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A fashion advertisement featuring two women in traditional Pakistani attire. The woman on the left stands in a full-length white dress with intricate yellow and blue embroidery, a high collar, and a matching dupatta. She wears a gold necklace and several yellow bangles. The woman on the right sits in a green dress with pink and yellow floral patterns, a matching dupatta, and a gold necklace. Both are wearing gold bracelets and rings. They are set against a dark background with a teal curtain.

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DIRECTOR
Brigadier Rashid Minhas
rashidminhas.hilal@gmail.com

EDITOR
Maria Khalid
mareeakhaled@gmail.com

DEPUTY EDITOR
Ghulam Murtaza Mir
murtazamir88@gmail.com

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Filza Asim
filzaasim33@gmail.com

GRAPHIC DESIGNER
Malaika Asif
malaikaasif.ispr@gmail.com

ASSISTANT OUTREACH MANAGER
Muhammad Bilal
chbilal.hilal@gmail.com

COMPOSERS
Farhan Ali Malik
Yasir Arafat

WEB OPERATOR
Mazhar Fazal

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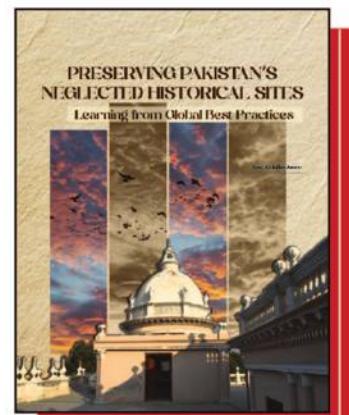
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THE INHERITANCE OF A NATION: WHAT HAVE WE GIVEN TO PAKISTAN?

March 23 is not merely a date on the calendar; it is a moment of reckoning. As Pakistan marks 85 years since the Lahore Resolution, the occasion demands both celebration and introspection—a recognition of past sacrifices and a candid assessment of responsibilities that remain unfulfilled. It is a reminder that the nation's foundation was laid not just through political manoeuvring but through an unyielding struggle for dignity and justice.

The journey of those who crossed borders in 1947 was more than a migration; it was a test of faith and endurance. Today, as Pakistan faces a new era of challenges—economic instability, digital misinformation, and ideological extremism—one pressing question persists: Have we upheld the ideals for which Pakistan was founded, or have they been diluted by the passage of time?

Pakistan's greatest strength has never been its geography but its people's resolve. The true challenge is not adversity itself, but the apathy with which it is often met. Patriotism must transcend rhetoric; it must be measured in actions that counter extremism, foster knowledge, and uphold truth. As poet-philosopher Allama Iqbal asserted, an individual is only as strong as their commitment to the collective good. The principles of unity, faith, and discipline remain as vital today as they were at independence.

Beyond the nation's struggles, Pakistan's resilience is evident in its evolving economic landscape. The rise of digital banking, fintech startups, and entrepreneurship is reshaping the country's financial future. With much of the population still underbanked, firms like Easypaisa, JazzCash, and Finja have revolutionized financial accessibility, bringing millions into the formal economy. Women-led businesses are also gaining momentum, carving out a space in sectors historically dominated by men.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's diaspora continues to play a pivotal role, not just through remittances—which surged by 32.5 percent in 2025—but through investment and knowledge transfer. These contributions reflect a shift: Pakistan's success is increasingly defined not by state-led initiatives but by the ingenuity and drive of its citizens.

As the world advances into an era dominated by artificial intelligence, nations must adapt or risk obsolescence. The developed world is redefining economic priorities, while Pakistan grapples with an underfunded education system, a workforce unprepared for digital transformation, and a staggering 78 percent learning poverty rate. The government's "*Uraan Pakistan*" initiative, aimed at modernizing curricula and integrating AI and digital skills, is a step forward, but execution remains a challenge. With public education spending still below 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), private institutions and non governmental organizations (NGOs) such as The Citizens Foundation and *Zindagi Trust* are filling the gaps, yet disparities persist.

The future hinges on Pakistan's ability to bridge the divide between policy ambition and on-the-ground execution. Despite minimal investment in research and development, the country has produced global tech talent. If it can harness this potential, Pakistan may yet secure its place in the AI-driven economy.

Beyond economic progress, Pakistan stands as a custodian of history, where traditions thrive and languages persist. It preserves architectural heritage, fosters poetry and music, and safeguards cultural identity—luxuries unattainable in nations fractured by war, famine, and internal strife.

More than a geographical entity, Pakistan grants its people a recognized identity in the global order—something stateless communities continue to fight for. It is a foundation upon which generations have built better lives.

As Pakistan celebrates its past, the question endures: What have we given back to this country? The answer must be more than silence. It must be a renewed commitment to education, innovation, and unity. It must be an acknowledgment that Pakistan's strength lies not just in its history but in its people's willingness to shape its future.

Maria Khalid

mareeakhaled@gmail.com

THE LONG ROAD TO A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY



IN A RAPIDLY EVOLVING WORLD, PAKISTAN'S GREATEST INVESTMENT ISN'T IN INFRASTRUCTURE OR INDUSTRY—BUT IN THE MINDS THAT WILL SHAPE ITS FUTURE.



Amir Zia

For better or worse, artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the world at a breakneck speed. Tectonic shifts are being felt in every sector—from services and manufacturing to trade and business. The developed world is creating new, dynamic opportunities, but at the cost of the old and established. The choices are stark: either change and adapt within a compressed timeframe or fall behind and lose.

The developed world is leading the way and unapologetically dictating the game—both within their societies and on the global stage. In doing so, they are writing new rules in which the size of governments, state-run organizations, and expenditures on causes once close to their hearts are being slashed or eliminated entirely. Cutting operational costs was once the mantra of the private sector, but it is now being embraced by governments in the first world as well.

The world's second- and third-tier economies are falling in line. Countries with relatively better-educated manpower, political stability, and robust governance and administrative systems are better positioned to propel themselves into the new era. In contrast, those unable to invest in, harness, and develop their human resources in line with changing times risk falling behind.

Pakistan, a nation of 250 million people, stands at a crossroads in this era of planned disruptions. It has the potential to join the big game and aim for a high-growth trajectory. To achieve this, the government and private sector must work together to accelerate investment in human capital. Once the goal is set and the vision is clear, even small steps on this path to change will make a difference.

Where Do We Stand?

Let's take a look at some of Pakistan's key human capital indicators—health, education, and skills—to understand the magnitude of the challenge in the 21st century.

According to a World Bank report, the child stunting rate has stagnated at nearly 40 percent, while learning poverty affects more than 78 percent of school-aged children, and infant mortality exceeds 62 deaths per 1,000 births. "Many parts of the country, especially rural areas but also major cities, lack access to basic services such as clean water and sanitation."

With 3.4 births per woman in 2022, Pakistan has the highest fertility rate in South Asia. "The number of youths entering the labor market each year is expanding at a faster rate than the total population, resulting in high youth disenchantment."

The report states that the composition of employment has changed little over time, with much of the labor force engaged in low-productivity and often informal jobs, particularly for women. This, it

explains, is due to a lack of investment in human capital.

ACCORDING TO A WORLD BANK REPORT, THE CHILD STUNTING RATE HAS STAGNATED AT NEARLY 40 PERCENT, WHILE LEARNING POVERTY AFFECTS MORE THAN 78 PERCENT OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, AND INFANT MORTALITY EXCEEDS 62 DEATHS PER 1,000 BIRTHS.

The silver lining is that the World Bank has partnered with the current government on a 10-year initiative (FY 2026-35) worth USD 20 billion, focusing on six key development areas, including reducing child stunting and learning poverty. However, beyond financial support and expertise, the real driver of change must be the federal and provincial governments, working in collaboration with the private sector and social welfare organizations.

Setting Targets

To begin with, Pakistan requires a multifaceted approach to improve its investment on human capital, especially in the field of education at various levels. This involves initiatives from the government, the private institutions, and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The government has already initiated various policies and programs from its "Vision 2025" and "*Uraan Pakistan*" aimed at increasing literacy, access to schooling as well as to train youngsters in the latest informative technology and the artificial intelligence skills. For example, the "*Uraan Pakistan*", as part of the country's 13th five-year National Economic Transformation Plan (2024-2029), describes education as one of the main drivers of sustainable economic growth, equity, and empowerment. The government's education initiatives aim to address systemic weaknesses, enhance access, and align education with the modern economic needs. This includes promoting quality education as a cornerstone to build a knowledge-based economy.

For this, curriculum modernization is a fundamental condition. The "*Uraan Pakistan*" plans to revise the curriculum for the rapidly evolving global economy, develop practical skills, promote critical thinking, and innovation rather than rote memorization. It also targets a 10 percent increase in literacy rate, which is currently hovering at around 61 percent. The biggest challenge is to put more than 25 million out-of-school children (aged five to 16 years) in schools by expanding access to primary and secondary education, particularly in rural areas and reducing the dropout rates. Special initiatives are needed for the marginalized girls and boys in Balochistan and Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa (KP) as well as rural Sindh, who are lagging behind compared to students in Punjab.

Another important component of the program includes a focus on technical and vocational training. This is a must to enhance employability by equipping youth with technical skills and information technology (IT) expertise. By expanding vocational training and integrating digital skills into education, the government seeks to align it with the "E-Pakistan" initiative for digital transformation.

In line with the initiatives by the past governments, especially of President Pervez Musharraf era, the practice of sending Pakistani students to the world's top universities for Master's and Ph.D. degrees is also being beefed up.

The National Youth Internship Program, offering 60,000 internships, and IT training, also remains part of the initiative along with inclusive education, encouraging and facilitating women, rural communities, and differently-abled individuals.

Building and modernizing schools in rural areas, establishing IT centers, and integrating technology-based learning and collaboration with provinces and stakeholders are also on the agenda.

Private Institutions

While the government is fixing the direction and setting the policy framework, in urban areas, private educational institutions and their networks already are playing a significant role in providing quality-education. These institutions, often using English as the medium of instruction, cater to a growing demand for quality education in the middle- and upper-middle class families.

However, many education experts advocate for a single national curriculum across both government and private institutions to promote national cohesion and bridge the widening educational divide between privileged and underprivileged students. There are also calls to phase out the expensive Cambridge education system, which places a burden on Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

Despite demands for greater scrutiny and accountability, the private sector continues to fill gaps in urban areas where the government struggles to provide due to limited resources.

NGOs

NGOs are playing a praiseworthy role in reaching underserved populations, particularly in rural areas and among women and girls.

Some of the key NGOs contributing to the education sector include The Citizens Foundation (TCF), The Hunar Foundation, Zindagi Trust, and Developments in Literacy (DIL). Many others are also making significant contributions at national, regional, and local levels.

For example, TCF is one of Pakistan's largest educational NGOs, operating nearly 2,033 schools and educating 301,000 students, almost half of whom are female. TCF focuses on providing "low-cost, high-quality" education and engaging communities to boost literacy in underserved areas.

Similarly, Developments in Literacy (DIL) has been providing affordable education to underprivileged children and running teacher training programs to improve literacy in remote regions. Zindagi Trust transforms under-resourced public schools, such as those in Karachi, into model institutions with improved infrastructure and holistic programs like Life-Skills Based Education.

The Literate Pakistan Foundation has reached 776,848 learners across 80 districts with simple, real-life skill-based literacy programs, targeting both children and adults in rural communities.

The Hunar Foundation operates 16 institutes offering world-class skill development education, covering fields ranging from computer science and artificial intelligence to entrepreneurship.

International organizations, including the Aga Khan Rural Support Program, have supported initiatives such as literacy centers for women in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral in partnership with the World Bank and UNESCO.

Challenges

Despite progress, significant challenges remain, including low public spending on education, which is less than 2.0 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Issues such as poor infrastructure, urban-rural disparities, and cultural barriers continue to prevent many female students from pursuing education.

Rampant corruption, disregard for merit, poor teacher quality, and lack of accountability are major obstacles that the federal and provincial governments must address urgently.

On May 10, 2024, the government declared a national education emergency to tackle the crisis of 25 million out-of-school children aged 5-16 years. However, despite such announcements, progress on this front has been slow.

One of the primary reasons for the high number of out-of-school children is that many families rely on them for labor—whether in agriculture, domestic work, or low-paid jobs, sometimes even in distant cities. The World Bank notes that poverty remains a major barrier to school enrollment, particularly in rural areas.

Gender disparities further compound the issue. As of 2024 estimates, female literacy stands at 49 percent compared to 73 percent for males. In patriarchal cultural settings, especially in rural and tribal areas, boys' education is often prioritized, while girls'

education remains limited. Additionally, an acute shortage of female teachers, particularly in rural areas, discourages girls from attending school.

A significant setback for the education sector came with the 2022 floods, which damaged 27,000 schools, particularly in rural Sindh and Balochistan. As of 2025, efforts to rebuild and renovate these schools are still ongoing.

Future is STEM

In Pakistan, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) faces numerous constraints that limit its growth despite increasing recognition of its importance for innovation and economic progress. These challenges include low funding, poor infrastructure, and policy implementation.

For instance, Pakistan allocates only 0.25-0.4 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to research and development (UNESCO data), significantly lower than the 2-3 percent average in STEM-focused developed nations. Unlike countries with robust STEM ecosystems, Pakistan's private sector invests minimally in STEM research and development (R&D), relying heavily on underfunded government initiatives.

Many schools—both urban and rural, including private institutions—lack laboratories, computers, and other modern equipment. Official data indicates that more than 50 percent of public schools do not even have basic science labs, severely limiting STEM learning opportunities.

Following the 18th Amendment, education has become a provincial subject, resulting in uneven STEM policies across the country. Federal initiatives often struggle with provincial buy-in and execution.

Despite these challenges, Pakistani scientists, researchers, and tech entrepreneurs have made notable contributions to advancing education through STEM innovations—both locally and internationally. Their efforts include groundbreaking research, technological platforms, and initiatives aimed at improving educational access and quality.

Both public and private sector universities in Pakistan offer high-quality STEM education, with institutions such as NUST, COMSATS, GIK, and Karachi University's HEJ Institute leading the way.

In the realm of technology-driven education, a recent milestone is Zahanat AI—Pakistan's first locally developed generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) platform. Launched by Data Vault, a tech company led by Mehwish Salman Ali, this AI platform has the potential to revolutionize education by offering personalized learning tools, automating content creation, and supporting educators with advanced resources. It exemplifies how Pakistani tech entrepreneurs are leveraging AI to enhance

educational outcomes.

Historically, Pakistani scientists have made a global impact in STEM fields. Dr. Abdus Salam, Pakistan's only Nobel Laureate in Physics (1979), contributed to theoretical physics through his work on electroweak unification. While his research was foundational rather than directly educational, it inspired generations of Pakistani students and researchers to pursue STEM, elevating the nation's academic aspirations.

From the late Dr. Salimuzzaman Siddiqui to Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, a long list of distinguished scientists has played a crucial role in advancing STEM education and research in Pakistan.

In biotechnology, Dr. Anwar Naseem has emerged as a pioneer. Dr. Naseem's focus is on agricultural advancements like genetically modified crops and his work is taught at Pakistani universities, where students engage with real-world applications of science to address food security.

The National Science and Technology Park (NASTP), established in Islamabad in 2017, has created a place where academia, industry, and innovators collaborate. The NASTP supports startups and research projects.

Then, the STEM Careers Program—a joint venture between the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences (PIEAS)—facilitates the youth to pursue STEM by preparing them for international science Olympiads and other competitions.

In computer science, Professor Shazia Sadiq has been recognized by the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering for her research in STEM, highlighting the impact of the Pakistani diaspora. Dr. Sadiq's work on data management and educational technology offers models that Pakistan could modify to suit its STEM curriculum.

In a nutshell, despite enormous challenges, advancements are being made, albeit slowly, on all the fronts which are vital to prepare Pakistan for the modern-day challenges in a rapidly changing world. The government, the private sector and the NGOs—all have this realization that investment in the human capital is the one and only way to leverage Pakistan's potential and to pull it out of the current low-growth cycle.

Pakistan has all the potential and opportunity for a great leap forward. It should not miss the boat. ■

The writer is an eminent journalist who regularly contributes for print and electronic media.
E-mail: amir.zia@gmail.com
X: @AmirZia1



What Have We Given to Pakistan?

Strengthening the Economy through
Entrepreneurship and Creative Endeavours

AS PAKISTAN'S ENTREPRENEURS REWRITE THE RULES OF BUSINESS, FINTECH DISRUPTS TRADITIONAL BANKING, AND THE DIASPORA FUELS GROWTH, A NEW ECONOMIC REVOLUTION IS UNFOLDING—ONE DRIVEN NOT BY STATE POLICIES ALONE, BUT BY THE RELENTLESS INGENUITY OF ITS PEOPLE.



Amir Jahangir

In many discussions about national progress, the focus often falls on what a country provides its citizens. However, a crucial and often overlooked perspective is what the citizens contribute to the nation's growth.

Pakistan's economic development is a result of the collective contributions of its people, mainly through the rise of entrepreneurship and industry. The innovative spirit of Pakistanis is propelling the country forward, from the emergence of dynamic startups in sectors like fintech and e-commerce to the growing influence of women entrepreneurs and the significant contributions of the Pakistani diaspora.

As the poet Khalil Gibran wrote in his 1925 article "The New Frontier" (published in *The Khalil Gibran Reader*), "Are you a politician asking what your country can do for you, or a passionate one asking what you can do for your country?" This sentiment was famously echoed later by John F. Kennedy in his inaugural speech. This quote beautifully captures how a nation's citizens contribute to its progress. Economic growth is not solely driven by the resources or opportunities provided by the country but rather by individuals' personal dedication, hard work, and innovative thinking across various sectors.

One of the most significant drivers of Pakistan's economic future is the rise of its entrepreneurial ecosystem. In recent years, the country has seen an explosion of innovative startups, particularly in fintech, e-commerce, and technology. These startups create jobs, foster innovation, and provide solutions that shape the national economy.

Fintech companies, for example, have been at the forefront of transforming Pakistan's financial landscape. In just a few years, startups like Finja and EasyPaisa have emerged as key players in digitizing financial services and promoting financial inclusion. Pakistan's population, much of which is still underbanked, is increasingly adopting mobile financial services. Fintech and digital banks, for instance, offer mobile wallets and digital payment solutions that enable individuals and businesses to conduct financial transactions securely and conveniently. This shift to digital banking is not only making financial services more accessible but is also contributing to a broader push for financial inclusion, especially in rural and underserved areas. The increasing popularity of fintech startups in Pakistan is helping to bridge the gap left by traditional banking institutions and is

contributing to a more inclusive financial ecosystem.

Traditional banking in Pakistan has faced significant stagnation due to several key challenges. The conventional banking system has long been characterized by limited reach, especially in rural and remote areas. Pakistan has a large unbanked population, and many individuals do not have easy access to brick-and-mortar bank branches. This has been compounded by high operational costs, outdated infrastructure, and a lack of financial literacy in a country where a large portion of the population is still outside the formal banking system. As a result, the banking sector has struggled to expand its customer base and increase financial inclusion. Furthermore, traditional banking institutions in Pakistan have been slow to adopt new technologies and offer digital banking solutions. While some banks began offering online banking services, the adoption rate remained low due to trust issues, inadequate customer support, and a lack of seamless integration with mobile platforms. This created a gap between what consumers needed and what was available to them regarding banking services.

In contrast, the rise of digital banking and fintech has sparked a revolution in Pakistan's financial landscape, effectively addressing many of these barriers. Digital banking and fintech platforms have brought banking to the fingertips of millions of users, making it more accessible, efficient, and user-friendly. These new-age financial services leverage the internet and mobile technology to provide previously limited services to physical bank branches.

Fintech and digital startups such as Easypaisa, Zindagi, JazzCash, Finja, and Uptick have significantly disrupted the market by offering mobile wallets, digital payments, micro-lending, and remittance services. These fintech platforms have gained massive traction, especially among younger



The graph shows the substantial growth of digital banking in Pakistan following the introduction of 4G services in 2014. There was a gradual increase in users before 4G, but after 2014, the number of digital banking customers surged dramatically, reflecting the transformative impact of mobile internet access on financial services.

populations and those in underserved areas. By allowing users to make payments, transfer money, access micro-loans, and even save and invest through their smartphones, digital banking has dramatically improved financial inclusion. In 2023 alone, the number of digital wallet users in Pakistan surpassed 30 million, reflecting a profound shift in how people interact with financial services.

One key advantage of digital banking and fintech solutions is their ability to bypass the traditional banking infrastructure, thus reducing costs and making financial services more affordable and accessible. Mobile-based platforms have allowed people to conduct banking transactions in real time, avoiding long queues, limited bank hours, and geographical barriers. This shift is expanding access to banking and facilitating greater financial literacy and inclusion across the country.

The introduction of mobile money platforms has particularly impacted connecting people previously excluded from formal banking systems. These platforms have allowed users in remote villages to send and receive money, pay bills, and make transactions without visiting a bank. In addition, fintech companies have also introduced peer-to-peer lending and micro-insurance products, which help address the financial needs of low-income groups and small businesses.

