuring that counterterrorism provisions align with international standards and are not used to suppress dissent. The experts emphasized that the protests leading to the convictions were rooted in decades of discrimination against Bhutan's Nepali-speaking minority, who continue to face social and political marginalization.

More than 100,000 Lhotshampa refugees were displaced during the violent crackdowns of the early 1990s. The UN experts concluded by urging Bhutan to initiate a process of accountability and reconciliation, addressing these historic injustices in line with its international human rights obligations. S

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Durand Fault Line

If aerial strikes fail to change Taliban policy regarding militant groups operating from Afghanistan, the ongoing Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict could further deepen hostility between the two states

BY AMBASSADOR SANAULLAH

The current Pakistan-Afghan crisis is not the result of a single trigger but rather the convergence of several structural and immediate factors that have gradually eroded the fragile equilibrium along the Durand Line. For decades, the conflict along the Durand Line largely unfolded through proxy dynamics, militant sanctuaries, and intermittent skirmishes. However, recent events, including airstrikes, cross-border attacks, and large-scale troop deployments, suggest a shift toward direct military confrontation between the two states.

After the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in August 2021, many analysts initially expected relations with Pakistan to improve. Pakistan had long supported the Taliban and their negotiations with the United States and facilitated the peace process that ended with the Doha Agreement. However, rather than stabilizing, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations deteriorated sharply. Several structural factors undermined expectations of a return to normalcy in the region.

The most serious issue in the current tensions has been the resurgence of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where TTP activity is concentrated, recorded 2,331 fatalities in 2025—a 44 percent increase from 2024. The statistics for the current year are even more disturbing. After the Taliban's takeover, many TTP fighters who had fled to Afghanistan were released from Afghan prisons or allowed to reorganize. TTP fighters now operate from Afghan territory to conduct cross-border attacks on Pakistani military posts. Afghanistan either does not care or lacks the capacity to control them. Pakistan has argued that if the Taliban cannot hand over the TTP leadership or control the group themselves, they should allow Pakistan to dismantle TTP and BLA sanctuaries operating from Afghan territory.

Another source of tension relates to the Taliban's views on the status of the Durand Line and the border fencing erected by Pakistan. Taliban fighters have often removed sections of Pakistan's border fence and engaged in cross-border firing incidents,

provoking military responses and sudden closures of border crossings at Torkham and Chaman.

Pakistan's Afghan refugee deportation policy has also irritated the Taliban authorities. They did not fully appreciate Pakistan's security concerns and the economic pressures that forced the authorities to launch deportation policies against undocumented Afghan refugees. However, Afghan authorities argued that deportations would create humanitarian problems in an already fragile economy.

Many analysts believe that the deportation policy hardened recalcitrant elements within the Taliban leadership who dispute the Durand Line as the international border between the two countries. In fact, successive Afghan governments, including elements within the Taliban, have historically viewed the Durand Line as a colonial boundary dividing Pashtun tribes and depriving Afghanistan of its traditional tribal areas.

Another contributory factor is that the Taliban government continues to ignore Pakistan's requests regarding the non-use of Afghan territory for attacks against Pakistan. This situation may also relate to simmering leadership differences between the Kandahar-based leadership around Hibatullah Akhundzada and the Haqqani network based in eastern Afghanistan, each with its own priorities and power base. Because of these internal dynamics, the Taliban leadership may be reluctant to abandon its former ally, the TTP. Some analysts also argue that Afghanistan's fragile economy makes it extremely difficult for the Taliban government to effectively control militant networks or stabilize the remote border regions.

The broader regional geopolitical environment has also generated pressures contributing to Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions. India has sought to improve its relations



If the Taliban government refuses to restrain TTP and BLA militants, Pakistan's current campaign of aerial strikes is unlikely to abate

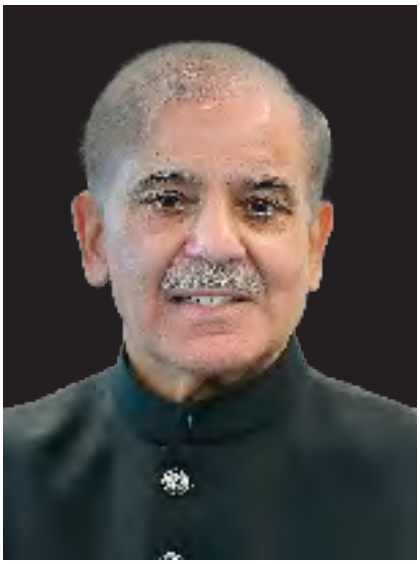
with the Taliban to limit Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan. Pakistani analysts believe that such engagement may indirectly encourage militant proxies targeting Pakistani military posts and civilian targets. This complex regional environment complicates mediation efforts and makes it difficult to secure a verifiable commitment from the Taliban leadership regarding the containment of TTP and BLA activities.

Pakistan has attempted a range of responses, from bilateral negotiations to multilateral diplomatic initiatives and limited aerial strikes against militant camps. Yet these efforts have not persuaded the Taliban authorities to prevent TTP, BLA, and other militant groups from launching attacks on Pakistani military posts, security officials, and civilian infrastructure.

In October 2025, Pakistan closed all border crossings with Afghanistan and carried out airstrikes targeting TTP leadership and infrastructure in Kabul, Khost, Jalalabad, and Paktika. Pakistan refused to rely on what it considered empty verbal reassurances while militant groups continued to operate from Afghan territory. Through drone and missile strikes on militant training camps, Pakistan attempted to demonstrate its determination to prevent cross-border terrorism.

Nevertheless, the low-intensity conflict continues to flare up. Pakistan even carried out broad daylight airstrikes on targets in Kabul, Kandahar, and the Bagram airbase. The Taliban did not remain passive either. They responded with counterattacks on border military posts while simultaneously fueling anti-Pakistan narratives domestically and among Pashtun tribes on both sides of the frontier.

After exhausting most available options, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khawaja Asif, in March 2026, declared that Pakistan was effectively in a state of open conflict with Afghanistan.





Pakistan now finds itself in an extremely difficult strategic position. If the Taliban government refuses to restrain TTP and BLA militants, as suggested by statements from Afghan Defence Minister Mullah Yaqub on March 7, Pakistan's current campaign of aerial strikes is unlikely to abate. Pakistan's military leadership appears determined to pursue aggressive counter-terrorism operations, as indicated by attacks on Bagram airbase and targets in Kabul and Kandahar. Pakistani forces have also captured certain border posts previously used by Afghan forces to launch artillery and drone attacks on Pakistani positions.

In some policy circles, there has even been discussion of whether Pakistan should attempt to force political change within the Kandahar-based Taliban leadership. However, the "military-first" option carries significant risks. If aerial strikes fail to change Taliban policy regarding militant groups operating from Afghan territory, the conflict could further destabilize the region and deepen hostility between the two states.

The tragic nature of the situation lies in the fact that the conflict is deeply rooted in history, geopolitics, and decades of political miscalculations. The situation may deteriorate further as local populations become increasingly influenced by ethnic, tribal, and ideological narratives.

Pakistan also recognizes that Afghanistan's instability is not solely the result of Taliban policies. For more than four decades, Afghanistan has been a theater of proxy competition among regional and global powers. After the Taliban takeover in 2021, international isolation, sanctions, and frozen central bank assets deepened the country's financial collapse and diplomatic isolation. These conditions have increased Afghanistan's vulnerability to regional geopolitical competition.

For this reason, Pakistan has often urged the international community to provide economic assistance to Afghanistan and integrate it into regional economic frameworks. Pakistani policymakers hoped that economic stabilization would help the Taliban authorities prevent militant infiltration across the border.