Moreover, the regulatory framework in Pakistan has started to evolve, with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and other financial authorities recognizing the importance of digital banking. The SBP's introduction of regulations such as the Branchless Banking Regulations and Digital Payment Systems Act has paved the way for a more favorable environment for fintech companies. This has encouraged the establishment of new players and the scaling up of existing platforms, further driving digital adoption and economic growth.

The SBP's Vision 2028 aims to increase bank account coverage to 75 percent of the adult population, up from around 50 percent today, and extend banking services to underserved segments, such as low-income individuals, SMEs, and farmers. Introducing digital financial services (DFS) and licensing digital banks are key to this strategy, which aims to offer cost-effective, digital-first banking solutions. The SBP envisions leveraging technological innovations such as Open Banking and Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) to reshape the financial landscape. Financial literacy and consumer protection will also be prioritized to ensure a secure and inclusive digital ecosystem. These efforts are designed to significantly boost financial inclusion and provide more accessible financial services to millions of Pakistanis.

The private sector in Pakistan has played a crucial role in the rise of digital financial services, helping to bridge the gap left by traditional banking systems, especially in reaching underserved populations. The demand for accessible and convenient financial services has led to significant innovations, with private sector companies leading the charge. Companies like Easypaisa and JazzCash have been forefront of mobile financial services. Easypaisa, launched by Telenor in 2009, was one of the pioneers in mobile wallets and payments, allowing millions of Pakistanis to send and receive money, pay bills, and make purchases without a bank account. JazzCash, another major player, has expanded its services to include mobile wallets, bill payments, and mobile banking, contributing significantly to financial inclusion.

Other fintech companies like Finja, *Zindagi*, and Uptick have also been key contributors to the sector. Finja and *Zindagi* provide digital payment solutions and micro-lending services, while Uptick focuses on offering financial products for SMEs, such as lending and payment solutions. These companies have helped create more accessible financial services, especially for small businesses and individuals in remote areas who traditionally had limited access to banking services.

Traditional private banks such as Bank Alfalah, HBL, and Faysal Bank have also embraced digital transformation, offering mobile apps, internet banking, and digital payment solutions that make banking services more convenient for customers. These efforts have been complemented by fintech startups like Finbox and Tez, which provide digital-first lending solutions and simplified financial transactions, further enhancing access to financial services.

Organizations like Karandaaz Pakistan, a non-profit organization supported by UKAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, focus on promoting digital financial inclusion and have partnered with private firms to increase the adoption of digital financial services. Together, these private sector efforts are reshaping the financial landscape in Pakistan, providing millions with greater access to financial tools and services, driving economic growth, and empowering individuals and businesses.

The rise of digital banking and fintech has been a game-changer for Pakistan, breaking down the barriers posed by traditional banking systems. It has brought millions of unbanked individuals into the financial fold, opening up new opportunities for personal finance management, entrepreneurship, and economic empowerment. As the digital ecosystem continues to grow and innovate, the future of banking in Pakistan looks increasingly digital and inclusive.

Alongside these advancements in the tech-driven

sectors, the increasing participation of women in business has been another transformative factor for Pakistan's economy. Historically, women's roles in the economic development of Pakistan have been underrepresented, but today, more and more women are stepping into leadership positions and launching successful businesses. Women's entrepreneurship is not just a matter of individual empowerment but a driver of economic progress. According to a 2023 report by the World Bank, women in Pakistan are starting businesses at an increasing rate, particularly in fields like technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. Organizations such as the Women's Business Incubator and TiE Pakistan provide much-needed mentorship and support to female entrepreneurs, helping them navigate the challenges of the business world. These efforts are paying off as we see the emergence of successful women-led businesses that are contributing to the country's economic fabric.

Pakistan's entrepreneurial landscape also benefits from the contributions of its diaspora. Overseas Pakistanis play a crucial role in the nation's economy, not only through remittances but also by transferring knowledge and expertise back to Pakistan. Remittances from the diaspora have long been a significant source of income for the country, helping to fuel domestic consumption and stabilizing Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

Based on the latest data, Pakistan's remittance inflows have shown significant growth in 2025 compared to 2024. Here's a detailed comparison:

Monthly Comparison

Month	2025 Amount	2024 Amount	Year-on-Year Growth
February	USD 3.12 billion	USD 2.25 billion	38.6 percent ¹
January	USD 3.00 billion	USD 2.40 billion	25.2 percent ²

Country-wise Comparison (February)

Country	February 2025	February 2024	Year-on-Year Growth
Saudi Arabia	USD 744.4 million	USD 540 million	37.9 percent ³
UAE	USD 652.2 million	USD 385 million	69.5 percent ⁴
UK	USD 501.8 million	USD 346 million	45.0 percent ⁵
US	USD 309.4 million	USD 287 million	7.8 percent ⁶
EU	USD 340 million	USD 263 million	29.3 percent ⁷

Cumulative Comparison (July–February)

For the first eight months of fiscal year 2025 (July–February FY25), total remittances reached USD 24.0 billion, showing a 32.5 percent increase compared to the same period in the previous fiscal

year when remittances were USD 18.1 billion.

The upward trend is particularly notable in remittances from the UAE, which jumped by nearly 69.5 percent year-on-year in February 2025. The UK also showed strong growth, with a 45 percent increase compared to February 2024.

This consistent growth and contributions by overseas Pakistanis in remittances throughout 2025 have significantly supported Pakistan's external account and household incomes across the nation while showing confidence in the country's leadership.

Traditional industries also play an essential role in Pakistan's economic development. The textile industry, which remains one of the largest exporters in the country, is still a significant contributor to Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP). Despite facing challenges like global competition and shifting market dynamics, Pakistan's textile industry generates billions in revenue, creating jobs for millions and contributing to the country's export earnings. Likewise, the sports goods industry, centered in Sialkot, remains one of the country's most important export sectors, with products reaching international markets. The information technology (IT) industry, led by companies like Systems Limited, TechAccess, Abacus Consulting, and TechAbout, is increasingly recognized as a driver of innovation, contributing to Pakistan's position as a growing hub for technology outsourcing.

While facing increasing pressure from globalization, these traditional sectors continue to represent Pakistan's economic resilience. As the country diversifies its economy, combining traditional industries and emerging sectors like technology, fintech, and e-commerce contributes to a more robust and forward-looking economy.

The Emerging Creative Economy of Pakistan

The creative economy in Pakistan has also become a significant driver of progress and development, contributing to various sectors such as culture, media, entertainment, design, technology, and innovation. With its rich cultural heritage and a youthful, dynamic population, Pakistan's creative industries have sparked economic growth, employment, and social impact while enhancing its global presence. The creative economy has facilitated innovation and entrepreneurship, positioning Pakistan as an emerging cultural hub worldwide.

Cultural and Media Industries

The growth of the media sector, including television, film, and digital content, has significantly

contributed to Pakistan's creative economy. The media industry has generated substantial revenue through advertising, content production, and distribution with prominent channels like *Geo TV*, *HUM*, *ARY*, and *Samaa TV*. These platforms have nurtured local talent in acting, journalism, production, and management while driving job creation across multiple sectors. Social media platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram have provided content creators a global stage, further strengthening Pakistan's creative economy. The uniqueness of Pakistan's creative economy lies in its ability to nurture creativity, providing a platform for it to thrive while simultaneously fostering an environment where this creativity can be consumed and appreciated both locally and internationally.

The fashion and design industries have become central to Pakistan's creative economy, generating substantial revenue and creating jobs across various sectors. Renowned designers like Khaadi, Sana Safinaz, HSY, SAK Atlier, and Shamaeel Ansari have put Pakistan's fashion industry on the global map. Fashion Pakistan Week and Karachi Fashion Week have provided platforms for designers to showcase their work, attract international investment, and promote local craftsmanship. The fashion industry's growth has profoundly impacted textiles, retail, and manufacturing, further embedding these sectors into the broader creative economy. Pakistani fashion and brands have become some of the most sought-after names in the region, particularly in markets like India and the UAE.

Traditional crafts like ajrak, pashmina shawls, and blue pottery have been vital to supporting rural economies in Pakistan. Local artisans have connected with international markets by promoting their unique handcrafted goods, contributing to exports, and preserving cultural heritage. The government and various NGOs have helped expand these markets, allowing artisans to reach a broader audience. This sector continues to be an essential driver of economic activity, especially in rural regions where artisanal products represent cultural identity and economic opportunity.

The emerging creative economy in Pakistan is reshaping the nation's development, fostering cultural

exchange, social cohesion, and economic growth. From media and entertainment to fashion, technology, and tourism, the creative industries have created new opportunities for entrepreneurship, job creation, and global recognition. By continuing to invest in and nurture this sector, Pakistan's creative resource has the potential to position the country as a leading player in the global creative economy. With its rich cultural heritage, entrepreneurial spirit, and dynamic workforce, Pakistan stands poised to capitalize on the growing global demand for creative products and services, making the creative economy a cornerstone of its future prosperity.

The collective contributions of Pakistan's citizens—whether through the rise of innovative startups, the growing presence of women entrepreneurs, the players in the creative economy, or the continued success of traditional industries—are helping to create a stronger, more diverse economy. These efforts fuel the country's economic growth and contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable economic future.

Pakistan's entrepreneurial ecosystem, driven by its youth's hard work and creativity, is opening new doors for innovation and opportunity. Pakistan's dynamic, youthful spirit is reshaping its identity, pushing it toward a more self-sustaining, resilient economy. Today's young entrepreneurs are not just inheriting the future—they are actively creating it, using their creativity and entrepreneurial drive to carve new paths. As Khalil Gibran aptly put it, the actual value lies not just in what is given but in the spirit with which it is given. This spirit of determination, resilience, and forward-thinking empowers Pakistan's youth to transform the country, ensuring its continued progress and global recognition. ■

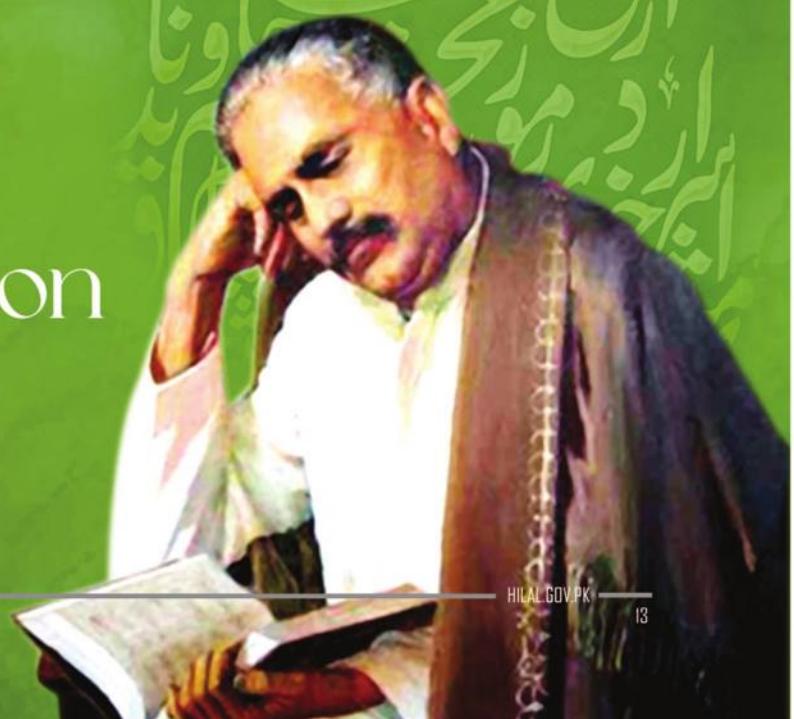
The writer is a global expert in competitiveness, risk assessment, and development. He leads Mishal Pakistan, the country's partner institute of the World Economic Forum, and serves as a senior expert with UNESCO's Inclusive Policy Lab. His expertise spans narratology, strategic communications, and AI policy, supported by academic credentials from Harvard Law School, MIT, Tufts University, Stanford, the LKY School of Public Policy, National Defense University Islamabad, and the Harvard Kennedy School.
E-mail: aj@mishal.com.pk
X: @amirjahangir

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IN FOCUS

The Poet's Call

How Iqbal's Vision Inspires a New Generation



IQBAL'S PHILOSOPHY IS A CALL TO ACTION, PUSHING YOUNG MINDS TO DREAM, STRIVE, AND TRANSFORM PAKISTAN'S FUTURE. THE QUESTION Lingers—ARE WE ANSWERING HIS CALL?



Aadil Farook

Allama Muhammad Iqbal, revered as one of the foremost philosophers, poets, and political thinkers of the early 20th century, holds a unique place in the hearts and minds of Pakistanis. His poetry serves as a lighthouse guiding the ship of a nation through the murky waters of identity, political emancipation, and personal growth. As we approach the anniversary of his passing on April 21st, it is crucial to engage with Iqbal's vision of youth as catalysts for change in contemporary Pakistan. The reflection asks: What have we, particularly the youth, contributed to Pakistan, guided by Iqbal's philosophy?

Iqbal's Vision: The Youth as Agents of Change

It's not just a matter of choice, but a responsibility that we, the youth, must shoulder. Iqbal's teachings encapsulate a profound understanding of the human experience, emphasizing the transformative potential of youth. His poetry acknowledges the youth as a demographic and as the driving force of societal evolution. In his poem "Tulu-e-Islam" (The Rise of Islam), Iqbal articulates his conviction that the youth can rise above their circumstances, embodying the spirit of resilience and agency. He writes, "The ultimate aim of the individual is not to simply live but to strive, to grow, to evolve into something greater."

IQBAL'S TEACHINGS ENCAPSULATE A PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, EMPHASIZING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH.

کوئی اندازہ کر سکتے ہے اس کے زور ہاڑو کا
نگاہ مردِ مومن سے بدلت جاتی ہیں تقدیریں!

(Can anyone even guess at the strength of his arm?
By the glance of the man who is a true believer even
destiny is changed.)

This call to action is vital, as it touches upon the essential quality of dynamism—an attribute that characterizes youth. Iqbal's observation that the youth must cultivate a sense of responsibility reflects a broader commitment to self-improvement and communal upliftment. He positions them as the architects of the future, emphasizing that in a nation ravaged by despair, it's the energetic spirit of the youth that can drive revival, showing that they are not just the future, but the present.

یقینِ حجم، عملِ پیغم، محبتِ فتحِ عالم
جہادِ زندگانی میں ہیں یہ مردوں کی ششیریں

(Firm certainty, eternal action, the love that conquers
the world—

These are the swords of men in the holy war of life.)

IN HIS POEM "TULU-E-ISLAM" (THE RISE OF ISLAM), IQBAL ARTICULATES HIS CONVICTION THAT THE YOUTH CAN RISE ABOVE THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES, EMBODYING THE SPIRIT OF RESILIENCE AND AGENCY. HE WRITES, "THE ULTIMATE AIM OF THE INDIVIDUAL IS NOT TO SIMPLY LIVE BUT TO STRIVE, TO GROW, TO EVOLVE INTO SOMETHING GREATER."

Relevance of Iqbal's Teachings in Today's Context

In our contemporary society, where challenges such as economic instability, political disillusionment, and social injustice prevail, the relevance of Iqbal's ideals remains paramount. The youth must introspectively engage with the fundamental aspects of self-reliance, knowledge acquisition, and ethical leadership that Iqbal championed.

Self-Reliance and Resilience

Iqbal's call for self-reliance resonates sharply in an

age increasingly shaped by external validation and diminishing personal agency. For today's youth, the imperative is clear: cultivate a mindset of innovation and entrepreneurship, where ambition replaces passivity and opportunities are created, not merely awaited. This spirit of initiative mirrors Iqbal's vision of an empowered individual—one who defies societal constraints and carves a path defined by personal values and aspirations.

اُس قوم کو شمشیر کی حاجت نہیں رہتی
جو جس کے جوانوں کی خودی صورتِ فولاد

(A nation whose youth are endowed with self as strong and hard as steel,
No need of piercing swords in war such people brave can ever feel.)

Knowledge as Empowerment

Iqbal's emphasis on knowledge is integral to the empowerment of youth. Education should not merely be a vehicle for acquiring degrees but a transformative process that inspires critical thinking and a quest for deeper understanding. Iqbal's philosophy encourages students to thirst for academic knowledge and seek wisdom. As Iqbal advocated, knowledge should incite introspection and promote a sense of responsibility towards societal issues. Today's youth must challenge the status quo, pushing beyond rote learning to engage with ideas that spur innovation and foster social change. It's not just a suggestion, but a call to action that can inspire and motivate the youth.

IQBAL'S TEACHINGS ENCAPSULATE A PROFOUND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE, EMPHASIZING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL OF YOUTH.

A Comparative Reflection: The Youth and Iqbal's Ideals

Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads, and it is crucial to explore how the current youth embody or diverge from Iqbal's aspirations. Are they embracing the ideals of self-reliance and leadership? Are they participating actively in addressing societal challenges?

While modern technology has created many channels for engagement and activism, a disconnect often permeates youth actions. Many quickly articulate dissatisfactions with societal conditions, yet effective action remains elusive. Activism has transitioned to social media platforms, where hashtags and digital campaigns become the primary modes of

expression. While these platforms amplify voices, they do not necessarily translate into grassroots activism or tangible contributions.

Conversely, we also witness inspiring movements led by youth who draw inspiration from Iqbal's teachings. Initiatives focused on social entrepreneurship, environmental awareness, and educational reform signal a willingness to face challenges head-on. Nevertheless, a larger examination is warranted to ascertain whether these efforts align with Iqbal's vision for a proactive and engaged citizenry.

Contributions to Pakistan: Embracing Iqbal's Teachings

As young people engage with their communities and society, assessing what they have contributed to Pakistan thus far becomes vital. Contributions can manifest in pursuing nation-building, such as social initiatives, cultural revival, and a fervent push for accountability and transparency.

Cultural Renaissance and Identity Renewal

In recent years, interest in local culture, literature, and art has been resurgent, which resonates with Iqbal's vision of a society that celebrates its rich heritage and identity. This cultural renaissance is emblematic of the youth's desire to reconnect with their roots, fostering a sense of belonging and community. Young artists, writers, and musicians draw inspiration from Pakistan's diverse history, integrating traditional motifs and contemporary themes to create work that speaks to local and global audiences.

Iqbal's poetry often evokes a deep appreciation for the cultural landscape of the East, urging a revival of artistic expression that reflects genuine experiences and emotions. In this light, contemporary creators can find solace and empowerment in Iqbal's call to awaken cultural consciousness. The emerging artists who engage with local narratives contribute to a collective story that challenges dominant perspectives and amplifies underrepresented voices. It's important for these artists to strike a balance between traditional and contemporary themes, as this not only preserves our cultural heritage but also encourages innovation and creativity.

For example, initiatives promoting regional literature, folk music, and visual arts have gained traction among Pakistan's youth. Platforms such as literary festivals, art exhibitions, and music festivals serve as forums for creative exchange and play a pivotal role in celebrating the rich tapestry of Pakistani culture. This vibrant engagement reflects a conscious effort to honor Iqbal's vision, where culture becomes a medium for societal critique and the cultivation of

national identity.

Social Entrepreneurship: Bridging Ideals and Action

Another significant area where Pakistan's youth are effecting change is through social entrepreneurship. Using business acumen to address social issues aligns closely with Iqbal's ideals of leadership and self-reliance. Contemporary youth are increasingly launching ventures prioritizing social impact over pure profitability to solve pressing challenges such as poverty, education inequalities, and environmental degradation.

Organizations led by young people across Pakistan provide innovative solutions demonstrating entrepreneurship's power to uplift communities. These ventures often focus on sustainable practices, skill development, and inclusive growth, allowing youth to harness their skills while contributing meaningfully to the nation's progress.

By adopting Iqbal's principles of self-reliance and community empowerment, today's entrepreneurs prove that social change is achievable through business. The intersection of social responsibility and economic viability embodies the essence of Iqbal's teachings, underscoring the potential for business to serve as a force for good in society.

The Role of Education in Realizing Iqbal's Vision

As we examine the contributions of the youth to Pakistan, the role of education cannot be overstated. However, a paradigm shift is required to ensure educational institutions foster environments conducive to critical thinking, creativity, and ethical leadership.

Iqbal believed education should cultivate knowledge, a spirit of inquiry, and a commitment to social justice. The current education system often falls short in this regard, emphasizing rote learning and standardized testing at the expense of holistic development. To realize Iqbal's vision of an empowered and enlightened youth, educational reform must prioritize experiential learning, civic engagement, and mentorship that prepares students to lead with integrity and insight.

Youth-led initiatives that advocate for educational reform are crucial; they challenge outdated practices and promote a curriculum that embraces diversity and fosters an appreciation for critical discourse. Such movements are instrumental in bridging the gap between Iqbal's ideals and the realities of contemporary learning environments.

Reflections on Our Contributions to Pakistan

As we contemplate our contributions to Pakistan, we must engage in a dialogue about the ethical

implications of our actions. As today's youth, are we adequately serving our nation, or are we falling prey to complacency in the face of challenges? Iqbal compellingly argues that individual character and collective ethical standards shape the nation's destiny.

پرواز ہے دونوں کی اسی ایک فضا میں
کر گس کا جہاں اور ہے، شایین کا جہاں اور
(The vulture and the eagle soar
In the same air, but in worlds apart.)

The question then arises: What legacy do we want to leave? Are we as invested in noble pursuits as Iqbal envisioned? The answer requires introspection and a commitment to embody the principles of vision, resilience, and courage that characterize Iqbal's poetry.

We must also address the notion of accountability—both individually and collectively. This means examining our relationships with our communities, leaders, and ourselves as we work towards a more just and equitable society.

As we commemorate Allama Iqbal's legacy, we must move beyond mere appreciation of his poetry and philosophy. The question of "What have we given to Pakistan?" must propel us into action, compelling us to engage actively with Iqbal's ideals.

By embracing our roles as agents of change, we can contribute meaningfully to the ongoing nation-building narrative. Pakistan's youth are uniquely positioned to navigate their futures informed by Iqbal's teachings—engaging in continuous self-improvement, championing social issues, and cultivating a rich cultural identity.

In doing so, we honor not just Iqbal's memory but also the future of our nation. Reflecting on Iqbal's call to strive for greatness, let us elevate our aspirations and engage in the arduous yet fulfilling journey toward realizing a prosperous, enlightened, and inclusive Pakistan for future generations. The future awaits our passionate contributions, inspired by a legacy that continues illuminating our paths. ■

E-mail: aadil.far@gmail.com

ON PAKISTAN DAY 2025, PAUSE AND ASK

What Have YOU Given Back?

THE IDEA OF PAKISTAN TURNS 85, BUT THE QUESTION REMAINS: HAVE WE HONORED THE PROMISE OF ITS CREATION?

Hilal Desk

March 23 is more than just a date on the calendar; it is the embodiment of a collective struggle, a testament to resilience, and a reminder of the extraordinary leadership that forged a nation in the span of just seven years. It is a day that calls for both celebration and introspection—a moment to honor the sacrifices of those who turned a vision into reality, but also to examine the weight of the responsibilities we now bear.

Pakistan's emergence was not merely the result of political maneuvering; it was a seismic shift in the consciousness of a people who longed for dignity, self-determination, and justice. The caravans that arrived in a nascent Pakistan did not merely traverse physical distances; they embodied a metaphysical journey—one that tested the limits of human endurance and faith. Their rallying cry—“Pakistan ka matlab kya, La Ilaha Illa Allah”—was more than a slogan; it was the heartbeat of a people seeking liberation, not just from colonial rule, but from the chains of existential despair. As Pakistan marks 85 years since the Lahore Resolution, we must confront an uncomfortable question: Have we upheld the pact forged in blood and sacrifice, or have we merely inherited a symbol stripped of its original urgency?

The passage of time has layered Pakistan's story with complexities, revealing the fragile interplay of ideals and realities. The threats we face today are not only territorial

but profoundly philosophical. The specter of hybrid warfare looms large, where truth itself is under siege—manipulated, distorted, and reshaped to sow discord. *Fitna al-Khawarij* (FAK) and other extremist ideologies are not merely enemies of the state; they are distortions of the soul, deviations from the higher moral calling that Islam demands. Meanwhile, the unchecked proliferation of digital propaganda turns perception into reality, eroding trust and dismantling the sacred bonds of national unity. Economic pressures, environmental crises, and the corrosion of ethical values further complicate the landscape. These are not just external crises; they are internal reckonings that call for a deeper introspection.

Yet, amidst these trials, Pakistan remains a land of immense blessings. It is not merely geography that defines a nation, but the will of its people to transform its potential into destiny. The tragedy lies not in the adversities we face but in the apathy that greets them. We often lament what Pakistan has not given us, but seldom do we ask: What have we given to Pakistan? This question is not rhetorical; it is an ethical imperative. To demand without giving, to expect without contributing—this is the mindset that must change.

WE OFTEN LAMENT WHAT PAKISTAN HAS NOT GIVEN US, BUT SELDOM DO WE ASK: WHAT HAVE WE GIVEN TO PAKISTAN? THIS QUESTION IS NOT RHETORICAL; IT IS AN ETHICAL IMPERATIVE. TO DEMAND WITHOUT GIVING, TO EXPECT WITHOUT CONTRIBUTING—THIS IS THE MINDSET THAT MUST CHANGE.

Are we mere spectators in Pakistan's journey, or are we architects of its future? Have we strengthened the sentinels who guard our frontiers, not only with weapons but with unshakeable national resolve? Have we played a role in dismantling the networks of extremism that threaten our peace? Have we, in our own spheres, cultivated knowledge, fostered tolerance, and defended truth against the tides of deception? Too often, the answer remains a hesitant silence.

This passivity must end. Strength lies in unity, and unity is not an abstract ideal—it is the lived reality of a people bound by purpose. As Iqbal so powerfully reminds us:

فرد قائم ریط ملت سے ہے تھا کچھ نہیں
موج ہے دریا میں اور بیرون دریا کچھ نہیں

(An individual is sustained by their connection to the nation; alone, they are nothing.)

A wave exists in the river, but outside it, it is nothing.)

The foundational ideals of unity, faith, and discipline remain as relevant today as they were in 1947. The call to work, work, and only work must not be confined to speeches but must echo in our daily actions. Our collective destiny is not hindered by a lack of resources but by the corrosion of belief in our own power to shape the future. To dispel these shadows, we must trust in ourselves, in our national strength, and in the divine promise that perseverance and faith yield triumph.

This is not a journey for the faint-hearted. Defeating the forces of misinformation, countering extremism, and restoring national confidence require vigilance, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to truth. We must embrace a new civic consciousness—where patriotism is not performative but deeply felt, where responsibility is not outsourced but personally owned. Monitoring threats within our midst, reporting suspicious activities, engaging in intellectual rigor, and rejecting the comfort of indifference—these are not acts of mere duty but of national survival. The battle against disinformation must not be fought only by institutions but by every citizen who refuses to be an instrument of discord. Social media must cease to be an echo chamber of grievances and must instead become a beacon of enlightenment and national cohesion.

Pakistan's future does not rest in vague aspirations; it lies in the choices we make today. It is a future that demands sacrifice—not only from policymakers and security forces but from every citizen who dares to dream of a Pakistan that is just, strong, and united. When the next Pakistan Day arrives, may we not look back with regret but with the satisfaction that we have honored the trust of history.

The great leader whose vision guided Pakistan's creation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, once declared in October 1947: "The greater the sacrifices we are made to undergo, the purer and more chastened shall we emerge, like gold from fire."

Today, as we mark the 85th anniversary of that defining moment in history, let us renew our commitment—not just to remembering Pakistan's past but to shaping its future. Let our unity transcend the divisions of language, ethnicity, and sect. Let our determination silence the voices of despair. And let our actions, not just our words, define our patriotism.

For when the question arises again—What have you given to Pakistan? —may our answer be one of unwavering pride. ■



Pakistan Day 2025: Evoking Altruism in Youth through Example

ON THIS PAKISTAN DAY, WE COMMEMORATE THE HERITAGE OF THOSE WHO FORMED OUR NATION—FROM HUMANITARIAN PIONEERS TO SCIENTISTS, ARTISTS, AND SOLDIERS—WHOSE SACRIFICES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS REMIND US OF THE PRIVILEGES OF A COUNTRY. GIVEN THAT THE FUTURE OF OUR NATION DEPENDS ON ITS YOUTH, LET US TRANSCEND OBSTACLES, MOTIVATED BY THESE EXTRAORDINARY INDIVIDUALS, AND WORK TOWARDS A MORE PROMISING FUTURE, UNITED IN OUR IDENTITY AND MISSION.



Ghulam Murtaza Mir

"And do not lose hope in the mercy of Allah, for no one loses hope in Allah's mercy except those with no faith."
—(Quran 12:87)

The Lahore Resolution 1940, later known as the Pakistan Resolution, was the culmination of struggles and sacrifices of the Muslims of the subcontinent. It stood as a united demand for a separate homeland for the Muslims residing in the North Western and Eastern Zones of British India. This idea would later culminate in the creation of West Pakistan and East Pakistan (later Bangladesh). Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in his Presidential address on the eve of the Lahore Resolution, emphasized the separate identity of the Muslims of India as a nation distinct from the Hindus. He urged the Muslim populace to "Come forward as servants of Islam, organize the people economically, socially, educationally, and politically."

MORE THAN A GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITY, PAKISTAN GRANTS ITS PEOPLE A RECOGNIZED IDENTITY IN THE GLOBAL ORDER—SOMETHING STATELESS COMMUNITIES, FROM THE PALESTINIANS AND KASHMIRIS TO THE ROHINGYA AND OROMO, CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR. IT IS A FOUNDATION UPON WHICH GENERATIONS HAVE BUILT BETTER LIVES.

Emphasizing the reason for the need for a separate homeland, our Quaid at the Frontier Muslim League Conference, Peshawar, November 20, 1945, proclaimed that "We have to fight a double-edged battle, one against the Hindu Congress and the other against the British Imperialist, both of whom are capitalist. The Muslims demand Pakistan, where they could live according to their own code of life, their own cultural growth, traditions, and Islamic laws."¹

ASK YOURSELF: ARE YOU MORE PROSPEROUS AND BETTER EDUCATED THAN YOUR ANCESTORS? MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THE ANSWER IS A RESOUNDING YES—A TESTAMENT TO PAKISTAN'S COLLECTIVE PROGRESS.

Here, it is important to emphasize that if we as citizens of this nation genuinely wish to see it, the rationale for the creation of Pakistan provides us with the answer to the ever so often asked question: "What has Pakistan ever given us?" The answer can be witnessed in Quaid-i-Azam's interview with BBC, London, December 13, 1946, where he eloquently summed up that:

"Hindu and Muslim India must be separated because the two nations are entirely distinct and different and, in some matters, antagonistic to each other... we differ in our history, culture, language, architecture, music, laws, jurisprudence, calendar and our entire social fabric and code of life. One India is impossible to realize which will inevitably mean that the Muslims would be transferred from the domination of the British to the caste Hindu rule, a position that Muslims will never accept."²

Pakistan stands as more than just a homeland—it is a sanctuary where history is preserved, traditions thrive, and languages endure. It is where architectural heritage is safeguarded, poetry and music find expression, and, above all, where life is lived in accordance with Islamic principles. These are privileges many can only dream of in nations ravaged by war, internal strife, famine, and disease—places like Ukraine, Myanmar, Mexico, Ethiopia, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Niger, and Yemen.

More than a geographical entity, Pakistan grants its people a recognized identity in the global order—something stateless communities, from the Palestinians and Kashmiris to the Rohingya and

Oromo, continue to fight for. It is a foundation upon which generations have built better lives.

Ask yourself: Are you more prosperous and better educated than your ancestors? More often than not, the answer is a resounding yes—a testament to Pakistan's collective progress. This is one of the prime examples of collective prosperity in Pakistan.

Despite Pakistan's challenges over the years, there have always been Pakistanis who have stepped forward, putting national interests above their own or performing exceptional feats in their respective fields, gaining repute in the world. These personalities should be the source of inspiration for our youth. Listing some of their significant achievements is essential to dedicate this Pakistan Day to the spirit of selfless service and sacrifice displayed by these gems of our nation:

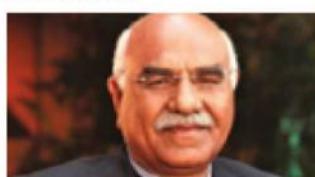
Humanitarian and Social Workers



- Abdul Sattar Edhi³—Founded the Edhi Foundation, the largest humanitarian organization in Pakistan, providing emergency services, orphanages, and free healthcare to millions.



- Dr. Ruth Pfau—a German-Pakistani humanitarian and doctor who dedicated her life to eradicating leprosy in Pakistan, earning her the title "Mother Teresa of Pakistan."⁴



- Dr. Amjad Saqib—founded the Akhuwat Foundation, the world's largest interest-free microfinance organization, empowering millions with financial inclusion.⁵
- Zamurrad Khan—led the transformation of

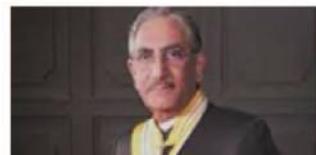


Pakistan Sweet Homes, providing shelter and education to thousands of orphaned children across Pakistan.⁶



- Hakeem Saeed—founder of Hamdard Pakistan, a pioneer in traditional medicine and a leading philanthropist. Hakeem Muhammad Saeed authored and compiled about 200 books on medicine, philosophy, science, health, religion, natural medicine, literature, social issues, and travelogues. In 1985, Hakim Muhammad Saeed founded Hamdard University, where he served as its first Vice-Chancellor and as a professor. But, the crowning activity of his life is the establishment of Madinat-al-Hikmah.⁷

Scientists and Academics



- Dr. Samar Mubarakmand—a key figure in Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs, he led the team that successfully conducted the 1998 nuclear tests.⁸



- Dr. Raziuddin Siddiqi—a distinguished mathematician and physicist, contributing significantly to Pakistan's scientific and academic institutions. During the 1940s in Europe, he

contributed to mathematical physics and worked on general relativity and the theory of relativity, nuclear energy, and quantum gravity. He was one of the notable students of Albert Einstein. In 1956, Siddiqui helped establish nuclear power in Pakistan, playing a critical role in Pakistan's indigenous development of nuclear weapons. He was the Vice-Chancellor of four Pakistani universities and the first Vice-Chancellor of Quaid-e-Azam University. He served as the emeritus professor of physics there until he died in 1998.⁹



- Dr. Nazir Ahmed (Physicist)—a leading nuclear scientist, he played a crucial role in developing Pakistan's nuclear energy program.¹⁰



- Salimuzzaman Siddiqi—a pioneering chemist known for his groundbreaking research in natural products and medicinal chemistry.¹¹



- Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman is a globally recognized scientist and educationist who has played a key role in transforming Pakistan's higher education and research sector.¹²

Economists and Bankers



- Shahid Javed Burki—Pakistani-American professional

economist who served as Vice President of the World Bank and as de facto Finance Minister of Pakistan on a caretaker basis. He has written extensively on economic development.



- Mahbub ul Haq—introduced the Human Development Index (HDI), revolutionizing global development metrics by prioritizing human well-being over gross domestic product (GDP).¹³

Political and Legal Figures

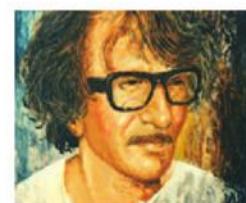


- Benazir Bhutto became Pakistan's first female Prime Minister and the first woman to lead a Muslim-majority country. She advocated for democracy and women's rights.¹⁴



- A. K. Brohi—a distinguished lawyer and constitutional expert, he played a vital role in shaping Pakistan's legal framework. He devoted the last few years to creating the International Islamic University in Pakistan and the National Hijra Council, whose major projects produced a hundred great books on Islamic civilization.¹⁵

Artists, Writers, and Cultural Figures



- Sadequain—renowned painter and calligrapher,

celebrated for his intricate murals and revival of Islamic calligraphy in modern art.¹⁶



- Abdul Rehman Chughtai—pioneer of Chughtai art, blending Mughal, Persian, and modernist influences in South Asian painting.¹⁷



- Faiz Ahmed Faiz—a legendary poet and revolutionary, his poetry of resistance and hope continues to inspire movements for social justice.¹⁸



- Parveen Shakir is a Pakistani poet and civil servant for the government of Pakistan. She is best known for her poems, which brought a distinctive feminine voice to Urdu literature.¹⁹



- Zia Mohyeddin—a legendary actor, director, and orator famous for reviving the art of literary recitation in Pakistan.²⁰

Architects and Urban Planners



- Yasmeen Lari—Pakistan's first female architect, known for her sustainable and disaster-resistant housing projects.²¹



- Kamil Khan Mumtaz, a renowned architect and conservationist, played a key role in promoting traditional and sustainable architecture in Pakistan, blending modern design with Mughal, Persian, Central Asian, and other indigenous building techniques.²²

Technology and Young Achievers



- Arfa Karim—the youngest Microsoft Certified Professional (MCP) at the age of 9, inspiring generations in technology.²³



- Usman Riaz—a Pakistani musician, composer, and artist who gained international recognition for his percussive guitar-playing style. He is also the founder of Mano Animation Studios, Pakistan's first hand-drawn animation studio, producing the country's first-ever hand-drawn animated feature film, *The Glassworker* (2025 Oscars as Pakistan's official submission in the International Feature Film category). His work has been featured on platforms like TED and BBC, showcasing his talent in music and animation.²⁴

Religious and Philosophical Thinkers



- Allama Muhammad Asad—a Jewish convert to

Islam, a scholar, and diplomat, Asad played a key role in shaping Pakistan's ideological foundations and translated the Quran into English. Pakistan conferred Asad its first full citizenship and appointed him the Director of the Department of Islamic Reconstruction, where he made recommendations on the drafting of Pakistan's first Constitution.²⁵

Athletes and Sports Figures



- Jahangir Khan—a squash legend, he won 555 consecutive matches, the longest winning streak in sports history.²⁶



- Arshad Nadeem—became the first Pakistani athlete to win a gold medal in javelin throw at the Paris Olympics 2024 and Commonwealth Games 2022.²⁷

National Heroes and Martyrs



- M. M. Alam—Air Commodore M. M. Alam set a world record during the 1965 Indo-Pak war by shooting down five Indian fighter jets in under a minute, earning him the title of "Little Dragon" and making him one of the greatest fighter pilots in history.²⁸



- Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed—honored with

Nishan-e-Haider for his bravery in the Kargil War, leading from the front and repelling enemy attacks before embracing martyrdom.²⁹



- Lalak Jan *Shaheed*—Havaldar Lalak Jan was awarded the *Nishan-e-Haider* for his extraordinary bravery during the Kargil War (1999). He defended his post against intense enemy attacks and sacrificed his life while holding his ground.³⁰



- Squadron Leader Hassan Siddiqui—a Pakistani fighter pilot who successfully engaged and eventually destroyed the Indian Air Force jets that violated Pakistani airspace in Azad Kashmir in 2019. One of the Indian pilots was also captured alive by ground troops.



- Aitzaz Hassan Bangash *Shaheed*—a teenage hero who sacrificed his life to prevent a suicide bomber from attacking his school.³¹

History teaches us that nations do not rise or fall by fate alone; they are shaped by the collective consciousness of their people. Civilizations flourish when individuals align their personal ambitions with a shared vision, forging a legacy greater than themselves. Pakistan stands at a crossroads, its future determined not by external forces but by the choices of its citizens—especially its youth. Will they embrace a path of innovation, resilience, and unity, or be consumed by cynicism and inertia?

Terrorism, political strife, and ideological divisions

threaten the very fabric of our society. But challenges, no matter how daunting, are not insurmountable. The survival of Pakistan depends on an unwavering belief in its ideals, an active commitment to governance, and the courage to defend its sovereignty. It is not enough to lament the past; the task is to shape the future.

افراد کے باخوبی میں ہے اقوام کی تقدیر
ہر فرد ہے ملت کے مقدر کا ستارا

Each citizen is not merely an observer of history but an architect of it. The defining question remains: will we rise to claim our place in it? ■

The writer is a member of staff.
E-mail: murtazamir88@gmail.com

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Foreigners Who Made Pakistan Their Home (Part 999)

WHILE MANY PAKISTANIS DREAM OF MOVING OVERSEAS, A LESSER-KNOWN STORY UNFOLDS—ONE OF FOREIGNERS WHO HAVE EMBRACED PAKISTAN, ENRICHING ITS EDUCATION, ECONOMY, AND SOCIAL FABRIC.



Jennifer McKay

In the last two editions of *Hilal Magazine*, I've written about a few extraordinary foreigners who made Pakistan their home since 1947 and who contributed significantly to the development and early progress of Pakistan. There are many more whose stories have not yet been told but those will make an appearance in these pages at various times in the future as research continues into this aspect of Pakistan's history.

The earlier settlers came here mostly to work in education and health, and some were pioneers in Pakistan's nascent military forces post-Partition. In this edition, we look at why a newer generation of foreigners have chosen to settle in Pakistan in recent years and how they are contributing to the socioeconomic development of the nation, as well as taking a continuing look at more foreigners who have played an important role in education.

In an era when hundreds of thousands of Pakistani's leave every year to work and live overseas – many permanently – it comes as a surprise to many that foreigners, particularly from developed western countries, choose to settle in Pakistan. The number is tiny in comparison to those leaving but for most of us who have made the leap, Pakistan is our home.

'Foreigner' is a common term around the world. Basically it defines someone who does not hold citizenship of the country in which they are residing and has various legal implications regarding immigration requirements, residency, property and business ownership. Pakistan is no different. The word also has cultural implications. Foreigners can sometimes be treated unkindly by the communities in countries in which they settle particularly if they 'look different' or have different cultural or religious practices. This has become a simmering issue in some western countries where, for example, Islamophobia has reared its ugly head. In Pakistan, foreigners rarely, if ever, encounter racism and bigotry based on differing religions and looking different. This is a tribute to the hospitality of the people of Pakistan; making foreigners feel welcome.