However, domestic pressure within Pakistan is growing. Pakistani citizens increasingly hold the Taliban government responsible for militant attacks inside Pakistan. At the same time, some observers believe that the Taliban are exploiting the strategic rivalry between Pakistan and India to enhance their own diplomatic leverage. Reports have also circulated about external actors, including Israel, attempting to influence militant groups operating in the region.

As a result, the status quo has become increasingly unsustainable. The loss of lives is mounting, and the security situation along the frontier is deteriorating. Pakistan faces the challenge of ensuring internal security while avoiding a prolonged interstate conflict with Afghanistan.

The current escalation, therefore, reflects a deeper transformation: a shift from proxy friction to overt state-to-state confrontation. Whereas earlier tensions were mediated through militant groups, bilateral channels, or friendly states, recent developments indicate that both governments are increasingly willing to use direct military force.

Unless the underlying issues, particularly the TTP and BLA sanctuary problem and the Durand Line dispute, are addressed through sustained diplomacy, the Afghanistan-Pakistan frontier is likely to remain volatile. The challenge for both states is to move beyond reactive military responses and towards a cooperative framework capable of addressing the complex security realities of their shared 2,670-kilometre frontier.

Regional powers may eventually help negotiate a temporary de-escalation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, no lasting solution is possible unless both sides engage in genuine dialogue addressing the political, security, and demographic complexities shaping their relationship. S

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Nature's War Toll

Even a limited nuclear exchange could have a devastating effect on global agricultural production and pose a serious threat to worldwide food security

BY FARIHA SHARF

War can affect a society in many ways. However, the environmental consequences that arise from war are not often looked at. By damaging ecosystems, contaminating water and soil, destroying infrastructure, and altering the climate worldwide, modern ways of waging war can have devastating effects on the environment. With all forms of war being harmful to the environment, nuclear weapons are the most harmful.



The consequences of war can last for decades and even centuries. If we, as a global community, think we may one day prevent the destruction of both nature and civilization as we know it, we must understand the environmental consequences of war.

Nuclear weapons are Environmentally Catastrophic.

Nuclear weapons are capable of inflicting significant damage both on and above ground in all situations. The detonation of a nuclear weapon releases vast quantities of radiation that contaminate the land and air.

During the 1954 Castle Bravo nuclear test conducted in the Marshall Islands, a large amount of radioactive ash was dispersed across several of the islands nearby, putting them in close contact with highly dangerous levels of radiation. Today, many individuals living in those islands have developed many severe forms of malignancies owing to radiation exposure.

As it was seen in the atomic bombings in World War II in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons can cause both immediate destruction and long-term environmental pollution when deployed. Whereas with the atomic bombings, radiation exposure has resulted in so many negative health issues (i.e., various types of cancers, other severe health-related incidents, genetic mutation), and serious disruption of ecosystems has occurred for generations to follow.

With the use of weapons such as depleted uranium in both the first and second Gulf Wars and in the conflict in Iraq as well, there are even greater concerns about the effects of environmental contamination as a result of modern-day war. Depleted Uranium (DU) munitions leave behind radioactive material, which creates a long-term contamination of soil and water. Once DU is released into the environment, it may persist for many years, posing hazards to communities and animals in conflict zones, even after the conflict concludes. There is a growing body of evidence to support that communities around military operations in general and battle zones specifically have a greater incidence of illness, such as

lung disease and a wide variety of cancers, as a direct result of exposure to contaminated soil and water.

Potentially disastrous effects of nuclear war include the risk of a nuclear winter. The Threat of Nuclear Winter (TTW) report, published in 1983, revealed the potential for a nuclear explosion/massive war to emit large amounts of smoke and soot into Earth's atmosphere, resulting in blocking out sunlight for several weeks to several years. Consequences could include substantial changes in average global temperature, failure of the agricultural system, worldwide famine affecting more than a billion people, and long-term impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity.

More recent studies on climate change have confirmed that even a limited nuclear exchange could have a devastating effect on global agricultural production and pose a serious threat to worldwide food security.

Environmental damage caused by modern-day conflicts has been highlighted in many ways. The current conflict between the Gaza Strip, Israel, and Iran, and continued tensions throughout the Middle East, provide many examples of how warfare damages the environment.

Air Pollution - The use of bombs, military vehicles, and fires in war, including the use of spray paint to destroy buildings, emits chemicals and small particles into the air. These chemicals and small particles contribute to respiratory illnesses and can affect ecosystems positively or negatively.

Water Pollution - Damage to sewer systems and water systems contributes to the contamination of water that might otherwise be clean and healthy. Waste is often dumped into rivers, lakes, or oceans, further contaminating these bodies of water. The Mediterranean, for example, has been affected by the destruction of sewage systems in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Groundwater sources may also have been contaminated by the dumping of waste into bodies of water.

Soil Degradation - Damaged agricultural land (crops destroyed or damaged by bombs), the use of chemicals from bombs, and the residue of the machinery used to bomb (tankers, helicopters, etc.) all lead to soil degradation, less fertile soil, and eventually the loss of agricultural production. The potential for strikes on nuclear or other industrial facilities poses a threat to the surrounding area due to the possibility of radiation leaks.

The planet's protection is not only an environmental concern but also a collective human duty

The impact of war extends beyond damage to ecosystems; it also creates humanitarian crises in many parts of the world. The destruction of the environment frequently leads to the mass displacement of populations, food shortages and famine, the inability of people to access safe drinking water, increased incidence of disease, and other public health-related emergencies, and the restoration of the Environment by the International Community.

The United Nations Environment Programme conducts environmental assessments of war-affected regions and assists in developing plans for environmental rehabilitation. Researchers and journalists, including Fred Pearce, Dominika Tomaszewska-Mortimer, Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, and Nada Majdalani, have raised an urgent call for action to provide funding to rectify environmental problems in war-torn areas. Their work also supports the inclusion of environmental protection in the post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building process.

What Can You Do?

While governments and international organizations have significant responsibilities, every individual can help raise awareness of environmental issues and protect the environment.

Some ways to help include:

- Provide support for humanitarian and environmental organizations
- Share reliable, validated information regarding the environment in war-torn regions
- Advocate for stronger environmental protection through international law
- Implement sustainable practices in their daily lives to minimize stress on global ecosystems
- By working together and promoting awareness, future conflict prevention and recovery will include a priority for the protection of the environment.

Not only do wars create human fatalities, but they also create a damaged planet. Environmental impacts from warfare, such as radioactive waste, contaminated seas, and destroyed ecosystems, will affect future generations. Nuclear weapons and modern war present danger not only to countries but also to the totality of the world. Protecting future generations relies upon recognizing the ecological costs of war and pursuing peace, environmental responsibility, and long-term sustainable recovery.

The planet's protection is not only an environmental concern; it is a collective human duty. S

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Wheels of Injustice

A society that allows murder to be settled like a private debt inevitably erodes faith in the rule of law

BY NAEEM SADIQ

Late on a summer night in June 2022, a high-speed SUV driven by the daughter of a High Court judge ran over and killed two employees of a food company in Islamabad. Confident in her father's judicial acumen and fortified by an unspoken immunity afforded to the elite, she stepped out of the car and walked away from the scene of the accident.

The system safety net kicked in. The police did not register an FIR for many days. A hurried settlement soothed the grievances of one victim's family, but the other family refused to compromise and resolved to seek justice in a court of law. After struggling and stalling for 3 years, it, too, arrived at the same conclusion that the first family had reached on the first day – accept a settlement, receive compensation, and withdraw the appeal. The case was closed.

In December 2025, we witnessed yet another stark reminder of the callousness

of the reckless, spoiled children of the judicial elite. Two innocent women were killed after being run over by the underage son of an Islamabad High Court judge, who was driving an unregistered V8 Land Cruiser fitted with fake number plates. An out-of-court pardon rapidly hushed up the matter, and the boy was set free without a formal trial.