Interestingly, the majority of foreigners who have made Pakistan their home are women who have married Pakistanis. Some have lived here 30 or 40 years and are truly integrated, raising their families in a multi-cultural household, working and mingling as locals. Although few statistics are publicly available, indications are that there are few foreign men who are settling here. That may change as new economic opportunities attract investors.

Again, there are no available statistics, but research indicates that dedication to education, and helping the poor is where we continue to find foreigners who have

dedicated most of their adult lives to Pakistan. Education is a key to the nation's success and good schools providing quality education are vital. Irish Nuns and Brothers feature in many stories. Sister Berchman of the Convent of Jesus and Mary and the Mill House Brothers of Burn Hall have been discussed in previous stories. There is another. The Presentation Sisters, officially the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, are a religious institute of Roman Catholic women founded in Cork, Ireland, by Honora "Nano" Nagle in 1775 when Ireland's Education Act 1695 precluded the less advantaged from education.

The Presentation Sisters' mission is to help the poor and needy around the world. Historically, the Sisters focused their energies on creating and staffing schools that would educate young people, especially young women. Most of these schools are still in operation and can be found across the globe including in Pakistan.



On September 8, 1895, the first Presentation Convent School was opened in the Punjab region of British India by three Irish religious sisters. Originally the schools were mainly for the families of British and Irish families stationed in India. After Partition the Presentation Sisters stayed in Pakistan and continued to run their schools and educate children of all faiths. Today in Pakistan there are many Presentation schools catering for the educational needs of thousands of children in Urdu-and English-medium schools. There are Presentation Convent schools in Rawalpindi, Murree, Peshawar, Jhelum, Sargodha, Khushab, Risalpur, Mingora in Swat, Hassanabdul/Wah, and in Tando Allah Yar, Khipro and Tando Adam in Sindh.

Although mostly staffed these days by local nuns and other teachers, there are still Irish nuns from the Presentation order who have been here for decades like Sister Eilish Heaney from the Convent in Murree, and Sister Bridie Walsh (who originally came from

IN PAKISTAN, FOREIGNERS RARELY, IF EVER, ENCOUNTER RACISM AND BIGOTRY BASED ON DIFFERENCING RELIGIONS AND LOOKING DIFFERENT. THIS IS A TRIBUTE TO THE HOSPITALITY OF THE PEOPLE OF PAKISTAN; MAKING FOREIGNERS FEEL WELCOME

Cork, the home of the Presentation Sisters) from Rawalpindi. Both are now in their 80's and have served the people of all faiths of Pakistan for many decades with love and dedication to provide quality education for the nation's children, including some of the most disadvantaged, to give them the best chance in life. The Sisters also raise money from donors in Ireland to support vulnerable women in their communities—widows, deserted wives, and those whose husbands are suffering from illnesses like cancer—helping to ease their hardship and improve their lives.

Education continues to attract foreigners who come to work in the international schools like Beaconhouse, the International School and others and some stay for years. The Langlands School and College, an outstanding educational facility in Chitral, continues to be led by a foreigner as it has from the very beginning. Ms. Carey Scofield, OBE, from the United Kingdom (UK), took over the role of Principal in 2013 and taken the not-for-profit school to new levels of academic excellence and in professional governance.

In her message introducing the school on their website, Principal Schofield says, "*The Langlands School and College provides an ordered and disciplined environment where our values of honesty, hard work, gentleness, service to others and courage—physical and intellectual—can flourish. We value the life of the mind and we encourage the young people in our care to enjoy learning for its own sake and to pursue truth always. We are ambitious for our pupils. Expecting all of them to give of their very best in all that they do. Want to give the strong plenty to yearn for and the weaker nothing to run from. Our pupils are encouraged to be tolerant of the ways of other people and yet aware of their own shortcomings. We are fortunate to have outstanding teachers who have proved themselves willing to give generously of their time and energy for the sake of the pupils. We are proud that our teachers lead by example, demonstrating in their own lives the values that the school upholds.*" Inspirational words indeed.

So, what is it really like for a foreigner to live in Pakistan? My own experience has always been positive. Life is mostly 'normal'—living in the capital,

taking on consultancies and advisory work, primarily in various aspects of Disaster Management, supporting projects that benefit the less fortunate, and traveling across the country to enjoy its remarkable scenery. Most foreigners who have settled here have worked like locals or participated in activities that benefit the poor, working alongside local staff.

After living here for many years, the question I am still most often asked is, "Why on earth would you choose to live in Pakistan?" Surprisingly, it is Pakistanis who are curious about this rather than foreign friends. My answer is simple: "The people, their hospitality, and the diverse beauty of the country". Questioning other foreigners here on this topic brings the same answer. Hospitality! People are genuinely curious about why shift from the developed world to a developing country but there is much to offer and make one feel at home. There is a tendency all over the world to think the grass is greener elsewhere but generally, it's not. Live in a place where you feel happy and welcome and also earn a living is the recipe for a good life. But it takes hard work and patience. I hope Pakistanis who want to leave change their minds and see the potential at home if we all work hard together. The country has progressed significantly since foreigners starting heading to a life in a newly-founded country post 1947 and the scope of activities that new arrivals and locals can embrace has expanded significantly.

- International experts, educators, and researchers contribute to education, healthcare, and training programs. They enhance local expertise and introduce innovative solutions to challenges, working alongside Pakistani colleagues.
- Tourists help sustain local economies in scenic regions across the country. Their visits not only support businesses but also promote Pakistan's image globally. There is also a growing number of international investors in the tourism industry and infrastructure.
- Foreigners living or working in Pakistan help foster understanding and exchange of traditions, art, and cuisine, enriching the cultural fabric of the nation.
- International organizations and expatriates provide aid during natural disasters and support development projects, especially in rural or underserved areas.

It is worth remembering though that the foreigners contribute to but do not replace the impressive work being done by Pakistanis in these and other sectors to build the socioeconomic prosperity of the country.

Pakistan's current foreign community can be divided into two groups; the long-term 'settlers' who

have been here for more than, say, ten years or more, and those on career postings for several years working in embassies as diplomats, or for multi-lateral institutions, the United Nations, academic institutions, and the corporate world. Most love their time here and take every opportunity to travel within the country during their free time. This is great for Pakistan's emerging tourism industry.

Their official and non-official contributions are important and valuable for the economy. Their contributions can be viewed through various lenses particularly foreign aid and development funding from bilateral and multilateral donors. This runs into billions of dollars in grants and loans though foreign aid is reducing substantially, particularly in recent times due to the huge impact of some donor countries cutting off aid. And then there is the amount of foreign currency the international staffers expend while assigned in the country for rent, utilities, household staff and drivers, social activities like dining out, hosting dinners and events, travel, shopping and other living expenses. This is substantial and has a trickle-down effect.

With foreign aid funding evaporating, Pakistan needs to increase foreign investment in large and small projects. Foreign companies and individual investors bring capital, create jobs and boost industries like energy, technology, and infrastructure. Initiatives like the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have transformed the landscape with new projects, opportunities, and a review of the regulatory environment. However, it is not only large foreign investors who are critical to economic development—SMEs and entrepreneurs who recognize the potential for growth in niche sectors also play a vital role.

I spoke with one of Pakistan's leading foreign-born entrepreneurs, Nicole Waheed—a Polish-born Australian who trained as a corporate lawyer in Australia and worked at top international law firms there and in London. She is a prime example of a foreign entrepreneur who has made Pakistan her home. In a complete shift from the legal profession, she has built an impressive chain of food and hospitality businesses in Pakistan. After meeting and marrying a Pakistani from a well-respected family, she made the life-changing decision to leave behind a promising legal career at a top London firm and move to Lahore with her new husband.

Not one to sit idly at home after such a hectic career, she discussed a proposal with her new family to convert an existing building in the busy Blue Area in the heart of Islamabad, to a world-class European style

bakery and café and renovate and reimagine the upper floor into a 20-room modern boutique hotel. She and her husband took on the construction management themselves; not an easy task as anyone who has ever built a house or commercial building knows only too well. In parallel with the construction work, she set about finding European bakers and local café staff and to train them in high-quality food preparation and service, and a full range of hospitality staff for the hotel.



In 2016, the first Loafology Bakery and Café opened and became an instant hit with both locals and the international community. A second, smaller outlet soon followed in the Diplomatic Enclave. Meanwhile, work on the boutique hotel continued, and it opened in 2021. Since then, three more Loafology cafés have launched—one in F-11 in Islamabad and two in Lahore. A Pan-Asian restaurant, Sesame & Soy, located beneath Loafology and the 108 Hotel in Blue Area, has also been integrated into the hospitality group.

Many people assume that the hospitality business is easy to succeed in due to its low barriers to entry. However, they often overlook the long working hours, operational complexities of dealing with artisanal food (with more than 80 percent of food orders customized to customer preferences), capital requirements, and the margin challenges associated with this business model.

Despite the challenges, Nicole continues to see opportunities to introduce new food products to the local market, combining local produce with Western techniques. More recently, she and her husband partnered with a French cheesemaker to establish Himalayan Gourmet Cheese and enlisted European consultants to develop a new line of smoked meat products. Each business not only creates opportunities for local suppliers but also generates jobs and provides skills training for Pakistanis, enabling them to earn a stable income and support their families.

A passionate advocate for the protection of Pakistan's wildlife and the environment, along with several friends, she has started a not-for-profit organisation to raise awareness and provide solutions for the needs of injured wildlife and to advocate for

sanctuaries. She said, “This gives us another opportunity to make a difference to our local community by sharing our international experience and knowledge. It’s building connections like these that is energising and inspiring.”

I asked Nicole whether she finds life in Pakistan vastly different from living in Australia or the UK. She said, “There are similarities since I live in urban centers, but social norms are more conservative, particularly in terms of clothing. People also have strong family connections, which often translate into a sense of collective responsibility. A good example of this is when parents request to meet us and our managers before agreeing to let their adult children work with us!”



And what's my own story? Readers of *Hilal* (for which I have written regularly for over 12 years) will be familiar with some of it—my work and my background. But for those who aren't, I first landed in Pakistan in 2003. I arrived in the early hours of a steamy, hot morning at the old Islamabad Airport. I was traveling alone because no one wanted to join me, believing Pakistan was too dangerous and that it was madness to visit. The travel warnings were alarming, and friends questioned the wisdom of my trip. But they needn't have worried, and I certainly wasn't.

During my two-week stay, I quickly realized that the country I was experiencing and the warm,

welcoming people I was meeting did not match the perceptions held in the West. I had such an enjoyable time that I was eager to return when the opportunity arose just three months later. That visit marked the beginning of a deep and abiding fondness for the country and its people. I continued visiting regularly until eventually making Pakistan my home in 2010.

We can't deny that Pakistan has had more than its share of problems in the past. But then again, what country hasn't? During my time here, the country has endured some of the worst disasters in history—political upheaval, terrorist attacks, the impact of conflict, sectarian violence, an energy crisis, crushing poverty, food insecurity, COVID-19, and a litany of other challenges. Yet, we have come through them.

Despite these difficulties—which cannot be ignored but can be overcome—I choose to focus on the positives, and there are many. It is these that I write about in these pages, drawing from both my professional and personal experiences. I have met wonderful people in cities, towns, and villages and have been deeply touched by their generous hospitality and inclusiveness.

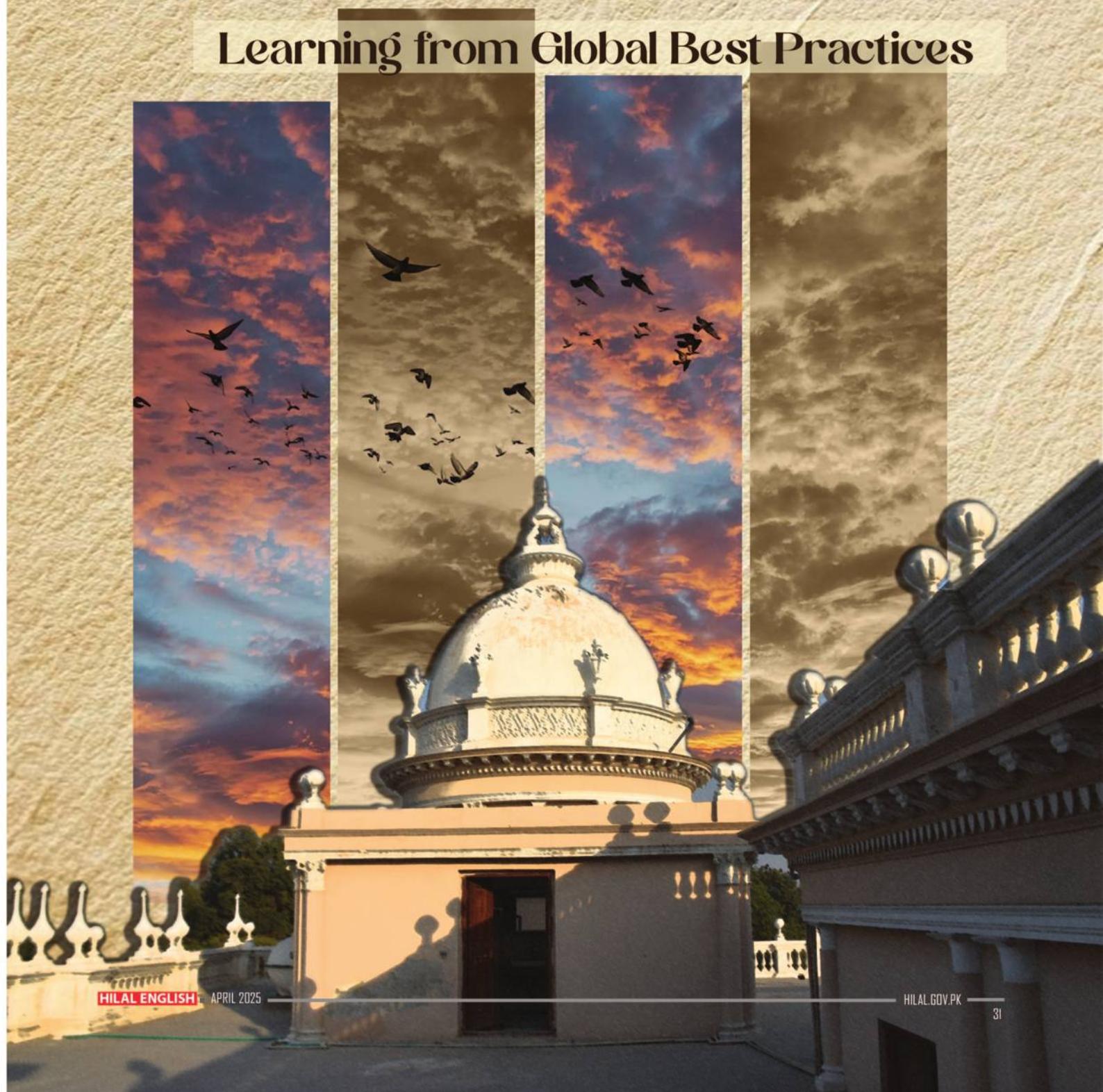
My work and love for travel have taken me across this spectacular country, including the breathtakingly beautiful Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), the Tribal Areas, all the provinces, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), where I have researched stories on people, diverse cultures, stunning landscapes, and Pakistan's rich history.

I've worked on some of the most challenging disasters in the country's history alongside capable and committed Pakistanis, and been humbled by the courage and resilience of people facing the most challenging of circumstances. I've been inspired by the talent and potential of young Pakistanis who are a joy to work with. And I've also had so many funny and memorable times and made a large circle of friends who so frequently overwhelm me with their kindness and generosity of spirit. Living in Pakistan does not seem at all an odd choice and I intend to stay. ■

The writer is an Australian Disaster Management and Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Advisor currently residing in Islamabad. She consults for the government and United Nations agencies and has previously worked with the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).
E-mail: Jennifer.mckay@gmail.com

PRESERVING PAKISTAN'S NEGLECTED HISTORICAL SITES

Learning from Global Best Practices



PAKISTAN'S HERITAGE IS A MOSAIC OF CIVILIZATIONS, EACH LAYER TELLING A STORY OF CONQUEST, FAITH, AND RESILIENCE—YET TIME AND NEGLECT THREATEN TO ERASE THESE NARRATIVES FOREVER.



Syed Abdullah Anwer

There may be no country on earth that rivals Pakistan in its sheer diversity, uniqueness, and the magnitude of its historical heritage sites scattered across its land. The country boasts exquisite examples of architecture, grandeur, and opulence, ranging from the early traces of human civilization in Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa, and Mehrgarh to the Gandhara and Buddhist civilizations that flourished into the Kushan Empire, leading to the Hindu Shahi period. This rich historical trajectory ultimately culminated in the firm establishment of Islamic rule in the region following the extraordinary conquests of Al-Muhallab ibn Abi Sufra in 664 AD and later by Muhammad bin Qasim in 711 AD under the Umayyad Caliphate.

In light of this intricate tapestry of civilizations and empires, Pakistan is also home to several United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage sites, including the Lahore Fort Complex, Rohtas Fort, the Takht-i-Bahi Buddhist Monastery, the ancient city of Mohenjo-Daro, the ruins of Taxila, and the Makli Necropolis.

Having provided this glimpse into the rich cultural and architectural treasure trove of our country, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasize the urgent need for the adequate and sustainable preservation of Pakistan's heritage sites. This effort should be complemented by making these sites both accessible and financially viable through the implementation of modern best practices and global standards in the tourism industry. Above all, I will strive to introduce you to the uncharted and unexplored yet equally fascinating historical gems scattered across Pakistan.

Global Best Practices for Preserving and Promoting Heritage Sites

Notwithstanding numerous challenges, emerging nations like Pakistan have the potential to achieve social and economic progress while simultaneously

enhancing their regional and cultural tourism. The delicate balance between sustainable tourism, historical conservation, and the management of heritage sites is crucial to ensuring their long-term viability and profitability. Effective collaboration among stakeholders is essential, emphasizing responsible travel practices, cultural awareness, and community empowerment. While sustainable tourism offers opportunities for equitable growth, challenges such as unequal benefit distribution and environmental degradation demand targeted solutions. Addressing these issues requires the implementation of fair trade practices, support for local enterprises, and the enforcement of sustainable policies. The historical separation of sustainable planning and heritage conservation calls for integrated policies and objectives. Bridging these domains is essential for a cohesive strategy that harmonizes historical preservation with sustainable urban development. Certain authors, however, recognize these issues while underscoring the accountability of the conservation sector.¹

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT ARE CRUCIAL FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGITIMACY OF TOURISM AT A CULTURAL SITE. THEY CAN GUARANTEE THAT THE LOCAL POPULACE HAS A VOICE AND AN INVESTMENT IN THE DECISION-MAKING AND MANAGEMENT OF THE PROPERTY AND ITS TOURISM ENDEAVOURS.

Therefore, to ensure that a long-term durable balance is achieved between the sustainability and profitability of heritage sites in Pakistan, the following best practices must be followed and implemented at the federal and provincial legislative juncture²:

- Evaluating the Effects of Tourism Before Developing or Expanding Tourism Activities**



ISLAMABAD'S HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGY MUST BE FOUNDED ON SUSTAINABLE AND COMMUNITY-ORIENTED PRINCIPLES FOR ENDURING SUCCESS. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING ALLEVIATING VEHICULAR CONGESTION IN HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND ADVOCATING FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES, WILL PRESERVE THE CITY'S NATURAL ALLURE.

at a Heritage Site. Before initiating the development or expansion of tourism activities at a heritage site, it is crucial to assess their potential impact on the site and its surroundings. This evaluation may involve conducting research, surveys, audits, or consultations with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, experts, authorities, and tourists. The assessment should encompass the environmental, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of tourism, as well as the site's carrying capacity and vulnerability. Furthermore, it should identify opportunities and challenges for tourism development and provide recommendations to mitigate adverse effects while maximizing positive outcomes.

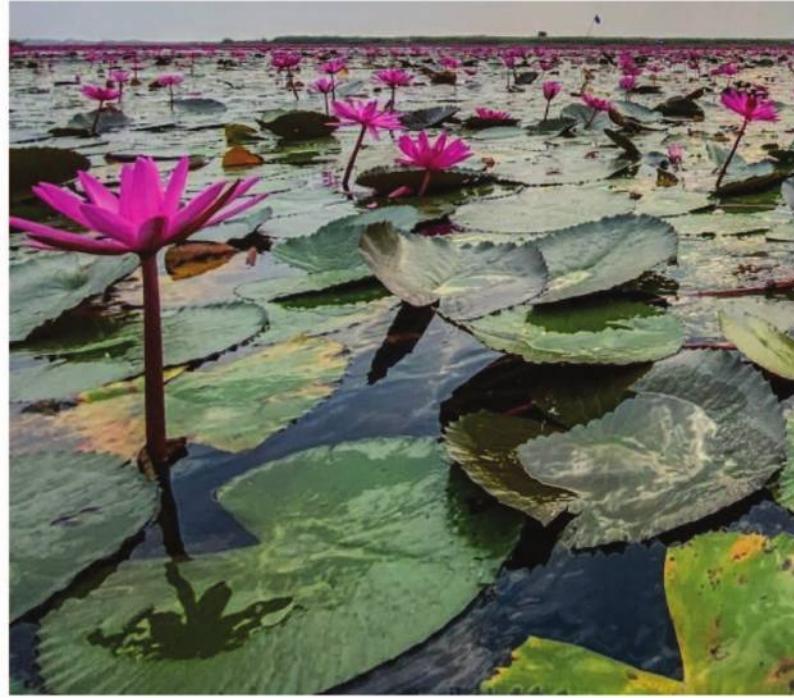
Formulate a Management Strategy. A management plan is a document that outlines the vision, objectives, strategies, and activities for conserving and enhancing a heritage site. It should

be based on impact assessment findings and the principles of responsible tourism. A management plan must be participatory, involving and consulting all stakeholders with an interest or responsibility in the site. It should be regularly reviewed, evaluated, and updated to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Additionally, it must align with national and international policies and standards for heritage conservation and tourism development.