Instead of sending his son to jail and resigning from his esteemed post, the judge used all his influence and all his threats to coerce a compromise. The episode was a stark reminder of how judicial indifference, if not outright complicity, breeds the familiar ingredients of our decay: a powerful perpetrator and a defenceless victim, a crime driven by reckless entitlement, and a final escape secured through 'diyat' or a negotiated settlement.

On 23 February 2026, a speeding car (BKR-525), driven by a reckless, entitled youth, soaked with privilege and arrogance, struck and killed a food delivery rider in DHA Karachi. The killer vehicle displayed an unauthorized 'Sindh High Court' plaque, a symbol of privilege that makes all such vehicles beyond the scrutiny of a colonial police force conditioned to defer to elite lawlessness. As expected, and as manipulated, the deceased's family 'forgave' the accused in the name of God. The car driver was never arrested, and the police did not register a case on behalf of the state.

Hundreds of vehicles displaying similar fake 'Sindh High Court' plaques or number plates bearing the words "Sindh High Court" can be seen on the streets of Karachi. Many of these vehicles display permanent markings, such as "Advocate, Sindh High Court," on a green background, which falsely suggests official government status. For years, citizens have petitioned the Sindh High Court and the Sindh Police to curb crimes committed under the guise of the Honourable Courts. Yet the silence of these institutions has been so persistent that it appears less like oversight and more like consent.

Effectively cushioning the powerful against the consequences of deadly recklessness, Section 322 of the Pakistan Penal Code was deleted and replaced with Section 320, reclassifying unintentional homicide as a bailable offence

Must the courts and judges appear indifferent when crimes are committed in their name or by their close relatives? Does Islam allow the state to remain a silent spectator while wealthy, spoiled, rich, influential escape accountability after killing innocent citizens through out-of-court pardons, coercion, or private settlements? Does Islamic jurisprudence allow such judges to continue serving on the Honourable bench? Would sentencing a judge to prison terms for allowing his underage child to drive be consistent with the Islamic principles?

A citizen, frustrated by years of judicial indulgence toward the powerful elite, posed these questions to the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) a few months ago. After considerable prodding and delay, a terse and guarded reply finally arrived. It addressed none of the substantive questions and confined itself instead to the predictable, politically safe assertion that "all citizens are equal before the law".

Not far from our frontiers, in a neighbourhood of identical malpractices, the Indian Government modified its Motor Vehicle Act in 2019 by the addition of Section 199A, which calls for penalising the parents with fines and jail terms up to 3 years, if their underage children are found involved in offences such as driving without a licence, rash driving, causing an accident or traffic violations.

Regrettably, Pakistan chose just the opposite trajectory. The judge whose daughter killed 2 food company employees in Islamabad was elevated from the High Court to the Supreme Court. Effectively cushioning the powerful against the consequences of deadly recklessness, the law was conveniently amended, and Section 322 of the Pakistan Penal Code was deleted and replaced with Section 320, reclassifying unintentional homicide as a bailable offence.

The incidents described above are neither isolated aberrations nor limited to the judicial domain. From the killing of Samia Sarwar in 1999 to the deaths of Shahzeb Khan, Nazim Jokhio, Kainat Soomro, and the sexual abuse and killing of 9-year-old Fatima, there are countless and painfully consistent examples of this barbaric immunity enjoyed by the rich and the powerful. The Qisas–Diyat framework, intended as an instrument of mercy, has too often become a marketplace where justice is negotiated, and life is priced.

"Forgiveness" by impoverished families rarely reflects free will; it reflects fear, coercion, or financial desperation. A society that allows murder to be settled like a private debt inevitably erodes faith in the rule of law. Reforming the Qisas–Diyat provisions by closing the door on back-channel compromises is therefore not merely a legal necessity but a moral imperative for a state that claims equality before the law for all its citizens. S

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YouTube India

YouTube, the world's largest free online video-sharing platform owned by Google, sits at the intersection of India's economic aspirations

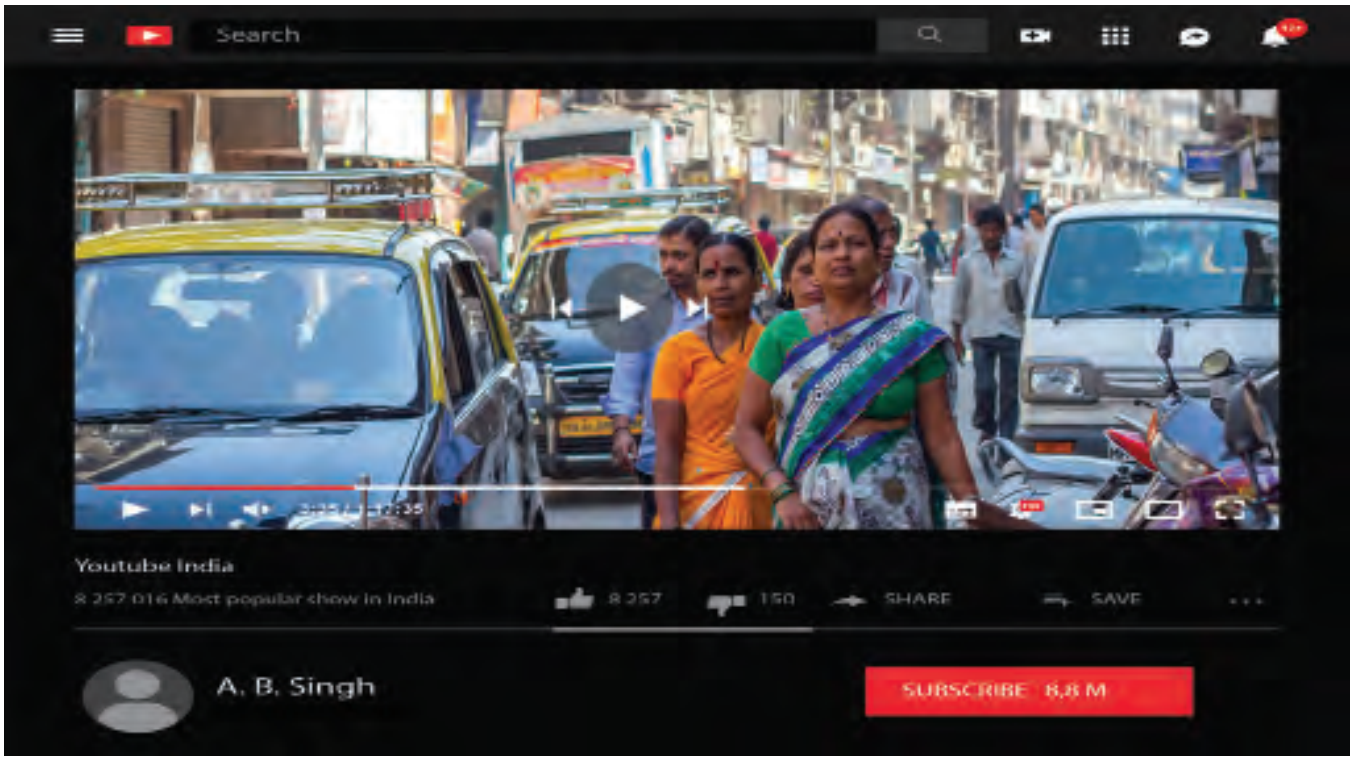
BY BILAL MUSTIKHAN

In little over a decade, YouTube has grown from a casual entertainment platform into one of the most influential digital forces in the world, in general and in India in particular. What once served as a space for music videos and comedy clips has evolved into a powerful engine of learning, livelihood, and cultural expression.

Today, YouTube sits at the intersection of India's economic aspirations, its hunger for knowledge, and its complex, multilingual identity. As India navigates its next phase of digital growth, YouTube is playing a central role in shaping how people learn, work, create, and connect.