Providing a Narrative and Employing Marketing and Exhibition Strategies to Promote a Heritage Site to Potential Visitors³. Interpretation and presentation are the means through which a heritage site communicates its values, meanings, and narratives to visitors and the public. These methods may include signage, guided tours, brochures, audiovisual materials, exhibitions, videography, documentaries, or events. Effective interpretation and presentation should be accurate, informative, engaging, and respectful of the site's diversity and authenticity. They should aim to enhance understanding and appreciation of heritage while encouraging responsible behavior and meaningful engagement among visitors. Additionally, they must incorporate the perspectives and voices of local communities and historical custodians, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among the locals.⁴

Encouraging Community Engagement and Participation. Community engagement and empowerment are crucial for the sustainability and legitimacy of tourism at a cultural site. They can guarantee that the local populace has a voice and an investment in the decision-making and management of the property and its tourism endeavours. They can cultivate a sense of ownership and pride among the local populace, alongside fostering respect and hospitality among visitors. Community engagement and empowerment can yield social and economic advantages for residents, including employment opportunities, increased income, educational advancement, and capacity development. Local engagement and empowerment can be realized through diverse methods, including consultation, collaboration, training, or co-creation.

Promoting Sustainable and Ethical Standards. Eco-friendly and ethical activities reduce tourism's environmental and social effects on the cultural site and its vicinity. They may encompass diverse measures and initiatives, including waste reduction, decreased water and energy usage, utilization of renewable or low-carbon energy sources, endorsement of sustainable



transportation and lodging alternatives, support for local goods and services, adherence to human rights and cultural diversity, or contributions to conservation or community projects. Sustainable and ethical practices can improve the quality and reputation of the tourism product, enhancing visitor satisfaction and loyalty. Sustainable and ethical practices can motivate other tourist companies and destinations to adopt similar approaches.

Transforming Islamabad into a Heritage Tourism Hub: Adapting the Istanbul Model⁵

Istanbul's heritage tourism model seamlessly integrates cultural experiences, historical preservation, and modern tourism infrastructure. Implementing a similar approach in Islamabad requires adapting to the city's unique cultural, historical, and geographical context. The following steps outline the execution process:



Figure 1: Mai Qamro Masjid

- **Identification and Preservation of Heritage Sites.** The first step in establishing a heritage tourism framework in Islamabad is identifying and conserving key historical and cultural landmarks. These include:
 - Lotus Lake Mosque/Jamia Masjid Rajgan,

- Village Parian
- Mai Qamro Masjid
- Rawat Fort
- Pharwala Fort
- Sarai Kharbooz
- Kuri Baradari
- Mughal Gardens (located in Wah, just outside Islamabad's territory)



Figure 2: Rawat Fort

Effective restoration and conservation efforts are crucial to maintaining the authenticity of these sites while enhancing their appeal to tourists. Additionally, pursuing UNESCO designation for historically significant monuments could elevate their global recognition and attract international visitors.

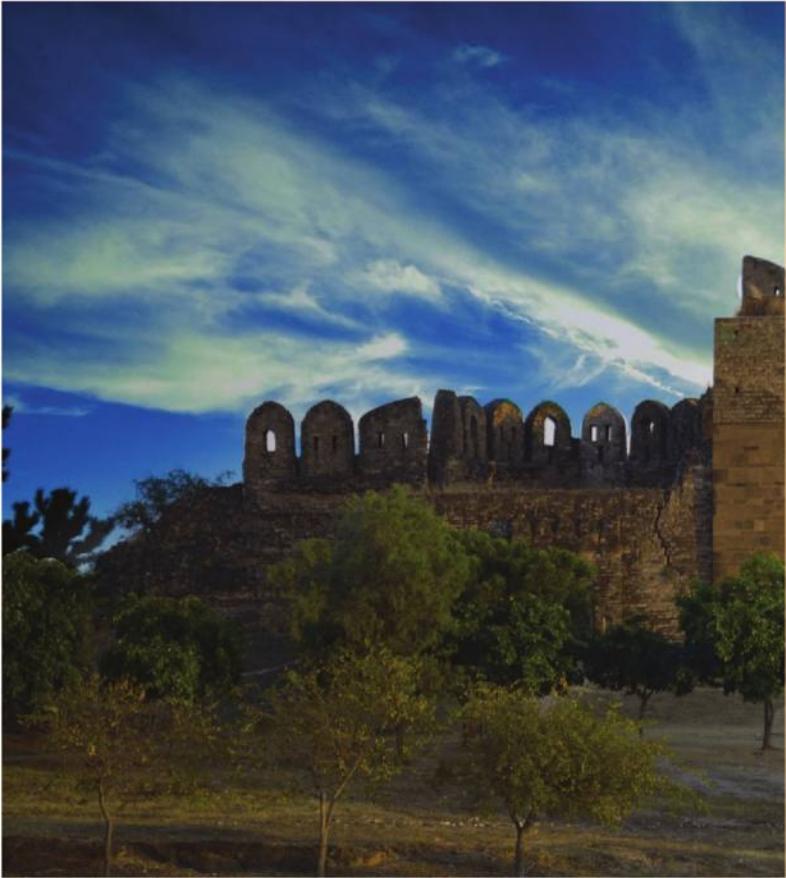


Figure 3: Pharwala Fort

- **Infrastructure Advancement.** A well-developed infrastructure is crucial for a thriving historical tourism industry. Establishing dedicated heritage walking pathways, hiking trails, and roads connecting significant historical sites can encourage pedestrian exploration, similar to the Istanbul model.

Following this approach, a network of roads and hiking trails can be developed from Shah Allah Ditta through the Margalla Hills, linking to the Piplan and Jaulian Buddhist Stupa and Monastery sites near the Taxila Museum and ruins. Notably, this tourist trail, following ancient routes, would also connect various lesser-known heritage sites in Islamabad, including:

- Kentla Baoli-Sher Shah Suri Stepwall
- Ban Faqiran Masjid and Ban Faqiran Buddhist Stupa Remains
- Giri Fort and Giri Buddhist Remains
- Emperor Ghauri Era Giri Masjid



- The Mohra Muradu Buddhist Stupa and Remains (concluding at the Indo-Greek Sirkap City and Jain Temple remains in Taxila)

If properly developed, this trail could encapsulate the rich and diverse history and cultural experiences that Islamabad has to offer to tourists from around the world.



Figure 4: Giri Stupa and Monastery Remains

Cultural Tourism and Experiences. Cultural tourism is a vital component of historical tourism, allowing visitors to engage deeply with a location's traditions and lifestyle. Islamabad can host cultural events featuring folk music, traditional crafts, and culinary fairs to highlight Pakistan's rich heritage. Gastronomy tourism can be enhanced by developing food streets or organizing culinary festivals showcasing local cuisine. Additionally, expanding the city's museum network with thematic exhibitions on the Mughal

era, Gandhara civilization, and contemporary history would offer valuable educational experiences for tourists. Improving public transportation with tourist-friendly shuttle buses or trams could enhance accessibility. Moreover, integrating smart signage, QR codes, and digital tour guides using AR/VR technology would enrich visitor engagement and provide interactive narratives about Islamabad's extensive history.

Promotion and Marketing. An effective branding and marketing approach is essential to establish Islamabad as a heritage tourism destination. Like Istanbul, which promotes itself as a metropolis connecting the East and West, Islamabad may highlight its blend of modernity and diverse cultural and historical significance. Digital advertisements, partnerships with travel influencers, and virtual tours can enhance visibility and draw tourists. Moreover, collaborations with global travel agencies and airlines might facilitate the provision of heritage-themed trip packages, enhancing the influx of domestic and international tourists.



Figure 5: Ban Faqiran Buddhist Stupa Remains



Figure 6: Kentha Baoli-Sher Shah Suri Stepwall

Sustainable and Community-Oriented Tourism. Islamabad's heritage tourism strategy must be founded on sustainable and community-oriented principles for enduring success. Environmental activities, including alleviating vehicular congestion in historic districts and advocating for sustainable tourism practices, will preserve the city's natural allure. Local communities must engage actively, with artists, historians, and tour guides assuming a

pivotal role in crafting authentic experiences. Moreover, public-private partnerships can stimulate investments that foster historic tourist development while guaranteeing economic advantages for local enterprises and inhabitants.



Figure 7: Sadiq Garh Palace

Bahawalpur's Heritage Hotel Model: Revitalizing Royal Legacy for Tourism

The successful transformation of historic palaces, forts, and havelis into luxury accommodations has demonstrated the potential of heritage tourism worldwide. Bahawalpur, with its rich royal heritage and stunning architectural landmarks, is well-suited to adopt this model. The implementation strategy should include:

The heritage hotel model has successfully transformed historic palaces, forts, and havelis into luxurious accommodations, blending royal legacy with modern tourism. Bahawalpur, with its rich regal heritage and magnificent architectural landmarks, is well-positioned to adopt this approach. The implementation strategy should include:

- **Identification and Restoration of Heritage Properties.** Bahawalpur houses remarkable ancient palaces, including:
 - Noor Mahal
 - Darbar Mahal
 - Sadiq Garh Palace
 - Gulzar Mahal
 - Nishat Mahal
 - Farukh Mahal

These palaces and havelis can be restored and transformed into luxury heritage hotels, preserving their architectural authenticity while upgrading facilities to meet high-end hospitality standards. Support from the government, private investment, and partnerships with renowned hotel brands can facilitate this transition.

- **Infrastructure Advancement for High-End Tourism.** Bahawalpur must improve its supporting infrastructure to attract affluent tourists, including upgraded roads, airports, and premium transit services. Heritage hotels should



Figure 8: Darbar Mahal

offer top-tier amenities such as gourmet dining, spa services, and curated historical tours to enhance the guest experience. Additionally, integrating environmentally sustainable practices, such as solar energy, rainwater harvesting, and efficient waste management, would further elevate the appeal of these establishments.

- **Advancing Cultural and Experiential Tourism.** A defining feature of heritage hotels is their ability to offer authentic cultural experiences. In Bahawalpur, these hotels can provide guests with traditional royal experiences, including live folk music performances, camel safaris, artisan workshops, and authentic Bahawalpuri cuisine. Curating themed events, such as royal dinners and historical reenactments, can further enhance their appeal to travelers seeking unique and immersive experiences.



Figure 9: Farukh Mahal

- **Branding and Global Marketing.** To ensure the success of this model, Bahawalpur's heritage hotels must be marketed effectively to both domestic and international tourists. Digital campaigns, partnerships with luxury travel influencers, and collaborations with global tourism platforms can enhance visibility. Heritage tourism packages can be developed, allowing visitors to explore various historical sites while staying in opulent accommodations. Converting heritage buildings into hotels requires strong public-private partnerships. To encourage investment, the government can offer incentives such as tax benefits, low-interest rehabilitation

loans, and heritage tourism initiatives. Partnering with esteemed hospitality brands or local boutique chains can further ensure high-quality service while preserving historical authenticity.



Figure 10: Muhammad Bin Qasim Mosque, Aror, Sukkur

EU's "Be.CULTOUR" Project: Revitalizing Cultural and Peripheral Destinations

The European Union's "Be.CULTOUR" project focuses on remote, peripheral, and deindustrialized areas, cultural ecosystems, and over-exploited destinations.⁶

This methodology aims to transform cultural tourism through a circular economic framework. Circular tourism seeks to reduce environmental impact while enhancing overall sustainability by emphasizing waste minimization, resource conservation, sustainable transportation, and the promotion of local products.

The Be.CULTOUR project has brought together a consortium of innovators, including public institutions, civil society organizations, and enterprises, to collaboratively develop strategies, tools, and solutions for integrating a human-centered circular economy into cultural tourism. The initiative aims to restore and enhance cultural heritage, empower local communities by creating sustainable employment, and strengthen entrepreneurial capabilities.



Figure 11: Jamia Masjid and Fort Complex, Bhambore

Examples of remote, rural, and lesser-known destinations where this model could be successfully implemented include:

- Muhammad Bin Qasim Mosque, Aror, Sukkur
- Jamia Masjid and Fort Complex Bhambore, Thatta
- Mahmud Ghaznavi Mosque, Swat

- Masjid Wali Muhammad, Multan

- Shahi Eid Gah Masjid, Multan

- Lodhi-Era Mosque, Gujranwala

Similarly, Balochistan Province is home to unique and uncharted heritage sites, including:

- Three Omani Sultanate Era Forts in Gwadar

- Tomb of Muhammad Bin Haroon, Bela

- Moti Gohram Tomb, Gandava, Jhal Magsi

- Tomb of Iltaz Khan

- Bhag Nari Tomb

- Jam of Lasbela Graveyard

- Bhawani Sarai Graveyard

- Graves of Muhammad Bin Qasim's Soldiers, Hangol



Figure 12: Shahi Eid Gah Masjid, Multan



Figure 13: Omani Sultanate Era Fort, Gwadar

Preserving Pakistan's historical sites is not just about safeguarding the past; it is about unlocking the immense cultural, social, and economic potential these landmarks hold for the future. By adopting global best practices, Pakistan can revitalize its neglected heritage, transforming it into thriving centers of sustainable tourism that contribute to national development while preserving and strengthening its historical and national identity.

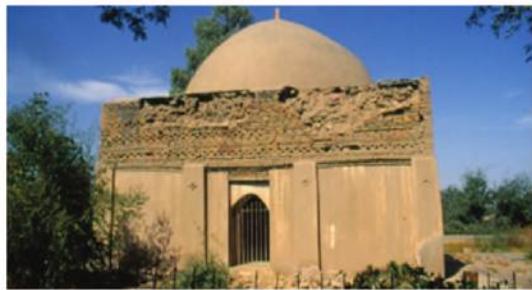


Figure 14: Tomb of Muhammad Bin Haroon



Figure 15: Moti Gohram Tomb

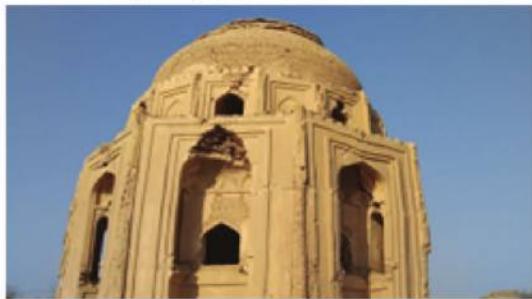


Figure 16: Bhag Nari Tomb

A well-balanced approach—incorporating impact assessments, strategic management, compelling storytelling, community engagement, and eco-friendly practices—is essential to achieving this vision. Implementing these measures requires collaboration at multiple levels: government institutions must establish clear policies, private stakeholders should invest in responsible tourism, and local communities must be empowered to take ownership of their heritage.

By integrating conservation efforts with sustainable urban development and ethical tourism models, Pakistan can ensure that its historical sites not only endure but also inspire future generations. If executed effectively, these initiatives will elevate Pakistan's global cultural standing and transform its unparalleled historical wealth into a key driver of economic growth and national pride. ■

The writer is an Advocate of the High Court, holding an LL.M. in International and Maritime Law. He is currently employed at the Global 100 TAHOTA Law Firm in China.
E-mail: syedabdullahanweradv@gmail.com

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HERITAGE



HERITAGE BEYOND STONE

The Living Traditions of Pakistan

WHILE THE WORLD MARVELS AT PAKISTAN'S HISTORICAL LANDMARKS, ITS TRUE LEGACY UNFOLDS IN THE UNRECORDED BALLADS OF NOMADIC SINGERS, THE FADING ART OF CALLIGRAPHY, AND THE RHYTHMIC CLAPS OF SUFI QAWWALI PERFORMANCES THAT ECHO THROUGH CENTURIES OF DEVOTION AND RESILIENCE.



Tasneem Shafiq

Pakistan's cultural legacy is often celebrated through its majestic historical monuments—Mohenjo-Daro's ancient ruins, Lahore Fort's grandeur, and the intricate Mughal-era mosques. Yet, beyond these physical landmarks lies an equally profound and dynamic heritage: the intangible cultural traditions that breathe life into the nation's identity. From storytelling to folk music, indigenous craftsmanship, and spiritual festivals, Pakistan's living heritage represents a vibrant tapestry of cultural continuity. These traditions passed down through generations, not only preserve the past but also shape contemporary cultural expressions. This article explores Pakistan's rich intangible cultural heritage, emphasizing its significance in shaping national identity and preserving these traditions for future generations.

PAKISTAN'S ORAL STORYTELLING TRADITIONS, SUCH AS DASTANGOI (EPIC NARRATION), HAVE LONG SERVED AS VESSELS OF HISTORY, FOLKLORE, AND MORAL WISDOM.

Storytelling and Oral Traditions: Echoes of the Past

- **Dastangoi and Sufi Narratives.** Pakistan's oral storytelling traditions, such as Dastangoi (epic narration), have long served as vessels of history, folklore, and moral wisdom. This centuries-old art form, once prevalent in the Mughal courts, continues to captivate audiences through modern adaptations and performances. Alongside Dastangoi, Sufi narratives—often shared in poetry and prose—convey spiritual and philosophical lessons that resonate across generations.

▪ **Folktales of Regional Legends.** Legends like Heer Ranjha, Sassui Punnhun, and Umer Marvi embody the collective consciousness of various regions. Adam Khan Durkhanai is considered a timeless Pashtun love story preserved through oral tradition and written accounts. These folktales, rooted in themes of love, sacrifice, and destiny, have been preserved through oral transmission, theatrical performances, and literary adaptations. They reflect the values and struggles of different communities, ensuring that indigenous wisdom remains relevant. Moreover, these stories hold spiritual significance.¹

Folklore serves as a valuable source for compiling the earliest written records on the history of Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Balochistan, offering deeper insights into the communities of these regions. It reflects qualities such as loyalty, patriotism, endurance, fearlessness, steadfastness, and intellect, embodying the time's social, cultural, and moral values. These narratives also provide a glimpse into the people's psychology during that era. For instance, the story of Marui conveys a powerful message of independence and patriotism, reminding us of the significance of these sentiments in times of national adversity. As historical sources, folklore helps us understand the social structures of past societies, preserving their traditions and collective consciousness.

▪ **Indigenous Languages as Cultural Vessels.** The survival of oral traditions is deeply intertwined with language preservation. Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Punjabi, and Brahvi, among other indigenous languages, serve as repositories of historical narratives and cultural wisdom. The spoken word remains essential in safeguarding

identity, particularly for communities striving to preserve their linguistic heritage.²

Ethnologue, a comprehensive reference to global languages, reports that 77 languages are spoken in Pakistan. This database is managed by Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, an international organization specializing in linguistic research. Hindko is widely spoken in Peshawar, Kohat, and the Hazara division, particularly in the districts of Abbottabad and Mansehra, where it is the dominant language. It is also the second most spoken language in KP. Meanwhile, Gujar (or Gojri) is the primary language of the Gujar communities residing in northern and southern Pakistan.

- **Poetry as a Living Legacy.** Poetry in Pakistan is more than mere literary expression—it is a living tradition that continues to shape cultural discourse. Sufi poets such as Bulleh Shah, Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, and Khushal Khan Khattak have left poetic legacies that transcend time and geography. Their verses, often performed through music, reinforce themes of divine love, humanism, and social justice, influencing contemporary artists and audiences.

Sarmast, a polyglot poet, had mastery over multiple languages, including Sindhi, Punjabi, Seraiki, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. His poetry was rich with visaal (union) and birha (separation) themes and deeply rooted in Sindhi metaphors and similes. This linguistic diversity reflects the fluidity of languages in the region, where, until the 1860s, no specific religious community exclusively claimed ownership of any language. Over time, however, linguistic identity became intertwined with cultural and religious distinctions, shaping Pakistan's evolving poetry heritage.³

Folk Music: The Soul of Pakistan's Cultural Identity

- **Regional Melodies and Instruments.** Pakistan's diverse folk music is distinguished by its unique regional sounds and instruments. The Rabab (Pashto), Alghoza (Sindhi), Sarangi (Punjabi), and Boreendo (Balochistan) each contribute to the country's distinctive auditory heritage. Handcrafted using traditional methods, these instruments produce melodies that evoke emotions tied to folklore, nature, and spirituality.
- **Sufi Qawwalis and Kafi Poetry.** Sufi music, particularly Qawwali and Kafi, has transcended regional boundaries to become a global phenomenon. Icons like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Abida Parveen have played a pivotal role in

popularizing these genres, keeping centuries-old traditions alive through mesmerizing performances. The lyrical depth of Qawwalis and Kafi compositions continues to inspire audiences with its mystical and philosophical undertones.

- **Cultural Festivals and Music Gatherings.** Festivals like the Lok Virsa Festival and Sindhi Ajrak Festival provide platforms for folk musicians to showcase their craft. These gatherings celebrate cultural diversity, bringing together artisans, musicians, and audiences in a shared appreciation of heritage. Such events also serve as crucial avenues for intergenerational transmission, ensuring that traditional music remains accessible to younger audiences.
- **Fusion of Folk with Modern Trends.** Contemporary musicians have successfully blended folk elements with modern music, making heritage relevant for younger audiences. Collaborations between folk singers and mainstream artists have introduced traditional sounds to global audiences, reinforcing that cultural preservation does not necessitate stagnation but creative evolution.

Traditional Craftsmanship: The Art of Time-Honored Skills

- **Handwoven Heritage: Ajrak, Phulkari, and Ralli.** Pakistan's indigenous textile traditions represent centuries of craftsmanship and cultural symbolism. Ajrak (Sindh), Phulkari (Punjab), and Ralli quilts (Sindh and Balochistan) are not just fabrics but storytelling canvases, showcasing regional motifs and techniques passed down through generations. Each piece carries historical significance, often linked to social rituals and identity.
- **Truck Art: A Moving Canvas of Culture.** Pakistan's truck art has become an internationally recognized symbol of cultural expression. Adorned with intricate floral patterns, poetic verses, and portraits of heroes, these moving artworks serve as mobile galleries of traditional craftsmanship. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, they reflect the fusion of folk motifs with modern artistic sensibilities.
- **Pottery and Blue Tiles of Sindh.** From the Kashigari (blue pottery) of Multan to Hala's intricate ceramics, pottery remains a vital craft reflecting artistic heritage. The elaborate tilework, particularly seen in Sindh's shrines and architectural sites, highlights the region's deep-rooted artistic traditions. These crafts continue to evolve, incorporating contemporary designs while preserving age-old techniques.

- Wood Carving and Brass Work.** Intricate wooden *jharokas* (balconies) in Punjab and handcrafted brass utensils in Peshawar exemplify Pakistan's rich artisanal traditions. These crafts, requiring immense skill and precision, remain an integral part of local heritage, with artisans striving to keep their professions alive despite industrialization's challenges.

Indigenous Rituals and Festivals: Celebrating Cultural Diversity

- Kalash Festivals (Chilam Joshi and Uchal).** The Kalash people of Chitral celebrate seasonal festivals such as Chilam Joshi and Uchal with music, dance, and rituals that reflect their unique identity. These festivals offer a glimpse into an ancient cultural heritage that remains distinct yet deeply connected to Pakistan's diverse landscape.
- Sufi Urs Celebrations.** The annual *Urs* (death anniversary) of Sufi saints, such as Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (Sehwan) and Data Darbar (Lahore), attracts thousands of devotees. These spiritual gatherings, marked by devotional music, dance, and communal prayers, reaffirm Pakistan's deeply ingrained Sufi traditions.
- Baloch Sword Dance and Pashto Attan.** Traditional dances like the Baloch Chap and Pashto Attan symbolize cultural pride and communal celebration. These expressive art forms passed down through generations, serve as a means of cultural continuity, uniting communities in rhythmic storytelling.
- Harvest Festivals.** Agrarian festivals like Basant (kite-flying festival), Shandur Polo (high-altitude polo tournament), and Lok Mela celebrate the country's rural traditions. These events provide entertainment and strengthen the connection between people and their ancestral customs.

Reviving and Preserving Living Heritage for Future Generations

- Role of Digital Media and Documentation.** With the rise of digital platforms, initiatives such as online archives, podcasts, and documentaries play a crucial role in safeguarding intangible heritage. By documenting oral traditions, folk music, and artisanal crafts, digital media ensures that cultural expressions remain accessible to

future generations.

- Integrating Cultural Heritage into Education.** Incorporating folk tales, traditional music, and indigenous crafts into educational curricula can instill cultural appreciation among younger generations. Schools and universities can play an active role in promoting heritage awareness through interactive learning experiences.
- Community-Led Preservation Efforts and Institutional Support.** Empowering local artisans, storytellers, and musicians through financial aid, tourism initiatives, and training programs is essential for cultural sustainability. Organizations like Lok Virsa, the National Institute of Folk Heritage, and UNESCO-backed initiatives play a vital role in preserving and promoting Pakistan's intangible heritage.

Pakistan's heritage is not confined to its ancient ruins or architectural marvels—it lives in the voices of its storytellers, the melodies of its musicians, the hands of its artisans, and the spirit of its people. Recognizing and promoting these living legacies is not just about preserving the past; it is about nurturing a dynamic and evolving heritage that continues to inspire, connect, and define Pakistan's future. By embracing and celebrating these traditions, we ensure that Pakistan's cultural soul survives and thrives, enriching generations with its wisdom, creativity, and resilience. ■

The writer has done MPhil in Peace and Conflict Studies from National Defense University, Islamabad.
E-mail: tasneemshafiq96@gmail.com

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Pak Tea House

A Café Frozen in Time as Lahore Moves On

PAK TEA HOUSE
SINCE 1948

FROM INK-STAINED FINGERS TO TOUCHSCREEN SCROLLS, THE WAY WE CONSUME IDEAS HAS CHANGED. BUT IN LAHORE, AN OLD CAFÉ STILL WHISPERS THE GHOSTS OF CONVERSATIONS THAT ONCE SHAPED THE FUTURE.



Maria Khalid

There was a time when Lahore breathed poetry—when words were lived, not just written; when ideas were fought for, not just exchanged. At the heart of this literary storm stood Pak Tea House, its dimly lit corners thick with cigarette smoke and the murmurs of revolution. In pre-Partition Lahore and the early years of Pakistan, it was a cornerstone of the city's intellectual and cultural landscape.

Nestled along the bustling Mall Road, it lay just beside the historic Anarkali Bazaar, where the scent of spices and the hum of traders wove together the essence of old Lahore. A stone's throw away stood the National College of Arts, a cradle of creativity where aspiring artists and architects honed their craft. Across from it, the grand façade of the Lahore Museum loomed, its red-brick structure holding within it the echoes of centuries past.

Facing the museum stood Punjab University, an institution that had shaped generations of scholars and thinkers. Just behind it, rising above the tree-lined avenues, the stately minaret of Government College commanded the skyline. This venerable institution had nurtured some of the nation's finest minds—Allama Iqbal, the philosopher-poet; Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the voice of revolution; Abdus Salam, the scientific genius who would bring home a Nobel Prize; and Chaudhry Zafarullah, the diplomat who helped shape Pakistan's foreign policy.

Winding through the narrow lanes of Anarkali, past shopkeepers calling out their wares and students

poring over secondhand books, one would find King Edward Medical College. Tucked away in the heart of the old city, it stood as a beacon of excellence, producing some of the finest physicians in the land. Together, these institutions formed a vibrant hub of intellect, art, and debate, with the Pak Tea House at its very soul—a gathering place where poets, revolutionaries, and thinkers sat shoulder to shoulder, shaping the ideas that would define a new nation.

IF WALLS COULD TALK, PAK TEA HOUSE WOULD SPEAK IN POETRY AND PROTEST, IN DEBATES THAT STRETCHED FROM DUSK TILL DAWN, IN THE LAUGHTER OF REVOLUTIONARIES AND THE SIGHS OF DREAMERS. MORE THAN A CAFÉ, IT WAS A SANCTUARY FOR INTELLECTUALS, WHERE POETS, NOVELISTS, JOURNALISTS, AND PHILOSOPHERS SHAPED PAKISTAN'S CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE.

If walls could talk, Pak Tea House would speak in poetry and protest, in debates that stretched from dusk till dawn, in the laughter of revolutionaries and the sighs of dreamers. More than a café, it was a sanctuary for intellectuals, where poets, novelists, journalists, and philosophers shaped Pakistan's cultural and political discourse.

But the echoes have faded. The age of teahouses—once synonymous with Lahore's



intellectual life—has given way to food streets and corporate cafés, where time is money and conversations must fit neatly into social media soundbites. As Intizar Hussain lamented: “Such were the devoted souls for whom ideas and ideologies meant more than worldly benefits... Now we are living in a different world. This world cannot afford to have such souls and such haunts within its fold.”

FOR DECADES, POETS LIKE FAIZ AHMED FAIZ, WRITERS LIKE SAADAT HASAN MANTO AND ISMAT CHUGHTAI, AND INTELLECTUALS FROM ACROSS IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUMS GATHERED HERE. IT WAS ONE OF THE FEW SPACES WHERE THE INTELLECTUAL LEFT AND RIGHT COULD MEET IN A BATTLE OF IDEAS, NOT FISTS.

This was a crucible of ideas—radical, beautiful, dangerous—where writers huddled at wooden tables, discussing Marxism and modernism, literature and revolution. The air, thick with cigarette smoke and ambition, carried the weight of voices that reshaped Pakistan’s intellectual landscape.

Once the beating heart of Lahore’s literary world, Pak Tea House now exists more as a relic than a revolution. The people, the urgency, and the ideas that made it possible have vanished like smoke from an extinguished cigarette. Walk past it today, and it feels like a ghost of what it once was, lost in the hurried footsteps of a city that no longer stops to listen.



Once Upon a Time in Lahore

The history of Pak Tea House is intertwined with the story of Lahore itself. Originally known as India

Tea House, it was established before Partition by two Sikh brothers who also ran the India Coffee House across the road. When the brothers migrated to Delhi in the summer of 1947, the tea house was taken over by Sirajuddin, who renamed it Pak Tea House—a name that would soon become legendary.

A. Hameed writes in ‘*Lahore Lahore Aye*’ in *Daily Times*:

“I can recall every Lahore hotel and restaurant from the early days of Pakistan. Let me begin with Pak Tea House. When I first saw it, I noticed that its sign had been crudely painted over—the word ‘India’ had been replaced with ‘Pak.’ I don’t know how Pak Tea House became the hangout of Lahore’s writers. In late 1947 or perhaps mid-1948, four brothers—Alim, Siraj, Sadiq, and Hamid—who were refugees from India, had India Tea House and Cheney’s Lunch Home allotted in their names. Sadiq received Cheney’s Lunch Home, though it was Hamid who ran it, while Siraj and Alim managed what they renamed Pak Tea House.”

Renamed Pak Tea House in 1948, it became a gathering place for the intellectual elite of the young nation—writers, poets, philosophers, and political thinkers who sought to define Pakistan’s identity in its infancy. Pak Tea House gave them a home.

The café quickly became the unofficial headquarters of the Progressive Writers’ Movement (PWM), a leftist literary collective that had been founded in British India in 1936. The café also hosted the Halqa-e-Arbab-e-Zauq, a literary circle where writers gathered to critique and discuss contemporary

Urdu literature, fostering a culture of fearless expression.

For decades, poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, writers like Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai, and intellectuals from across ideological spectrums gathered here. It was one of the few spaces where the intellectual left and right could meet in a battle of ideas, not fists. But gradually, the tides changed.

By the 1990s, the spirit of Pak Tea House was waning. The intellectual groups that once debated fiercely over Marxism and modernism morphed into closed-off cliques, disconnected from the public. The final blow came when the café shut its doors in the mid-90s, symbolizing not just the end

of a café but the end of an era.

There was a time when a writer could spend an entire evening at Pak Tea House with nothing but a

notebook and an endless cup of chai. When a single poem, recited in the right voice, could shake the walls. When the city's intellectuals did not need grand halls or glittering festivals—they needed only a table, a few chairs, and the burning desire to create.

IT IS NOT THAT TODAY'S YOUTH LACK INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY, BUT THEIR PLATFORMS HAVE SHIFTED. SOCIAL MEDIA IS THE NEW PAK TEA HOUSE, WITH DISCUSSIONS HAPPENING ON SCREENS INSTEAD OF IN CAFÉS. THE ERA OF FACE-TO-FACE LITERARY ENGAGEMENT IS FADING.

A young Faiz Ahmed Faiz might have sat in one of those chairs, scribbling verses that would one day become anthems. Saadat Hasan Manto, irreverent and sharp, might have argued over a story too bold for his time. Habib Jalib, fire in his voice, might have stood up to recite a poem that sent ripples through the room.

And when the night deepened, the conversations never truly ended—they spilled onto Mall Road, into the narrow alleys of Urdu Bazaar, carried forward in whispered discussions and passionate letters.

Step outside, and the Lahore of today looks very different from the one that birthed this iconic café.

The city has modernized at a staggering pace. Towering shopping malls, glass-fronted offices, and sprawling housing societies have replaced much of the old city's charm. Where once bicycles and tongas clattered through the streets, now SUVs and motorbikes weave through traffic jams. Lahore's famous literary scene—once centered around places like Pak Tea House—has largely moved online.

The contrast is stark: a city racing toward the future, while Pak Tea House remains an island of the past, clinging to an era when poetry and politics were inseparable.

A. Hamid reminisces in his columns that, in the years before Partition, Lahore was a city of slow afternoons and endless conversations, where poets, journalists, and intellectuals moved through its bazaars and tea houses, weaving the fabric of a cultural life that would soon be disrupted by history. The air in Shah Alami's narrow alleys carried the scent of spices and fresh produce, the streets so confined that a *tonga* could become stuck between the old buildings. Outside Lohari Gate, amid the quiet hum of daily life, a young poet with blond curls once extended his hand—a fleeting moment of literary kinship in a city on the brink of irrevocable change.

To walk through Anarkali was to witness a marketplace that was both lively and deeply familiar. A Sikh-owned sweet shop served a *lassi* that locals swore by, its thick, creamy texture a staple of the neighborhood. Nearby, the large sign of Nizam Hotel stood as a landmark, while a modest Hindu-run eatery—more of a *dhaba* than a hotel—offered wooden booths where customers could dine in relative privacy. At one of these tables sat the humorist Haji Laq Laq, a man whose sharp wit and observations would soon have a different audience in a newly drawn nation.

And then there was Pak Tea House, its name hastily repainted in the uncertain days after 1947. It became, almost by accident, the refuge of a literary class that found itself searching for permanence in an unsettled world. Here, Nasir Kazmi reminisced about the neem tree in his old courtyard in Ambala, the pigeons he had set free before leaving—only to see them return to the rooftop as he turned the street corner. Across the road, at Coffee House, journalists, politicians, and lawyers debated the headlines of the day over coffee that, to some, tasted burnt but was nevertheless essential. The conversations were quick, sharp, and often cutting—the city's future mapped out in cigarette smoke and the scribbled notes of an editor's draft.

The intellectual scene extended beyond these tea houses. Nagina Bakery was a quiet haunt for some of the city's finest minds, while Lorang's on The Mall was a picture of colonial sophistication, known for serving the best tea in town. Stiffles, once a lively bar, later gave



way to Casino and Lord's, echoing the evolving character of a city shifting in identity. In Regal Chowk, Standard—owned by a Hindu businessman everyone simply called Paul—stood as a meeting point before it, too, was lost to time.

ITS SIGNIFICANCE, HOWEVER, IS NOT FOUND IN THE CHAYE, COFFEE, OR QEHWA IT SERVES, BUT IN THE LINGERING SENSE OF HISTORY. FRAMED PORTRAITS OF POETS, INTELLECTUALS, AND WRITERS GAZE DOWN FROM THE WALLS, SILENT WITNESSES TO AN ERA THAT STILL FLICKERS TO LIFE IN THE OCCASIONAL MUSHAIRA.

Today, Lahore is no longer the city it once was. The tea houses are gone, the grand cafés replaced by offices and shopping plazas. Where Metro once hosted ballroom dances, WAPDA House now rises. The spaces where poets once debated the future over cups of mixed tea have been swallowed by new enterprises, their absence leaving a quiet void in the hearts of those who remember. The city still breathes, still pulses with life, but for those who recall its past, it is a Lahore that exists now only in memory.

A Changing City, A Dying Culture

That world is gone now.

Pak Tea House nearly vanished. By the mid-1990s, its owner, unable to sustain the business, considered selling it but was prevented by government restrictions. Parking was scarce, traffic choked the area, and eventually, the café shut its doors in 2000. With it, Lahore lost more than a tea shop—it lost the heart of its intellectual life.

This was more than the decline of a café; it was the fading of a culture. Writers who once lived by ink and inspiration turned to other pursuits. Literature, once a dynamic force, became a performance at festivals rather than a way of life. Fiction writer Intizar Hussain, reflecting in his nostalgic essay *Finding Past Again* writes:

"It was a different world when coffeehouses and tea houses flourished. They thrived alongside a vibrant restaurant culture that set The Mall apart from the city's other cultural hubs. Those who gathered there were never in a hurry. They could afford to sit for hours, debating ideas and ideologies over a single cup of tea."

This shift deepened an enduring divide. The elite now gather in Gulberg and Defense, sipping imported lattes and discussing fiction in English, while the working class meets in smoky *dhabas* over *doodh*

patti. Between them lingers the memory of places like Pak Tea House—too historic to erase, too out of sync with the present to thrive.

Once, it nurtured bold thought, much like Paris' Les Deux Magots or London's Club of Honest Whigs. But while those spaces were preserved, Pak Tea House struggled to retain its relevance. As Lahore embraces literature festivals and branded intellectualism, depth is often overshadowed by presentation. Some of the richest regional literature remains overlooked, shaped more by commercial trends than organic creative exchange.

Lahore was once the Paris of the East, where literature thrived in newspapers, magazines, and bookshops. Intellectuals debated over endless cups of tea, shaping the city's cultural landscape. Today, the bookshops on Mall Road have nearly vanished, publishing competes with digital media, and literary discussions unfold online rather than in person.

It is not that today's youth lack intellectual curiosity, but their platforms have shifted. Social media is the new Pak Tea House, with discussions happening on screens instead of in cafés. The era of face-to-face literary engagement is fading.

A City Forgets

Lahore, once a city of literature, has distanced itself from its intellectual past. Urdu Bazaar, once a publishing hub, is now dominated by textbook shops. Literary spaces have been replaced by corporate-sponsored festivals, celebrating spectacle over substance.

Where Faiz once recited poetry, Manto wrote defiant stories, and Jalib shook halls with his verses, now stand banks, auto shops, and malls. The battle is no longer between ideologies but between heritage and commercialization.

More than the absence of Pak Tea House, it is the emptiness left behind that marks this decline. Where the scent of old books once filled Urdu Bazaar, commercial billboards now dominate. Where literary giants once gathered near Nila Gumbad, auto parts now line the streets.

A. Hameed, recalling the history of Pak Tea House, spoke of a Sikh man who had once owned the café and a nearby coffee shop, returning years later to find his old home turned into something unrecognizable:

"When he asked the stranger to come in, he told him that he had come from India and this place and the Coffee House across the road used to belong to him and his brother. The Coffee House has long been gone and in its place there now stands a bank."

Revival or Disappearance?

In 2013, the government revived Pak Tea House,

acknowledging its historical significance. Its reopening brought a brief resurgence, attracting students, journalists, and writers eager to reconnect with its past.

But something was missing. Today, the café is more a cultural landmark than a literary hub, drawing visitors who come to reminisce or capture its nostalgia in photographs.

Where poets and writers once sparred over ideas, students and casual patrons now linger over tea. The charged debates that once defined the space have softened into quiet conversation—a gathering spot rather than an incubator of creativity.

Its significance, however, is not found in the *chaye*, coffee, or *qehwa* it serves, but in the lingering sense of history. Framed portraits of poets, intellectuals, and writers gaze down from the walls, silent witnesses to an era that still flickers to life in the occasional *mushaira*.

The question remains: how do you preserve a cultural institution without reducing it to a relic? Should Pak Tea House become a tourist attraction, or can it reclaim its role as a space for literature and ideas?

In a world where coffeehouses are about selfies and Wi-Fi, where poetry is performed for likes rather than revolutions, can Lahore still claim its lost intellectual depth?

Perhaps the real question is not whether Pak Tea House will survive, but whether Lahore will ever deserve it again. For many, it remains less a living institution and more a symbol of a city that no longer exists.

Will Lahore Ever Listen Again?

Pak Tea House was once the beating heart of Lahore's literary and intellectual scene, a reflection of the city itself. As Pakistan's cultural capital, Lahore has long been a cradle of art, poetry, and philosophy. Under Mughal rule, it flourished as a center of Persian and Urdu literature, its architectural marvels—Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, and Shalimar Gardens—standing as testaments to its artistic heritage.

By the 19th and early 20th centuries, Lahore had become a publishing hub, home to influential newspapers and literary journals. It was here that Allama Iqbal penned verses that envisioned Pakistan and where poets like Habib Jalib, Ahmed Faraz, and Amrita Pritam found their voices. Against this backdrop, Pak Tea House was more than just a café; it was an institution, a space where the city's intellectual and cultural pulse could be felt.

Today, amid rapid modernization, Pak Tea House stands as a relic of another time, a testament to an era

when words carried weight and ideas could shake the status quo. Its decline is not just the loss of a physical space but a fading connection to a once-thriving legacy of art and literature. Lahore's literary life was once alive in the streets, in the unfiltered conversations that flowed from one café to another. Habib Jalib was not just recited—he was lived.