One of the platform's most significant contributions has been in education. India's education system has long struggled with issues of access, scale, and quality, particularly outside major urban centers. YouTube has helped bridge many of these gaps by offering free, easily accessible learning resources to anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection. From exam preparation and science lessons to spoken English and financial literacy, educational content on YouTube has reached millions of learners who might otherwise have been left behind.

What makes this shift especially impactful is language. Indian educators and creators are teaching in Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, and dozens of other regional languages. For many students, learning in their mother tongue makes complex subjects less intimidating and far more relatable. YouTube has effectively become an informal, parallel education system- one that complements schools and colleges while also serving those who never had access to formal education in the first place.



Beyond academics, YouTube has emerged as a major platform for skill development. As India's economy evolves and traditional job pathways become less secure, the demand for practical, job-ready skills has grown sharply. YouTube responds to this demand with remarkable speed. Tutorials on graphic design, video editing, coding, tailoring, carpentry, mobile repair, cooking, and digital marketing are widely available, often created by self-taught professionals who understand local realities.

For many users, especially young people and women, YouTube offers a way to learn without leaving home or investing large sums of money. These skills frequently translate into freelance work, small businesses, or side incomes, making the platform a quiet but powerful supporter of India's informal and gig economies.

At the same time, YouTube has enabled the rise of a new class of Indian entrepreneurs: content creators. Content creation in India is no longer a niche hobby but a legitimate career path. Successful YouTubers run small companies of their own, employing writers, editors, designers, and managers. Revenue flows through multiple streams, including advertising, brand collaborations, memberships, merchandise, live events, and online courses.

What is particularly striking is how decentralized this creator economy has become. You no longer need to live in Mumbai or Delhi to build an audience. Creators from small towns and rural areas are documenting their lives, sharing expertise, and creating loyal followings. Farmers, home cooks, mechanics, teachers, and comedians are finding audiences that value authenticity over polish. In this ecosystem, relatability often matters more than perfection.

Culturally, YouTube reflects India's diversity more accurately than any traditional media platform ever has. Regional music, folk art, local storytelling, and hyperlocal humor thrive alongside mainstream entertainment. Languages and dialects that rarely find space on national television attract millions of viewers online. This visibility helps preserve cultural traditions while also allowing them to evolve for younger audiences.

At the same time, Indian creators are reaching global audiences.

YouTube has become a two-way cultural bridge, allowing India not only to consume global content but also to export its own perspectives, creativity, and talent

Tech reviewers influence buyers worldwide, beauty creators set trends beyond national borders, and vloggers connect the Indian diaspora to life back home. YouTube has become a two-way cultural bridge, allowing India not only to consume global content but also to export its own perspectives, creativity, and talent.

This shift has inevitably disrupted traditional media. Television, once the dominant force in Indian households, now competes with YouTube for attention, especially among younger viewers. News debates, interviews, film promotions, and even religious programming increasingly find their primary audience online. Many television personalities and media houses have launched their own YouTube channels, recognizing that digital platforms offer immediacy, interactivity, and measurable engagement that broadcast media struggles to match.

Advertising patterns have followed this change. Brands are investing heavily in YouTube campaigns, drawn by the platform's ability to target specific audiences and measure impact. Influencer marketing, product explainers, and long-form brand storytelling have become common, benefiting both large corporations and small businesses.

For Indian entrepreneurs and startups, YouTube serves as both a marketing tool and a storytelling platform. Founders use video to explain their vision, demonstrate products, and build trust with customers. Small and medium businesses, in particular, benefit from the platform's relatively low cost and wide reach, allowing them to compete in markets that were once dominated by larger players.

As India continues its rapid digital transformation- supported by affordable data, widespread smartphone adoption, and a young population- YouTube's influence is only set to grow. The platform is shaping how Indians learn new skills, consume information, express identity, and imagine success.

At the same time, challenges remain. Issues around misinformation, content moderation, creator burnout, and income sustainability cannot be ignored. Yet, even with these concerns, YouTube's broader impact on Indian society is undeniable.

By lowering barriers to entry, amplifying diverse voices, and turning access into opportunity, YouTube has embedded itself deeply into India's digital future. It is not merely reflecting change; it is actively driving it. In doing so, the platform is helping millions of Indians participate in the country's growth story- one video at a time. S

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DRAMA DIPLOMACY

Beyond language, the thematic content of Pakistani TV plays a crucial role in its popularity across the border

BY DR. FARAH NAZ



In South Asia, where politics between India and Pakistan have often been tense and adversarial, an unlikely bridge has quietly flourished through television screens. Pakistani television plays, once confined mainly to domestic audiences, have evolved into a powerful instrument of soft diplomacy, attracting devoted viewers not only in Pakistan but also in India and among the global South Asian diaspora. Without formal agreements, state visits, or official campaigns, these dramas have created cultural familiarity, emotional connection, and a subtle reshaping of public perception. Their influence demonstrates how storytelling, language, and shared social values can sometimes succeed where formal diplomacy struggles.

At the heart of this phenomenon lies linguistic and cultural proximity. Pakistani TV plays are primarily produced in Urdu, a language that is widely understood in India due to its deep overlap with Hindi. This mutual intelligibility eliminates one of the most significant barriers to foreign media consumption. Indian audiences often do not experience Pakistani plays as entirely foreign; instead, they feel culturally adjacent. Everyday expressions, poetry, humour, and family dynamics resonate across borders, making the viewing experience feel familiar rather than distant. This linguistic bridge allows Pakistani serials to travel seamlessly into Indian households without the friction that usually accompanies international entertainment.

Beyond language, the thematic content of Pakistani TV plays a crucial role in its popularity. These TV serials often emphasize emotional storytelling centred on family relationships, moral dilemmas, class struggles, romance, and social justice issues. Many viewers perceive them as more grounded and character-driven compared to highly commercialized or sensationalist formats found elsewhere. The restrained style of romance, the focus on dialogue rather than spectacle, and the exploration of social issues such as women's rights, mental health, and economic inequality give these dramas a sense of authenticity. Audiences connect not only with the characters but also with the ethical and emotional questions the narratives raise. Emotional investment, in turn, fosters empathy—one of the most potent tools of soft power.

Celebrity culture and digital platforms have amplified this cross-border cultural flow. Pakistani artistes such as Fawad Khan, Mahira Khan, Hania Aamir, Fahad Mustafa, and others have amassed large followings on Instagram, YouTube, and other social-media platforms. These digital spaces allow fans to interact directly with celebrities, follow their daily lives, and feel personally connected to them. This "parasocial relationship," where viewers develop one-sided emotional bonds with public figures, transcends national boundaries. The internet reduces the role of traditional gatekeepers such as broadcasters and censors, enabling cultural exchange even during periods of strained diplomatic relations. In effect, the digital age has made cultural diplomacy decentralized and audience-driven rather than state-controlled.

The South Asian diaspora further strengthens this dynamic. Communities in the United Kingdom, North America, the Middle East, and Australia often consume a blend of Indian and Pakistani media. Diasporic audiences are typically less constrained by domestic broadcasting restrictions and tend to adopt a more pluralistic cultural identity. What becomes popular among diaspora communities frequently flows back into the subcontinent through social media, streaming platforms, and word

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of mouth. Diaspora viewership acts as a cultural relay, sustaining and spreading cross-border entertainment trends even when official relations are tense.

The broader impact of this cultural exchange lies in narrative humanization. Political conflicts often rely on simplified images of the "other," but television dramas complicate those images by presenting everyday lives filled with humour, love, struggle, and aspiration. When viewers in India watch Pakistani weddings, family arguments, or workplace challenges, they see reflections of their own experiences. This does not erase geopolitical disagreements, but it softens rigid stereotypes and introduces nuance into public perception. Soft diplomacy works precisely because it is subtle; it reshapes attitudes gradually through repeated exposure rather than direct persuasion.

However, the growing popularity of Pakistani TV plays in India has also intersected with political and regulatory debates. At various moments, especially following cross-border incidents or periods of heightened tension, Indian authorities have imposed restrictions on Pakistani media content. These measures are typically justified on grounds of national security, public order, or the prevention of misinformation. Governments around the world, not only in South Asia, often tighten digital controls during crises to manage narratives and reduce the spread of inflammatory or misleading information. In this context, cultural content can become entangled with broader concerns about information ecosystems rather than being viewed solely as entertainment.

Another dimension of such restrictions involves narrative sovereignty. States naturally seek to influence how national identity and political events are portrayed within their borders. Foreign cultural imports, particularly from a geopolitical rival, can be perceived as challenging domestic narratives or diluting cultural cohesion. This does not necessarily mean that television plays themselves are seen as threats; instead, they become symbolic arenas where questions of identity, influence, and public imagination are contested. Cultural products carry emotional weight, and emotions shape political attitudes, making entertainment strategically significant even when it appears apolitical.

Pakistani artistes such as Fawad Khan, Mahira Khan, Hania Aamir, Fahad Mustafa, and others have amassed large followings on Instagram, YouTube, and other social-media platforms

Domestic political signalling also plays a role. Leaders may adopt stricter cultural or economic stances toward rival nations to demonstrate firmness or align with nationalist sentiments among voters. In such cases, restrictions on foreign media function more as symbolic gestures than as comprehensive cultural policies. Economic considerations are another factor, as local entertainment industries sometimes advocate for limitations on imports to protect market share and revenue. Ideological perspectives further influence policy debates, particularly among groups that emphasize preserving indigenous narratives and cultural dominance.

Despite these controls, the paradox of the digital age remains evident. While governments possess legal and regulatory tools to restrict content within their territories, the architecture of the internet makes absolute control difficult. Mirror uploads, fan-subtitled versions, virtual private networks, and diaspora sharing networks often keep content circulating. Cultural exchange finds alternative pathways, demonstrating that audience demand and technological innovation can outpace regulatory efforts. As a result, cultural diplomacy through entertainment tends to persist even when official relations fluctuate.

From a historical perspective, this phenomenon is not entirely new. South Asia has long been interconnected through poetry, music, cuisine, and shared linguistic traditions. Television plays represent the contemporary continuation of centuries-old cultural exchanges, now accelerated by digital technology. Cultural history shows that societies rarely develop in isolation; artistic influences often cross borders regardless of political disputes. Attempts to fully restrict cultural interaction usually prove temporary because curiosity, creativity, and shared human experience naturally seek expression.

In essence, Pakistani TV plays have emerged as a form of soft diplomacy because they combine relatable storytelling, shared language, digital accessibility, and celebrity appeal to create emotional bridges across borders. Restrictions and regulatory debates reflect broader concerns about security, identity, and political optics rather than simple opposition to entertainment itself. The ongoing exchange illustrates a central truth of cultural history: while governments negotiate treaties and manage conflicts, ordinary people often connect through stories, art, and shared emotions. In the quiet space of a living room or on a smartphone screen, TV drama becomes diplomacy, not through force or policy, but through empathy and imagination. S

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Drowning in Waste

When it comes to managing its solid waste properly, Pakistan lags behind all countries in the world

BY SYED E. HASAN

Waste management is one of the essential civic services underpinning a society. Ensuring proper sanitation and environmentally safe waste management is no less important for citizens than the provision of safe drinking water, shelter, food, energy, transportation, and communications. Municipal Solid Waste (MSW), also called trash or garbage, consists of items that we discard regularly, such as clothing, glass jars and bottles, metal cans and containers, food, paper and paper products, plastics, packaging materials, furniture, appliances, electronics, and batteries, etc.

MSW comes from homes, offices, businesses, educational institutions, public and commercial establishments, such as restaurants, grocery stores, vegetable and meat markets, and other businesses; parks; stadiums, hospitals; and small manufacturing and other non-hazardous industrial operations. Solid waste generated in cities, towns, and villages that is managed by the local municipalities or city governments is called municipal solid waste. On the other hand, solid waste generated from agriculture production, crop and food processing, mining, and dredging operations, though examples of solid waste, are not considered MSW because they are managed by the generators, usually on site.

Most developed countries deal with MSW in an environmentally safe way: by separating recyclable components from non-recyclables, and using organics, such as food scraps, garden waste, biodegradables, and other materials, to capture methane for heating and electric power generation. The leftover or residual waste is then disposed of by placing it in an engineered structure, called a sanitary landfill. Hazardous wastes are managed in compliance with specific laws and rules for their storage, transportation, treatment, and disposal.

However, most developing countries in South Asia, Africa, and elsewhere do not follow this approach and mix the household, industrial, health care, and electronic waste together, only a portion of which is collected by the municipal workers and dumped at designated locations, wrongly called landfills. Such open dumping poses a serious threat to human and ecological health, causes air, water,

and land pollution, and contributes to greenhouse gases (GHGs), resulting in climate change, besides lost land productivity and high material management costs. Globally, on average, 23 percent of the solid waste produced goes uncollected, while 33 percent is openly dumped. In low-income countries, like Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, etc., the problem is even worse, where 60 percent of solid waste goes uncollected, and 93 percent is improperly managed.

Worldwide, 2.1 billion tonnes of MSW are generated each year, and the quantity is projected to increase to 3.8 billion tonnes by 2050. While multiple conventions, mostly convened by the United Nations, have emphasized the need for proper waste management, the mandate differs from country to country. In high-income nations, the concept of the circular economy is widely recognized and implemented, while in low-income countries, a lack of financial investment and regulation hinders progress. As waste continues to pose significant environmental challenges, adopting an integrated, circular-economy-driven waste management system is a critical need for all countries. A 2010 UN-Habitat report highlighted it by stating: "Managing solid waste well and affordably is one of the key challenges of the 21st century, and one of the key responsibilities of a city government."

Waste Management in Pakistan

It would not be a misstatement to say that Pakistan has lagged behind all countries in the world in managing its solid waste properly. The 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) report by Yale University, USA, released in 2025, ranked Pakistan at 179, out of 180 countries, in terms of its environmental performance. Pakistan ranked lower than Afghanistan (171), Bangladesh (175), and India (176). EPI used 58 performance indicators, including waste management, to rank 180 countries on their progress toward mitigating climate change, improving environmental quality, and protecting the ecosystem.

On average, in developing countries, 40 percent of MSW (range: 40-90 %) ends up in open dumps: Pakistan, along with some African countries, falls under the 90 percent group. Improved waste management is an environmental imperative and requires participation from the public, government, and businesses to preserve the country's environmental quality and protect human and ecological health.

The 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) report by Yale University, USA, released in 2025, ranked Pakistan at 179, out of 180 countries, in terms of its environmental performance

The December 2025 edition of the UN report titled The Global Environment Outlook calls for "... interlinked, whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to reshape economy and finance, materials and waste, energy, food and, of course, the environment." For a long time, we have used gross domestic product (GDP) as a gauge for a country's economic health, but we need to move beyond and incorporate measures that also track the health of human and natural capital to make sound economic and business decisions to meet development needs while safeguarding the ecosystem.

Tackling the Waste Problem

Pakistan generates over 50 million tonnes of MSW annually, which is dominated by food waste, as illustrated below. On a per capita basis, it amounts to 0.55 kg/person/day (ppd), which is a moderate quantity compared to the global average of 0.75 ppd. Why, then, does Pakistan have such a deplorable record of managing its waste?