Now, we sing Faiz Ahmed Faiz's revolutionary verses without embracing their call to action. We admire Manto's defiance yet hesitate to wield it. We celebrate Ismat Chughtai's feminism but soften its edges. Every era rewrites its own intellectual history, but who now carries the torches once lit by poets, thinkers, and revolutionaries

For those who still step into Pak Tea House—past its yellowed walls and black-and-white checkered floors—perhaps there is still hope. A poet's voice may yet rise, a debate may still ignite, and history may once again be brewed over a cup of chai. The café may no longer be the epicenter of Pakistan's literary movements, but as long as words hold power, its story is not over.

Once, in the warmth of Pak Tea House, these words were lived, defended, and fought for. But now, the city walks past, unaware. The teacups sit empty. The chairs gather dust. The voices that once filled the air have become whispers, too faint for Lahore to hear. ■

The writer is a member of staff.
E-mail: mareekhaled@gmail.com

DEPORTING

THE

AFGHAN

REFUGEES

Challenges and Policy Options

FOR OVER FOUR DECADES, PAKISTAN HAS SHOULDERED THE BURDEN OF HOSTING MILLIONS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES, A HUMANITARIAN EFFORT NOW STRAINED BY ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND SECURITY CHALLENGES AS UNDOCUMENTED ARRIVALS CONTINUE AMID SHIFTING REGIONAL DYNAMICS.



Ambassador Naghma A. Hashmi (R)

Following the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, Pakistan witnessed a massive influx of Afghan refugees. That was over four decades ago, and since then, Pakistan has hosted and accommodated them in every possible way. The prolonged presence of Afghan refugees, along with their continuous inflow whenever the political situation in their country changes, has had significant political, security, ethnic, economic, and social implications for Pakistan. Over the past forty years, there have been three major waves of Afghan refugees: the first following the Soviet invasion, the second after the 9/11 War on Terror (WoT), and the third after the Taliban's second takeover following the U.S. withdrawal in 2021.

Although several small groups of Afghan refugees have voluntarily repatriated to Afghanistan occasionally, new ones continue to arrive, balancing those who leave. As of now, there are still over 3.7 million Afghans in Pakistan, of whom only 1.7 million are legal, and the rest are illegal residents with no documentation. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than 300,000 Afghans again fled to Pakistan since the Taliban takeover of Kabul.

The huge problems faced by Pakistan due to the unusually large inflow of Afghan nationals continue to resonate even forty years after the traumatic events of the Soviet invasion. Unfortunately, this continuous pressure and the negative impact have become unbearable and are a major factor in the overall internal instability in the country.

Some of the major problems, among many others, are briefly outlined as follows:

- Constant friction between Afghan refugees and the Pakistani population due to land occupied by the refugees.
- Rising unemployment, as refugees—particularly unregistered and illegal ones—tend to work at much lower wages.
- Afghan traders operate businesses in various cities but do not pay taxes. For instance, many traders became billionaires in Peshawar alone yet managed to evade taxation. This has burdened local taxpayers and business owners, adversely affecting revenue collection and economic growth.
- Intense competition for limited animal grazing pastures and disputes over water supply. According to UNHCR, Afghan refugees brought 45,000 camels, 35,000 cows, 25,000 donkeys, and thousands of other livestock, with their numbers increasing over the years.
- Limited healthcare facilities, housing shortages,

and a sharp rise in property prices due to increased demand, placing unbearable pressure on schools and other academic institutions.

- The influx of unregistered arms has led to a Kalashnikov culture and easy access to automatic small arms, threatening Pakistan's internal security. This has resulted in a sharp rise in terrorism, crime rates, murders, and kidnappings for ransom due to the presence of illegal refugees.
- A direct threat to Pakistan's internal security and political stability is the growing pressure on its western borders due to ongoing violence and terrorism emanating from within Afghanistan. Pakistan has witnessed a phenomenal rise in terrorist attacks across the country, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). It is not only the frequency but also the intensity of these attacks that has become completely unacceptable. In just one week, there were 54 attacks, including the devastating assault on the Jaffar Express. Terrorists are deliberately and maliciously targeting civilians, security personnel, and armed forces. The brazen attacks on security forces in KP have shocked the entire nation. Behind these attacks are *Fitna al-Khawarij* (FAK) and other banned organizations, all of whom receive backing from both India and Afghanistan. These operations are being conducted from Afghan territory, where their leaders continue to thrive in safe havens.
- The massive influx of drugs, which has now permeated all sections of society—particularly young and vulnerable children and young adults—has become an urgent issue. Additionally, Pakistan has become a transit point for drug trafficking to the rest of the world, severely tarnishing its soft image.
- When refugees belong to the same ethnicity as the local population, they often receive sympathy and shelter due to ethnic nationalism, as seen in KP. However, if refugees come from different ethnic and linguistic groups, clashes of interest arise. In Balochistan, the local Baloch population perceives refugees as a threat to the delicate ethnic balance.
- With the connivance of local officials, a large number of Afghan refugees have acquired Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) and passports, adopting Pakistani identities. In Balochistan, in particular, this poses a challenge to the majority status of locals.
- Baloch nationalists in Pakistan are among the main forces demanding the repatriation of refugees and illegal immigrants to Afghanistan.
- When the interests of refugees and the local

- population clash, locals, in an effort to safeguard their interests, take a strong stance against refugees, as witnessed in KP on several occasions.
- The presence of Afghan refugees, particularly illegal immigrants, has contributed to rising inflation, child labor, and the spread of various diseases, such as poliomyelitis and malaria.

Pakistan, however, is not only home to millions of Afghan refugees and illegal immigrants but also to nationals from several other countries, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bosnia, the Middle East, and some African states. The presence of Afghan and other refugees in large metropolitan cities—particularly in KP, Balochistan, urban Sindh, and the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi—has serious consequences for Pakistan.

Hosting a large number of Afghan refugees has placed an enormous burden on Pakistan's limited resources, among other pressing issues. International aid for Afghan refugees was completely halted in 1998. In 2023, the UNHCR provided only a token amount of PKR 25,000 per month directly to registered Afghan families, which is far from adequate. Pakistan bears all other expenses without any assistance from the UNHCR or the international community. With new crises emerging worldwide, Afghan refugees and illegal Afghan immigrants in Pakistan have faded from international attention. However, Pakistan continues to grapple with this reality daily, along with all its associated challenges. The warm response of the Pakistani people toward Afghan refugees has also diminished considerably since the initial outpouring of sympathy in 1979.

To protect our national interests and ensure both internal and external security, Pakistan must take firm decisions. This should include the incorporation of requisite laws to prevent any illegal or undesirable elements from exploiting policy ambiguities. Following the Taliban's return to power last year, Pakistan, like other countries in the region, has officially closed its borders to new refugees. Nevertheless, thousands continue to enter Pakistan through various points along its long and porous border with Afghanistan. Therefore, the government's recent initiative to identify and deport all illegal immigrants, including Afghans, to their countries of origin is a welcome step.

It is important to note that Pakistan is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or the 1967 Refugee Protocol, which define the term "refugee" and outline their rights, as well as the legal obligations of host states. As such, Pakistan is not legally bound to accept any refugees. Yet, despite this, we have not only welcomed them but have also

continued to support them for the past four decades.

As Ahmer Bilal Soofi explained in his recent article, Pakistan lacks a national migration policy and has no laws defining refugees or their rights. The entry and stay of foreign nationals are regulated under four different laws, leading to an ad-hoc approach to the refugee issue. While the Naturalization Act grants nationality to children born in Pakistan, this provision is not extended to Afghan refugees, with all such requests historically rejected at both administrative and judicial levels. This has further complicated the situation, particularly for Afghans born in Pakistan who now have families of their own.

Until last year, Pakistan's policy was to extend refugee status only to those classified as refugees by the UNHCR, which operates under the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. These frameworks assign international legal responsibilities to host states, establish the principle of non-refoulement to prevent forced repatriation, and define "refugee status" for asylum seekers. This has created a stark disconnect between Pakistani state policy and UNHCR mandates, most notably seen in Pakistan's fencing of the shared border with Afghanistan in 2021.

Despite some institutional arrangements by the government, such as the establishment of the Ministry of States and Frontier Regions (SAFRON) and the Office of the Chief Commissioner of Afghan Refugees (CCAR), there has long been no approved parliamentary policy with political ownership to address refugee management, integration, or deportation.

In 2000-2007, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the UNHCR signed a tripartite agreement, granting Afghan refugees in Pakistan the right to register and obtain a Proof of Registration (PoR) card. These cards were issued by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in collaboration with SAFRON and the UNHCR. They required annual renewal and remained valid until 2020, after which their data was transferred to biometric identity documents.

PoR cardholders can temporarily stay in Pakistan, have freedom of movement, and access public health and education. They can rent property, open bank accounts, and register family births. However, they cannot legally work, although many do work in the informal sector. According to UNHCR, verification of around 1.4 million registered refugees had been completed, and close to one million had been issued the PoRs.

In 2017, Pakistan launched another program to register the hitherto undocumented Afghans by issuing Afghan Citizenship Cards (ACCs). The ACC is a

temporary identity document for Afghans having no other forms of identification and offers limited benefits compared with the PoR. ACC holders are entitled to stay temporarily in Pakistan and have freedom of movement but cannot access public health services or education. Some reports say more than 840,000 refugees have been issued these cards.

Repatriation of Afghan refugees also needs to be organized in line with the recognized international law, the UN Convention of 1951, and the Refugee Protocol of 1967, even though Pakistan is not a signatory of this Convention and the Refugee Protocol. There is no doubt that the Afghan refugees have outstayed their welcome on our soil. Besides, Afghanistan's political and security situation is slowly but surely improving. Afghanistan desperately needs young and educated Afghan refugees to return to their country and contribute to socioeconomic development, which is a prerequisite for long-term political stability and security. The world offers examples of nations where returning expatriates, including refugees, have contributed to development. Some prime examples include China, Ireland, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

A large number of countries in the world, particularly countries of North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, have comprehensive policies dealing with asylum cases, refugees, and illegal immigrants as these countries are favored destinations for migrants for a variety of reasons. These nations are legally obliged to accommodate refugees fleeing from their countries due to natural disasters and socioeconomic and political compulsions. They host millions of foreigners, including Pakistanis, and can deal with them by international law and local regulations. As affluent countries, they have financial provisions for refugees in their annual budgets. Besides, they get full support from the international community and UNHCR as they are all signatories to the UN Convention of 1951 and the Refugee Protocol of 1967.

Yet in recent years, we have seen these developed Western countries, many being social welfare states, frustrated on account of the heightened influx of refugees fleeing from former colonies of the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe from areas like Africa, the Middle East, Iran, and Afghanistan because of conflict and war imposed on them by the West, among other factors. Like Pakistan, they are also facing the negative fallout of hosting large numbers of refugees and illegal immigrants.

It would not be wrong to say that a large concentration of refugees and illegal migrants has become an existential issue for the West. Brexit, the

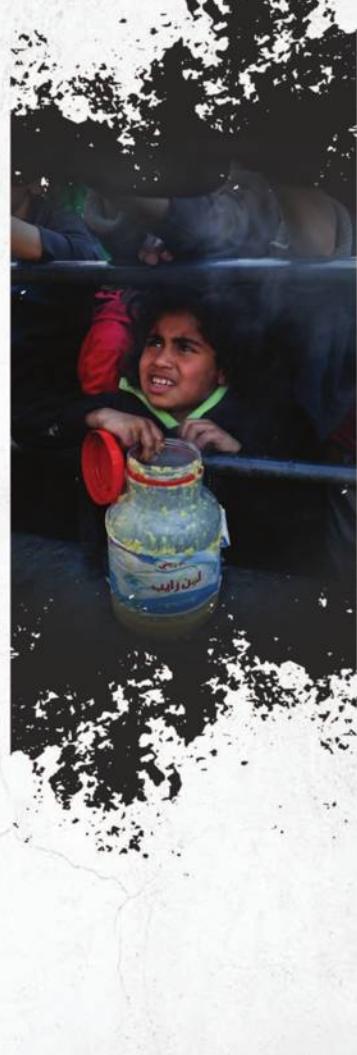
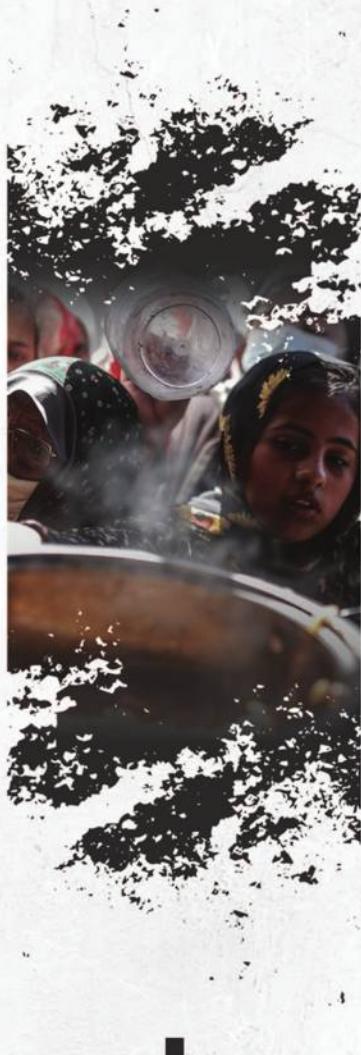
rise of Islamophobia, the rise of populism and extreme-right and extreme-left politics, home-grown terrorism, economic difficulties, unemployment, social and communal tensions, and the fall of moderate governments one after the other in recent years in the U.S. and Europe can well be attributed to the difficulties arising out of the massive influx of refugees. EU has almost reached a breaking point regarding differences in how to distribute refugees equitably and cap the number of refugees accepted in their countries.

To protect their national interest, countries have, one after the other, taken measures to either close their borders and refuse entry to immigrants or have taken draconian measures to expel them. For example, Australia apprehends incoming immigrants on the high seas and detains them on a remote island 300 nautical miles from the mainland till the legal and judicial procedures are completed; the Netherlands has built a floating prison to keep illegal immigrants and refugees at sea till their cases are sorted. UK, Italy, Greece, and others try not to let migrant boats dock on their shores. Coastal authorities in some countries refuse to assist drowning refugee boats and ships facing technical difficulties. A tragic example was the sinking of a boat off the coast of Greece, where over 300 Pakistanis lost their lives, despite these countries being legally obligated to accept refugees. Meanwhile, the United States has constructed a wall to prevent immigrants and refugees from Latin and South America, particularly from Mexico.

It is a normal and acceptable policy and practice of all Western and other countries to check and deport illegal residents regularly. Anyone overstaying their visa duration or misusing their visa status is promptly arrested and deported. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) regularly operates flights for the repatriation of illegal immigrants. Even in our region, we have seen Iran sending back approximately 10,31,757 refugees back to Afghanistan as it could not bear to host them any longer.

Pakistan is, therefore, well within its right to clear its territory of illegal migrants and also to repatriate Afghan refugees. Intensifying its crackdown on Afghan refugees, new movement restrictions, and increased detentions and deportations of undocumented foreigners is the only way to control the increasing threats to Pakistan's internal and external security. ■

The writer has served as an Ambassador to China, the European Union, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Ireland. She has also authored and edited several books, including *Magnificent Pakistan*, *Pakistan-China All Weather Friendship*, and *Lost Cities of Indus*.
E-mail: naghmanahashmi40@gmail.com



HISTORY'S DARKEST TOOL

Hunger and Starvation as Weapons of War

FROM THE ROMAN SIEGES TO MODERN CONFLICTS, STARVATION HAS LONG BEEN WIELDDED AS A WEAPON OF WAR, AND DESPITE INTERNATIONAL LAWS PROHIBITING IT, THE WORLD CONTINUES TO WITNESS ITS INHUMANE USE—FROM THE BENGAL FAMINE TO GAZA—UNDERSCORING A GLOBAL FAILURE TO HOLD PERPETRATORS ACCOUNTABLE.



Vice Admiral Taj M. Khattak (R)

Hunger and starvation, as weapons of war, are among the oldest tools used in conflicts between warring factions. They have been present from Roman times to modern conflicts. In recent history, Britain's conduct in the Boer Wars and the Bengal Famine—where Prime Minister Winston Churchill, to his eternal discredit, diverted food grown by natives to support the war effort elsewhere—stands out as a harbinger and a horrific example of this inhumane tactic, leaving a blot on the history of mankind.

Adolf Hitler's infamous 'Hunger Plan' killed over four million Soviet citizens during WWII, not to mention the victims of thousands of its concentration camps in Nazi Germany and occupied territories in Europe, the majority of whom were of the Jewish faith. They were exterminated after reducing them to walking skeletons through systematic malnutrition, eventually resulting in starvation and death.

The media reach and cinematic depiction of a few decades ago weren't as prolific or intrusive as today. Still, even then, one would have thought that post-WWII, the voluminous literature about this despicable phenomenon would have jolted the world's collective consciousness sufficiently to at least curb its further use. This has unfortunately not happened. On the contrary, hunger and starvation have become almost indigenous to armed conflicts between nations these days. This is particularly disappointing when it comes from the state of Israel, where the ancestors of its citizens had been subjected to the worst form of inhuman treatment not long ago. One of the factors in how Israel came into existence was the sympathy factor for its people after what they had gone through years by a barbarian regime in Germany.

Since October 7, 2023, when Hamas-led fighters attacked Israel, high-ranking Israeli officials, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant,¹ National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir,² and Energy Minister Israel Katz³ have made public statements expressing their aim to deprive civilians in Gaza of food, water, and fuel—statements reflecting a policy being carried out by Israeli forces. Other Israeli officials have publicly stated that humanitarian aid to Gaza would be conditioned either on the release of hostages unlawfully held by Hamas or Hamas' destruction.

The Israeli government is using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in the occupied Gaza Strip, which is a war crime in the view of Human Rights Watch (HRW).⁴ In this conflict, Israeli forces have deliberately blocked the delivery of water, food, and fuel while willfully razing agricultural areas and depriving the civilian population of objects indispensable to their survival.

Israel's continuing blockade of Gaza, as well as its more than 16-year closure, amounts to collective punishment of the civilian population and is a war crime by any definition. As the occupying power in Gaza under the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel must ensure that the civilian population gets food and medical supplies.

ONE OF THE FACTORS IN HOW ISRAEL CAME INTO EXISTENCE WAS THE SYMPATHY FACTOR FOR ITS PEOPLE AFTER WHAT THEY HAD GONE THROUGH YEARS BY A BARBARIAN REGIME IN GERMANY.

Prior to the current hostilities, 1.2 million of Gaza's 2.2 million people were estimated to be facing acute food insecurity,⁵ and over 80 percent were reliant on humanitarian aid. Israel maintains overarching control⁶ over Gaza, including the movement of people and goods, territorial waters, airspace, the infrastructure upon which Gaza relies, and the registry of the population.

According to the World Food Programme (WFP), at least 70 percent of the world's hungry people live in conflict-affected areas and are subjected to starvation. Instances of intentional and organized deprivation of civilians of objects indispensable to their survival (OIS) are widespread. Time and again, warring parties have been accused of disrupting food systems and using starvation for military gains. An increasing number of civilians have been rendered food-insecure as food stocks are looted during conflicts, and infrastructure necessary for production and distribution is often destroyed.

THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS USING THE STARVATION OF CIVILIANS AS A METHOD OF WARFARE IN THE OCCUPIED GAZA STRIP, WHICH IS A WAR CRIME IN THE VIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH.

There have been efforts at the global level to check this phenomenon, which has been codified as International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Criminal Law (ICL). The international community has also made some half-hearted efforts in emphasizing the link between hunger through relevant UN Resolutions that condemn the starving of civilians as a method of warfare and call upon parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under IHL. Still, these efforts have largely been ineffective mainly because the accountability mechanism, so essential for

the success of these efforts, fails to identify perpetrators of these despicable actions or it cannot withstand pressures generated by global political dynamics.

In the last decade or so, approximately 60 percent of the 815 million people suffering from hunger have been living in conflict zones. IHL and International Criminal Law (ICL) provide a framework of rules to protect populations from food insecurity caused by conflict. The recent widespread scenes of hunger in Gaza are clear evidence that Israel is using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in the region. Thousands of Gazans have died as a result of malnutrition and starvation. Yet, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) addressed this barbarity mildly, referring to it merely as "tragic" and "man-made"—despite being both predictable and entirely preventable.

This velvet glove approach persists even as aid agencies continuously warn that famine in Gaza is "almost inevitable" unless Israel's blockade is lifted and immediate assistance is provided. Some time ago, on two separate occasions, Israeli forces opened fire on Palestinians waiting for food trucks carrying flour into Gaza City, killing at least 100 people and injuring 700 others.

Like the evolution of all laws over time, the global codification of measures to curb this inhuman activity has also undergone different phases. In 1863, Francis Lieber, a German-American jurist during the American Civil War, framed the Lieber Code, which was endorsed by major powers at the time. Surprisingly, the Code held that it was lawful to starve hostile belligerents, armed or unarmed, if it led to the speedier subjugation of the enemy.