Haroon Sahab! Show here the Graph Provided by the Writer

The answer is the absence of public awareness and the lack of political will, besides the minimum or no enforcement of environmental laws. It is true that safe management of MSW entails large financial outlays, but international agencies, such as the UN under its Environmental and Climate Adaptation programs, are ready to offer financial aid and technical assistance.

MSW, a Valuable Resource

Not only is safe MSW management environmentally desirable, but it is also a revenue generator. A well-known example is the informal waste recycling operation that exists in Pakistan, where the waste scavengers—the kabadiwalas—make a living by salvaging useful materials from the dumps and selling them in the secondary markets, leaving behind non-marketable materials in the waste pile, dominated by organic components, which amounts to over 60% of the total waste quantity. The organics, comprising fruits and vegetable discards, paper, grass cuttings, leaves, kitchen waste, etc., decompose over time to produce various gases dominated by methane and carbon dioxide. Methane is a natural gas with high heat content – higher than petrol, diesel, and coal, and is an excellent and clean source of heat. Technology exists to separate methane from other landfill gases and pipe it to homes for cooking and space heating. It is also used to generate electric power. However, methane is a highly potent GHG, being 25 times more effective in trapping atmospheric heat than carbon dioxide over a 100-year time period. Flaring or uncontrolled

release of methane is undesirable and a loss of a valuable economic resource. Capturing methane from waste dumps and landfills has two major advantages: (1) minimizing the release of GHGs into the atmosphere, and (2) providing an alternative fuel for generating heat and electric power. A 2021 study by Ihsanullah Sohoo and his colleagues (https://doi.org/10.3390/en14092444) estimated that in 2015, a total of 0.51 million tonnes of methane was generated from major landfills in Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Hyderabad, Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, and Quetta. Assuming a methane collection rate of 50%, it could produce 143 MW of electricity worth $71 million annually (1 PKR = 0.0036 US$ as of January 2026).

Nature Preservation and Tourism

Three-fifths of Pakistan comprises mountains and highlands, which are endowed with a unique landscape, boasting some of the world's highest peaks: the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, and Himalayas. These mountains host some of the longest glaciers in the world and feed the country's rivers, including the Indus. Northern Pakistan is also becoming an important hub for tourism. Recognizing the unique ecology, a 2021 World Bank study stated that the mountain area "offers Pakistan an opportunity to build an economy that leverages these natural assets for economic growth. Mountain ecosystems are fragile and must be managed to ensure their ecological integrity and environmental sustainability. Solid waste management is a challenge that impacts ecological resources, socio-economic wellbeing, and tourist-sourced economic growth potential in these regions". Unfortunately, due to a lack of cohesive national policy or regional effort, plastics in MSW are polluting the Indus River, carrying 160,000 tonnes of plastic waste as it empties into the Arabian Sea.

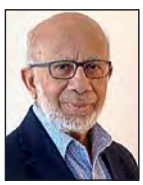


Capturing methane from waste dumps and landfills minimizes the release of GHGs into the atmosphere, and it also provides an alternative fuel for generating heat and electric power

Recommendations

1. Initiate aggressive public awareness campaigns on waste reduction, reuse, and recycling. A sustained public education campaign, using TV, radio, and social media, highlighting the benefits of environmentally-safe solid waste management has been found to be highly effective.
2. Sponsor community-based waste management incentives, such as recognition and awards to communities for generating the least quantity of waste, achieving the highest recycling rate, and similar accomplishments.
3. Continuously promote the benefits of safe waste management to change the mindset from thinking of MSW as a resource rather than waste.
4. Invest in modern waste collection, treatment, and disposal infrastructure.
5. Utilize new technologies for efficient waste tracking and management.
6. Develop workable regulations and strictly implement environmental laws, with stiff civil and criminal penalties for violators.
7. Engage the private sector to actively participate in waste management services.
8. Invest in projects to use methane for electric power generation and reduce GHG emissions.
9. Foster partnerships with government and kabadiwalas for sustainable waste solutions, providing fair and just alternatives without creating undue burden on their livelihood.
10. Introduce waste management courses and degree programs in colleges and universities to ensure an uninterrupted supply of trained professionals to work in the waste management industry. S

Based in Kansas City, USA, the writer is an internationally-acclaimed expert, a two-time winner of the US Govt. Fulbright Senior Scholar Award, and the only scientist in the world who has authored two award-winning college textbooks in the field of waste management. He can be reached at hasans@umkc.edu.



Enhancing Water Management

Pakistan's water future will depend not on the quantity of water it possesses, but on the efficacy of its management of existing water resources

BY NAMWAR YUSUF RAHMAN

Each year, World Water Day revives a familiar debate in Pakistan: are we running out of water? The more pressing question, however, is not one of availability but of water mismanagement. Across sectors, inefficient use, poor governance, and lack of long-term planning continue to define how water is handled in the country.

Pakistan's economic structure makes this challenge particularly acute. Agriculture remains the largest consumer of water, yet it is also where inefficiencies are most visible. Traditional irrigation methods, especially flood irrigation, dominate farming practices, leading to excessive losses through evaporation and runoff. Despite decades of discussion, the shift towards modern irrigation techniques has been slow, constrained by cost, awareness, and policy gaps. The result is a system where water is heavily used but not effectively managed.

Urbanisation and industrial expansion have further complicated the picture. Growing cities require more water for domestic use, while industries depend on it for manufacturing processes. Yet wastewater treatment remains inadequate. Industrial discharge continues to pollute rivers and groundwater, reducing water quality and limiting its reuse. Climate change has added urgency to these challenges, altering rainfall patterns and increasing variability in water flows. But even here, the underlying issue remains one of management rather than absolute shortage.



The Water Moisture Sensor monitors moisture levels and conducts irrigation accordingly

Addressing this problem requires more than infrastructure projects or short-term fixes. It calls for a shift in how water is valued and governed — from a largely unregulated resource to one that is managed efficiently and responsibly. While the role of the state is central in setting policy and enforcing regulation, the private sector has increasingly emerged as an important part of the solution.



Businesses, particularly large-scale manufacturers, have both the incentive and the capacity to improve water use. Efficient water management reduces operational risks and ensures continuity in resource-constrained environments. As a result, many companies are investing in water-saving technologies, recycling systems, and process improvements that reduce waste. Some are also extending these efforts beyond their operations, working with farmers and suppliers to promote more efficient irrigation practices.

A significant development in this regard has been the adoption of the Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Standard, a global framework that encourages responsible water management at both site and catchment levels. Unlike traditional compliance-based approaches, the AWS Standard requires companies to consider the broader water ecosystem, including local communities and shared resources. It emphasises transparency, stakeholder engagement, and collective action — elements often missing in conventional water management strategies.

In Pakistan, organisations, specifically Nestlé Pakistan, have played a leading role in introducing and implementing this framework. In 2017, its Sheikhupura facility became the first site in the country — and the first within Nestlé globally — to achieve AWS certification. This was not merely a symbolic achievement; it signalled the possibility of aligning Pakistan›s industrial practices with international sustainability standards.

Since then, the company has expanded certification across all its manufacturing facilities, becoming the first Nestlé market worldwide to have all its sites certified under the AWS Standard. More importantly, these certifications have been accompanied by measurable improvements in water management. The company has reduced water use in its operations, increased recycling, and invested in initiatives to restore water balance.



The Alliance for Water Stewardship (AWS) Standard serves as an international framework that promotes responsible water management practices at both localized sites and catchment areas

Other companies have begun to follow this lead, though at a more gradual pace. Interloop, Engro Fertilizers Limited, and GSK have adopted the AWS framework for their operations. These developments suggest a growing recognition within the private sector that water stewardship is integral to long-term sustainability. However, adoption remains limited, and scaling such practices across industries remains a challenge.

The broader lesson is clear: Pakistan's water issue cannot be fixed by supply-side solutions alone. Building more dams or extracting more groundwater won't solve the inefficiencies built into the system. Instead, what's needed is a fundamental shift towards better management — one that integrates policy, technology, and behavioural change.



Drip irrigation site in Tando Adam, Sindh

This is where collaboration becomes critical. Government institutions must strengthen regulatory frameworks and ensure enforcement, while the private sector must continue to invest in sustainable practices and transparent reporting. At the same time, communities and civil society must be engaged as active stakeholders in managing shared water resources.

Pakistan's water future will depend not on how much water it has, but on how effectively it manages what it already possesses. The challenge now is to move from isolated examples to widespread change — before mismanagement places even greater strain on the system. S

BOOK

IN GOD'S WORDS

Questions of Faith

BY NIKHAT SATTAR

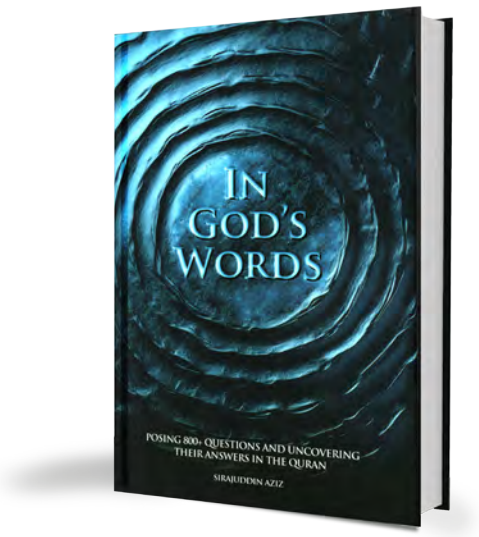
There are very few writings in English that relate to the Holy Quran and have been written and published in Pakistan. Sirajuddin Aziz's In God's Words is a welcome addition for readers of Quranic translations in English. Students of the Quran will benefit especially from the book's content and structure. It offers a quiz format and includes over 800 questions directly derived from verses of the Quran, with answers from the same. It is, therefore, easy for the reader to relate one to the other.

Initially, it is not clear how the questions were formulated and whether they follow a specific theme or point. A few pages down, the book reveals that the questions are based on a chronological order of reading the Quran and follow from Surah to Surah in their sequence. They focus on events, God's commands, and the situations of both believers and non-believers during the period when the Quran was being revealed. At many places, the context of the question is also given, thus shedding light on the issue at hand.

The reader's expectations when they open the book are that they will find answers to questions that trouble Muslims today. The state of the world, the injustices that are perpetrated, the misogyny, and the inequalities that are instituted in the name of Islam, mainly in Muslim countries, all raise doubts in the mind of a thinking Muslim about some Quranic injunctions. However, only a few questions are related to these aspects. The questions posed are as if they were from a textbook from which answers can be easily extracted, without much analysis.

The book, therefore, conforms to a textual and traditional reading of the Quran as opposed to a beyond-the-text and contextualized reading. This is perhaps because the answers are supported by quotations from Abdullah Yousuf Ali and Mohammad Asad's translations and commentaries. Both scholars are from the traditional group of Quranic scholars. These commentaries add to the clarity of the answers and explain many of the verses. In addition to these commentaries, the author frequently expresses his own views, adding a personal touch to the book.

For the serious reader, it might be necessary to have an authentic English translation at hand, as well as the Arabic Quran for reference, since the questions and answers flow from Surah to Surah. The book would have benefited from less repetition, as many questions and answers appear multiple times. Some tight editing and the removal of typos would enhance the book's usefulness. Some answers do not seem relevant to the question, and some commentaries are out of context with the answers. In a few places, the context is missing.



Book	:	*In God's Words*
Author	:	*Sirajuddin Aziz*
Year	:	*2026*
Pages	:	*172*
Price	:	*Rs. 3,000*
Publisher	:	*Self-published*

It is unclear whether the translation is from Abdullah Yousuf Ali's or whether it is also from the author himself. The source should have been given.

The presentation of the book is pleasant: hardbound with a jacket.

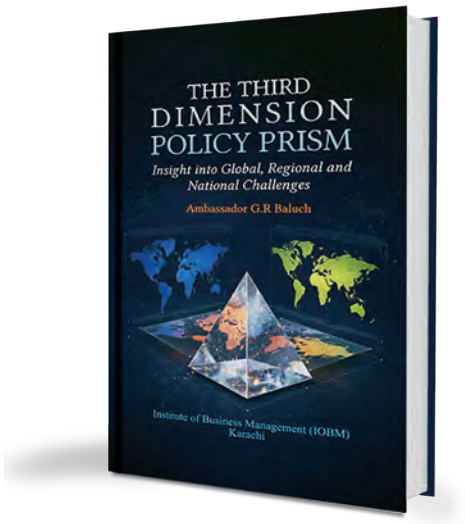
All in all, In God's Words is a handy, useful reference book for students of the Quran, as well as for general readers, and a valuable addition to Pakistani writings on the Quran in English. S

BOOK

THE THIRD DIMENSION POLICY PRISM

No 'Scholarly Touch'

BY DR. MOONIS AHMAR



Book	:	*The Third Dimension Policy Prism: Insight into Global, Regional, and National Challenges*
Author	:	*G. R. Baloch*
Publisher	:	*Karachi: Institute of Business Management*
Pages	:	*394*
Price	:	*Rs 2,495.00*
Year	:	*2026*

A valuable source of information and deep insights, the book 'The Third Dimension Policy Prism: Insight into Global, Regional, and National Challenges' by G. R. Baloch comprises 54 essays and is divided into 5 chapters, covering a wide spectrum of themes, including South Asian and Middle East regions, global politics, and numerous academic and social issues. The author, G. R. Baloch, is Pakistan's former ambassador and currently serves as Director of the Global and Regional Studies Center (GRSC) at the Institute of Business Management (IoBM) in Karachi.

On the question of 'Operation Sindoor' and the shattering myth of Indian military superiority, the author argues that, "for nearly a decade, India's foreign and security policy rested on three assumptions: that it had neutralized Pakistan, drawn the West into strategic embrace, and could manage China from a position of confidence. Each now stands questioned." (p. 31). A window of opportunity for Pakistan emerged following the failure of 'Operation Sindoor', as security and strategic ties between Islamabad and Dhaka strengthened. According to the author, Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot isolate themselves in a competitive South Asia and must focus on their reconciliation process.

India tried to compensate for its strained ties with Washington during the second term of U.S. President Donald Trump by mending fences with China. The meeting with Chinese and Indian leaders in Kazan in October 2025 produced a joint statement that stated, "China and India see each other's development opportunity rather than a threat, and a cooperation partner rather than a competitor." (p. 52). Henceforth, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tianjin, China, to attend the SCO meeting was termed a landmark in bettering China-India relations. Modi's visit to China was welcomed by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, calling the summit a gathering of friendship and fruitful results. On this account, the author argues that, "India-China rapprochement, therefore, represents a pragmatic recalibration, a hedging mechanism to manage multiple pressures simultaneously: military, economic, and geopolitical. It allows India to redirect focus, reduce border tensions, and preserve space for maneuvering in the complex interplay with both Beijing and Washington".

However, the book has some shortcomings, including a lack of focus when covering regional and international issues. Furthermore, the book has repetitive sentences on page 80 from page 40, when he describes Trump's dismissal of India's economy as dead, and on page 87 from page 34, when he discusses relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. The book lacks documentation, references, and an index, reflecting its lack of scholarly touch.

The author terms the Pakistan-Afghanistan border conflict between October 10 and 12 of 2025 as a major flashpoint in South Asia. For Pakistan, its security dilemma stems from militant threats emanating from the Afghan soil, an emboldened Taliban regime gaining diplomatic space, and a potentially coordinated sub-conventional nexus involving India and Afghanistan. Therefore, Pakistan can meet challenges emanating from Afghanistan by ensuring resilient governance in Pakistan's own border regions, investment in socio-economic integration of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and counter-narratives to extremist recruitment. To deal with geo-political imperatives and regional relevance, the author suggests that "in a world increasingly moving towards multipolarity, middle powers like Pakistan, Türkiye, and Azerbaijan are well placed to act as regional stabilizers and global connectors."

Despite its many flaws, the book is a useful source of information on current affairs. Furthermore, the book needs to be understood in terms of major flashpoints in South Asia and the Middle East. The author's emphasis on a multilateral rather than a unilateral world order is the need of the hour and enhances the value of the book. S

DOCUMENTARY

THE COLOUR OF MY HEART

Many Lives of Mohyeddin

BY BEENISH MAHMOOD

The Colour of My Heart, directed by Umer Riaz, is an Urdu documentary with a runtime of 1 hour and 40 minutes. It was released in Pakistan on the 6th of February and isn't meant just for intellectual people. It is a reimagined and reworked version of his 2018 documentary Some Lover to Some Beloved.

The documentary is based on the life of Zia Mohyeddin, who was a venerated actor and a cultural icon. It portrays both his personal and professional lives in an effective and rousing manner.

As Zia Mohyeddin tries to resurrect the glamour of Urdu poetry and to pass it on to the coming generation, he touches upon the lives of significant Urdu poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Ghalib, and Arfa Syeda Zehra. He also interviews Faiz's daughter, Saleema Hashmi, and Moneeza Hashmi, as well as his mentor, Daud Rahbar.

Zia explains the true essence of a ghazal. A Ghazal is not simply poetry, but it addresses the beloved, a beloved that is invisible. The documentary also delves deep into memory and nostalgia. It is about personal longing, history, and selections. Zia married thrice. He married Nahid Siddique, a classical dancer, Azra, and Sarwar.

When the wives were questioned about what Zia was like, each one had a different perspective. Nahid Siddique was afraid of his anger, and Sarwar was tired of his perfectionism. Azra complained of his rigid punctuality. Zia was replete with idiosyncrasies. He was a difficult man to live with. As Sarwar says, even if his tea was a minute late, he would not drink it.

The documentary also focuses on how Lahore has transformed over time, with new developments in infrastructure changing the entire map of Lahore.

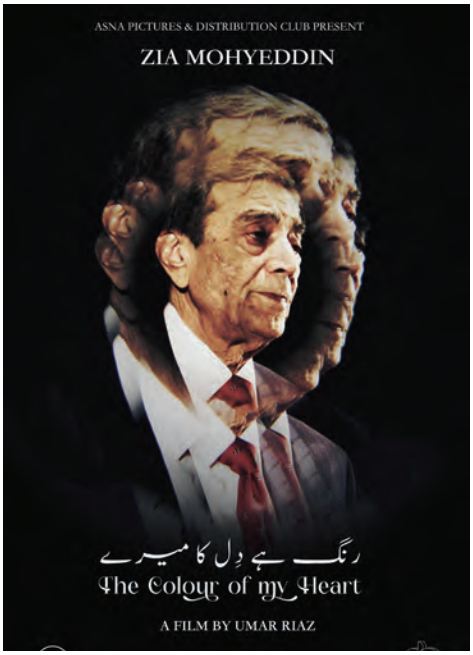
The documentary is well directed. The prowess of the film shows through the sounds and visuals selected to depict a particular scene in a gripping and heart-wrenching manner.

Despite the lack of a simple narrative, the film runs a poetic discourse, which grips the viewer's attention. The film comes across as a celebration of Eastern culture.

Dr. Zehra, a human rights activist and educationist, acts as the narrator and binds together a recollection of Zia's life. The film is structured into chapters, and Dr. Zehra introduces each chapter to the spectator.

The chapter on Faiz Ahmed Faiz is perhaps the best part of the documentary. His poetry is deep and touches the very soul of the person. Aaj bazaar Mai Papa Jaulan Chalo is the most popular and profound ghazal he has penned. He wrote this after having been imprisoned for 4 years.

The Colour of My Heart is not the story of a hero or villain; it is the story of the common man, who rises from the depths of misery to the pinnacle of success.



Zia Mohyeddin was a rare Pakistani graduate of RADA, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in England. He performed in theatre in The Lawrence of Arabia and A Passage to India. Thereafter, he retired to his homeland. He yearned for his country and its soil. His love for the Urdu language would always pull him towards home. And that is when he started the Zia Mohyeddin show, also called the poor man's David Frost Show, which put a halo of stardom on his head.

Zia recounts the haunting memories of the terrorist blasts in Pakistan. He shows Pakistan as a dangerous country where chaos ensues, and riots erupt, and cars burn. S

FILM

JUJJI

Slice of Rawalpindi Life

BY RIMSHA KAMRAN

With Jujji, Pakistani cinema stakes a compelling claim in the realm of gritty, character-driven thrillers. Directed and co-produced by Habib Shahzad, written by Ahmad Umar Ayaz, and produced under the independent banner BHM Films in collaboration with Yūgen Studios and Lollipop, Jujji is a taut, psychologically charged portrait of crime, conscience, and the high price of justice.

Released globally on streaming platforms like Amazon Prime Video and Verizon Fios in November 2025, and anticipated for wider distribution, including Pakistan, in early 2026, Jujji represents both a stylistic and thematic evolution in Pakistan's film landscape — away from broad entertainment and toward immersive, emotionally complex storytelling.

Set in the densely populated streets of Rawalpindi, Jujji begins with a seemingly isolated murder: a homeless shoe-shiner is found dead under mysterious circumstances. Assigned to the case are Mustafa Rizvi as Sub-Inspector Naveed and Anjum Habibi as Constable Arshad, partners whose professional integrity and personal vulnerabilities quickly become central to the unraveling investigation.

Their suspect is a methodical and chilling figure known only as Jujji, played by Muhammad Arslan, whose crimes — inspired by real- world events — display an unsettling precision. As Naveed and Arshad chase leads and sift through clues, the narrative shifts from procedural intrigue to a haunting psychological journey. The officers find themselves navigating not only the killer's trail but their own questions of duty, morality, and redemption.



Unlike many crime thrillers that rely on sensational spectacle, Jujji unfolds with measured restraint. Suspense is built not through flashy set pieces but through the accumulation of small, intense moments — an eerie silence in a dim alley, a suspicious glance in a crowded market, or the mounting frustration of a detective haunted by past failures. This grounded approach gives the film a feeling of grim authenticity.

Muhammad Arslan's portrayal of the killer is chillingly understated. Without resorting to exaggerated theatrics, he conveys a disturbing normalcy that becomes deeply unsettling — a technique that makes his presence linger long after the scene fades. Mustafa Rizvi, as SI Naveed, delivers one of the film's most compelling performances. He balances professional dedication with personal torment, embodying an investigator who is as much in pursuit of the killer as he is in pursuit of his own sense of worth. Anjum Habibi's Constable Arshad serves as a grounded counterpoint, his calm pragmatism offsetting Naveed's simmering determination. Supporting roles — from Mahnoor Nawab as Naveed's concerned wife to Arfa Nadeem as his daughter — add emotional texture that enriches the protagonist's internal conflicts. The ensemble cast brings a slice of everyday Rawalpindi life to the fore, making the city feel like a living, breathing character in the film's gritty tapestry.

Jujji is more than just a crime thriller — it's a study of moral ambiguity, a meditation on duty, and a rare cinematic experience that challenges its audience rather than placates them. Its deliberate pacing and introspective tone may not satisfy viewers craving conventional action, but for those who appreciate nuanced character work and atmospheric tension, Jujji stands as one of Pakistan's most compelling films of recent years. S

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