This stance underwent a dramatic transformation later, forming the basis for The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. A further review followed the publication of the Report of the Commission on the Responsibilities of the Authors of War, which held that the deliberate starvation of civilians was a violation of the laws and customs of war. Today, the prohibition on using starvation as a weapon in both international and non-international armed conflicts is codified in the Additional Protocols of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions. While this principle was considered novel at the time of adoption, it has since become a

fundamental aspect of customary international humanitarian law IHL.

International Humanitarian Law IHL, however, is far from perfect, and belligerents often exploit loopholes to serve their own interests. For example, what one party considers indispensable to the survival of the civilian population may not be seen the same way by another. Similarly, the definition of objects indispensable to survival is broad, allowing the stronger party to manipulate it to its advantage. Other areas of concern include the threshold of need, the purpose of starvation, the methods employed, the distinction between international and non-international conflicts, and the protection of medical areas and hospitals.

Despite growing concern over the use of hunger as a weapon of war in conflict areas and the recognition of IHL and ICL rules as 'lines of defense' against starvation in armed conflict, accountability is difficult to achieve. The prohibition on starvation under IHL and the war crime of starvation in ICL fail to account for the many situations where warring parties do not pursue policies whose direct or indirect purpose is starving civilians, allowing cases of collateral famine to slip through the cracks.

Additionally, where clear violations of IHL and ICL have been committed, it is often impossible to identify a clear perpetrator, restricting the viability of accountability procedures. To address this, it is imperative to have a wider global consensus on the obligations of parties to an armed conflict, which are broader than those acts that result in individual criminal responsibility, and to leverage IHL and ICL concepts to fill lacunas in the law.

Finally, the international community must elevate the public and political profile of the crime to make it so morally deplorable that its usage is no longer normalized. This will build political pressure to fight impunity for starvation as a method of warfare. ■

The writer is a retired Vice Admiral of the Pakistan Navy and a distinguished expert on national security issues.
E-mail: tajkhattak@gmail.com

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NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

THE SPIRALLING GAZA CONFLICT

CEASEFIRE SHATTERED, GAZA BURNS, AND THE WORLD ONCE AGAIN DEBATES WHAT JUSTICE LOOKS LIKE.



Rear Admiral Faisal Shah (R)

After a brief ceasefire, the agreement between Hamas and Israel was unilaterally revoked by the latter, who once again commenced relentless bombing of Gaza, which has claimed the lives of scores of Palestinians, including children. A fresh ground offensive has also been started in southern and central Gaza, which hints towards escalating the situation. According to Gaza's Health Ministry, approximately 640 Palestinians have lost their lives in the renewed Israeli ground offensive, shattering its ceasefire agreement with Hamas.¹ Houthis, in retaliation for the resumption of genocide, attacked Israel's Nevatim airbase with ballistic missiles and targeted shipping in the Red Sea. This provoked the wrath of the U.S., which launched its most significant military operation in the Middle East since President Trump took office. The U.S., already focused on Iran, has warned it to refrain from supporting the Houthis.

The Middle East has been in continuous turmoil for the last few years, especially after Hamas' attack in October 2023. The current conflict has featured some unique dynamics in the region, which, though prevalent, are not always conspicuous. For the first time, Iran and Israel came face to face and exchanged military arsenals in deliberate attacks. The demonstration of technological prowess from both sides was also notable. The U.S. sided with Israel unabatedly, even more so after Mr. Trump took office as President. The Gaza conflict also united Muslims and the majority of non-Muslim countries in a unanimous call to halt Israeli atrocities.

The process toward the 'Two-State' solution gained global prominence, and the ceasefire agreement between Hamas and Israel was hoped to be a stepping stone in that direction. Iran's support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis became apparent, but efforts were made to eliminate their leadership and weaken their military capabilities. Now that Israel has revoked the ceasefire agreement, all these actors are back on stage, and the suffering of Palestinians has resumed, evoking global empathy for their plight.

The momentous Gaza ceasefire agreement was divided into three phases and spread over months. It was concluded on January 19, 2025, with the mediation of the U.S., Qatar, and Egypt. The first phase, lasting six weeks, saw Hamas releasing 33 hostages in exchange for Israel releasing around 1,900 Palestinian prisoners and allowing aid and other goods to enter the Gaza Strip. The second phase of negotiations was set to begin upon completion of the first and included the release of all remaining hostages as well as the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces

from the Gaza Strip, leading to a permanent end to the war. The first phase ended on March 1, 2025, with thousands of Palestinians returning to Gaza, where only rubble awaited them. Consequently, active talks on the rebuilding of Gaza commenced.

Two plans were presented: one from the U.S. proposed the forced migration of Palestinians from Gaza to Jordan and Egypt while converting the Gaza Strip into a "Riviera of the Middle East"—a resort area under U.S. control but funded by "Arab partners." Arab countries rejected the plan as it involved forced migration, violated Palestinians' rights, had an unrealistic approach, contained non-implementable features, and was against international laws and norms.

The second plan, Gaza-2030, was presented by Egypt and spanned three phases over five years with a financial layout of USD 53 billion. It proposed a Palestinian technocratic setup for the first six months, ultimately transferring control to the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians would remain in temporary settlements inside Gaza until the plan was fully implemented. The international community, including international financial institutions (IFIs), was to be approached for funding.

Neither plan included a role for Hamas in the rebuilding and governance of Gaza. Gaza-2030 was widely accepted globally and garnered support from Arab and European countries.

Upon the culmination of the first phase of the ceasefire deal, Israel, with the backing of the U.S., proposed extending the first phase by another six weeks, during which all hostages would be released while negotiations for lasting peace continued. Hamas resisted and insisted on adhering to the original plan, which included the withdrawal of Israeli forces. In response, Israel halted humanitarian aid to Gaza and then resumed aerial raids, followed by a ground offensive.

A FRESH GROUND OFFENSIVE HAS ALSO BEEN STARTED IN SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL GAZA, WHICH HINTS TOWARDS ESCALATING THE SITUATION. ACCORDING TO GAZA'S HEALTH MINISTRY, APPROXIMATELY 640 PALESTINIANS HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE RENEWED ISRAELI GROUND OFFENSIVE, SHATTERING ITS CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT WITH HAMAS.

During earlier negotiations on the ceasefire agreement, Israel did not agree to have the "non-resumption of attacks" explicitly mentioned in

writing. Hamas accepted this demand based on the verbal assurances of mediators. This was perhaps a deliberate loophole left in the agreement by Israel.

A COMPLEX WEB OF INTERTWINED ACTIVITIES CONTINUES TO UNFOLD IN GAZA. HOW THESE WILL BE RESOLVED REMAINS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT. HOWEVER, THE ULTIMATE VICTIMS IN ALL OF THIS ARE THE PALESTINIANS

Mr. Netanyahu was engulfed in political turmoil at home. He saw the Gaza conflict as a blessing in disguise for salvaging his political career, allowing him to rally public support in his favor. He unleashed an unprecedented wave of destruction and killing, simultaneously waging battles on multiple fronts: Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iran.

Throughout the conflict, there was immense public pressure for the release of hostages, with families demanding the return of their loved ones, alive or dead. However, hardliners in Israel sought the complete annihilation of Hamas. Thus, Mr. Netanyahu had two clear objectives: securing the release of all hostages, including their remains, and eliminating Hamas entirely.

Despite a relentless and brutal campaign that resulted in the deaths of more than 50,000 Palestinians and left over 100,000 injured, he failed to achieve either of his stated objectives.²

When he signed a ceasefire agreement with Hamas, there was opposition within his government, and some coalition partners threatened to abandon the government. He may have reassured them that after the release of hostages, he would complete the task. The extension in the first phase of the ceasefire was perhaps aimed in this direction, as he might not have wanted to lose the military edge he gained during the whole campaign by retrieving troops. On the other hand, due to the resumption of hostilities, the release of hostages by Hamas is again in limbo. There is, therefore, growing criticism from the public, who had hoped to receive their dear ones as the ceasefire process was completed. This situation has significant implications for the future of the conflict and the potential for a lasting peace agreement.

The U.S. dream of taking control of Gaza and converting it into a Riviera would also not have been possible had the ceasefire agreement progressed in its original form. The White House stated that it was

consulted by Israel before the attacks resumed, implying that its consent—tacit or explicit—was given.

Additionally, an unfinished agenda remains: a deal on Iran's nuclear program. The U.S. has vowed to apply maximum pressure on Iran to conclude a nuclear agreement, which must include its entire program, covering both weapon systems and delivery means. Iran has resisted but has shown some willingness to negotiate—provided there is no external pressure. With Israel's renewed military campaign, pressure on Iran will also increase, as it remains the only country to have confronted Israel militarily. If Iran re-enters the conflict, U.S. pressure against it will intensify, which is already mounting following Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and subsequent counterattacks by the U.S.

A complex web of intertwined activities continues to unfold in Gaza. How these will be resolved remains difficult to predict. However, the ultimate victims in all of this are the Palestinians. They have lost their loved ones, homes, livelihoods, and peace. More importantly, there is little hope of restoring life in Gaza—at least not to what they once knew seventeen months ago. ■

The writer is an Honorary Research Fellow at the National Institute of Maritime Affairs, Islamabad.
E-mail: faisel68.fs@gmail.com

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SCALING UP RAINWATER HARVESTING IN PAKISTAN: A NEED OF THE HOUR

PAKISTAN'S ESCALATING WATER CRISIS—DRIVEN BY CLIMATE CHANGE, POPULATION GROWTH, AND MISMANAGEMENT—DEMANDS URGENT ACTION, WITH RAINWATER HARVESTING EMERGING AS A PRACTICAL YET UNDERUTILIZED SOLUTION TO MITIGATE SHORTAGES, FLOODS, AND DECLINING PER CAPITA WATER AVAILABILITY.



Syed Zaheer Hussain Gardezi

We frequently see reports highlighting that Pakistan is facing severe water-related disasters, primarily due to climate change. These include water shortages and flash floods, such as those in 2010, 2014, and 2017, with the most devastating occurring in 2022. According to the Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), the country's per capita water availability has declined alarmingly over the years. This situation is further exacerbated by climate change, population growth, and inefficient water management practices. Adopting an integrated approach, including rainwater harvesting (RWH), is essential for addressing Pakistan's water crisis.

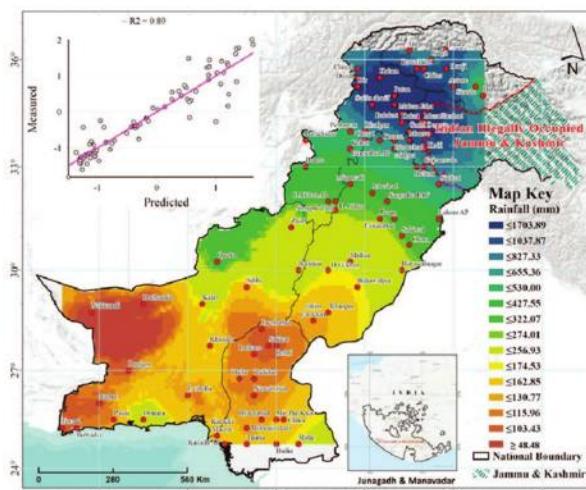
PAKISTAN'S WATER RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING RAPIDLY. THE COUNTRY'S PER CAPITA WATER AVAILABILITY DECREASED FROM 5,260 CUBIC METERS IN 1951 TO 1,032 CUBIC METERS IN 2020.

The Status of Water Resources in Pakistan

Pakistan's water resources are dwindling rapidly. The country's per capita water availability decreased from 5,260 cubic meters in 1951 to 1,032 cubic meters in 2020. This decline is attributed to a combination of factors, including population growth, urbanization, weak water governance, and, last but not least, climate change.

The following data reflect the drastic changes observed in rainfall patterns from 2022 onwards:

- Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).** These areas experience heavy rainfall during the spring season and significant snowfall in late winter.
- Western Region (Balochistan).** This region receives limited rainfall, with most areas getting less than 200 mm annually. However, some areas in Balochistan recorded 590 percent above-average rainfall in August 2022.
- Eastern Region (Punjab).** This region has a relatively wet climate, with most areas receiving substantial rainfall during the monsoon season. In some areas of Punjab, 304,475 acres of crops and orchards were severely affected by heavy rainfall in 2022.



- Southern Region (Sindh).** This region experiences extreme rainfall variability, with some areas receiving as little as 100 mm annually. However, Sindh province recorded 726 percent above-average rainfall in August 2022.
- Coastal Region.** This region receives most of its rainfall during the monsoon season, with some areas experiencing urban flash floods.

It is essential to note that climate change has intensified extreme rainfall patterns in Pakistan, with some studies suggesting a 50-75 percent increase in intense rainfall events.

The Potential of Rainwater Harvesting in Pakistan

Rain is the primary source of almost all freshwater globally, except for some confined aquifers. Rainwater harvesting, a long-neglected aspect of water replenishment, holds immense potential as a solution to Pakistan's water crisis. It can significantly supplement the country's water resources, offering hope in the face of a daunting challenge.

IN SOME AREAS OF PUNJAB, 304,475 ACRES OF CROPS AND ORCHARDS WERE SEVERELY Affected BY HEAVY RAINFALL IN 2022.

Pakistan receives an average annual rainfall of around 240-255 mm, with a maximum of 1,700 mm in the northern districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while the southern parts of Punjab and Balochistan receive as little as 50 mm. Harnessing this rainwater can play a crucial role in addressing water scarcity. However, climate change has severely disrupted rainfall patterns, further exacerbating the challenge.

Benefits of Rainwater Harvesting

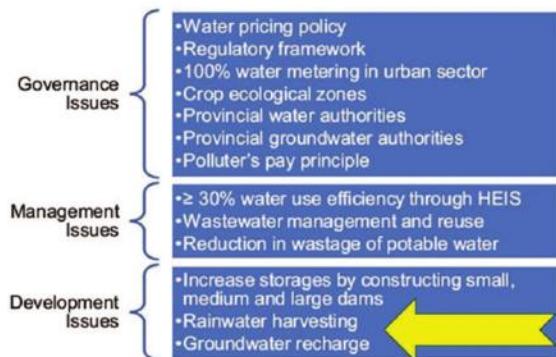
- Reduced Dependence on Groundwater.** RWH can reduce the pressure on groundwater resources, which are being overexploited and unregulated in many parts of the country.
- Improved Water Quality.** Rainwater is a relatively clean source of water, largely free from industrial and chemical pollution, making it a valuable resource for both urban and rural areas. Moreover, improving its quality requires only simple and cost-effective treatment methods.
- Increased Water Availability.** Rainwater harvesting can serve as a reliable water source, primarily for non-potable uses such as toilet flushing, laundry, kitchen gardening, and other domestic purposes.
- Reduced Flood Risk.** RWH can help mitigate the impact of floods by reducing stormwater runoff and alleviating pressure on urban drainage systems.

Challenges and Opportunities

While RWH offers numerous benefits, several challenges need to be addressed:

- Lack of Awareness.** Many people in Pakistan are unaware of the benefits of RWH and how to implement it effectively.
- Lack of Technical Knowledge About Infrastructure.** Limited awareness regarding the proper design and implementation of rainwater harvesting systems, including storage tanks, piping networks, and surface water conservation techniques, hampers its widespread adoption.
- Cost Implications.** In regions with low annual rainfall, the high initial investment required for RWH infrastructure, particularly storage systems, can be a significant barrier to implementation. However, there are multiple opportunities to implement rainwater harvesting afresh and build upon

existing practices at the international, national, and regional levels.



Key issues and required strategies outlined in the National Water Policy 2018

- National Water Policy (NWP).** The Government of Pakistan approved its National Water Policy (NWP) in 2018, which encourages the implementation of rainwater harvesting programs and projects. The NWP provides policy directions for addressing water management challenges in three key areas: agriculture, domestic use, and industry.
- National Water Conservation Strategy of Pakistan.** The Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) developed a National Water Conservation Strategy (NWCS) to support the implementation of the National Water Policy (NWP) for sustainable water resource management. The NWCS provides policy guidelines, conservation strategies, activities, and technologies to promote efficient water use. Its overall objectives include:
 - Ensuring water conservation, minimizing wastage, and securing equitable distribution.
 - Supporting service providers in developing best management practices for water conservation while reducing financial dependence on the government.
 - Providing actionable information on water conservation to enhance water security in the face of climate change.

Rainwater harvesting (RWH) primarily consists of three methods:

- Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting
- Surface RWH (Ponds and small dams)
- Groundwater Recharge

It is a matter of great concern that we are far behind the desired level of utilizing and managing rainwater. Pakistan has only demonstrated these interventions through small-scale pilot programs. Some notable examples include:

- The Promotion of Rainwater Harvesting Project by



RWH System installed by ERRA at Post Graduate College, Murree

the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) was implemented in earthquake-affected areas of Azad Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) from 2010 to 2014. It is the largest-ever rooftop rainwater harvesting project in Pakistan and the South Asian region, with more than 40,000 building units equipped with RWH systems. This initiative not only provides a simple and effective way to supply water directly to local populations but also helps mitigate soil erosion in mountainous areas, a major factor contributing to the silting of Mangla and Tarbela Dams.

- More than 300 school buildings in AJK were equipped with rainwater harvesting systems between 2018 and 2022.



RWH System installed at IsDB Girls Primary School Sehr Bagla, Hattian Bala

- The Agency for Barani Areas Development (ABAD), Punjab, has carried out substantial work on small and medium surface rainwater harvesting systems in northern Punjab, while PCRWR conducted a pilot program in Thar from 2006 to 2008.
- UN-Habitat is implementing a pilot rainwater harvesting project in two districts of the Rawalpindi Division.
- The Urban Unit Punjab has initiated a small rainwater harvesting project in the Murree region, aiming to install around 1,100 units.
- The Capital Development Authority (CDA) conducted a groundwater recharging pilot project with assistance from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) nearly a decade

ago.



Rainwater Ponds and Small Dams Developed by PCRWR in Thar Areas and ABAD in Upper Punjab



General Feasibility of Rainwater Harvesting in Pakistan

For implementing all three RWH methods, the country can be divided into the following regions:

- **Northern/High Mountainous Parts.** Roof-Top RWH and Small RWH Ponds.
- **Northern Sindh to North Punjab, North-West Balochistan and North-West KP.** Roof-Top RWH, Surface RWH, and Groundwater Recharging.
- **Lower South Punjab, North-East Sindh to Coastal Areas (Sindh & Balochistan).** Roof-Top RWH and Surface RWH.
- **North-West (Balochistan, Punjab, and Sindh).** Surface RWH, Roof-Top RWH, and Groundwater Recharging.

Rainwater harvesting has the following numerous benefits:

- It provides a supplemental water source, especially during dry spells, and enables individuals, municipalities, and local authorities to manage their water supplies. By offering a visible indication of water usage, it promotes a conservation mindset.
- It serves as a safer drinking water alternative in areas where groundwater or springs are highly polluted with biological and chemical contaminants such as fluoride and arsenic.
- It helps in managing flash floods and conserving this crucial freshwater resource for future productive use.

Given the increasing climate change-related events in recent years, it is now essential to scale up all the above pilot initiatives (and any overlooked efforts) across the country wherever feasible. Specifically, Rooftop RWH, the simplest method of providing water in northern areas such as Murree, Kotli Sattian, Galliyat, Swat, Mansehra, Muzaffarabad, Bagh, Rawalakot, and similar regions, should be initiated immediately with the active participation of local governments and beneficiary communities.

THE GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN APPROVED ITS NATIONAL WATER POLICY (NWP) IN 2018, WHICH ENCOURAGES THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RAINWATER HARVESTING PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS.

Furthermore, for technical assistance and knowledge sharing, Pakistan should establish close collaboration with regional and international organizations such as the South Asia Rainwater Harvesting Network (SARNET), Lanka Rainwater Harvesting Forum (LRWF), International Rainwater Harvesting Alliance (IRHA), American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association (ARCSA), and others already working on similar initiatives. ■

The writer is a development professional and environmentalist, as well as a member of the Technical Committee of the Pakistan Engineering Council on Green Building Codes. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the South Asia Rainwater Network (SARNET).
E-mail: zaheergardezi61@gmail.com



THE OTHER HALF OF THE RESISTANCE



The Women at the Heart of Kashmir's Struggle



THEY HAVE LOST SONS, HUSBANDS, AND HOMES—BUT
NOT THEIR VOICES. IN KASHMIR, WOMEN ARE THE
KEEPERS OF RESISTANCE.



Naila Altaf Kayani

Kashmir is not just a land of picturesque meadows, towering mountains, and cool, refreshing springs—it is also a cradle of rich culture and interfaith harmony. It is the homeland of resilient and courageous people, where the natural beauty is complemented by its women's strength, passion, and eloquence. Whether it was Lal Ded, sharing her mystical wisdom, or Habba Khatoon, singing ballads of love and loss, Kashmiri women have always found a way to express their emotions and experiences. This legacy has been their strength in over seven decades of occupation and oppression. It is this very heritage that has empowered Kashmiri women to endure hardships, resist tyranny, and stand unwavering in every phase of the struggle for freedom.

The struggle for Kashmir's freedom is not a battle fought by men alone. Kashmiri women have refused to remain silent spectators; they have raised their voices, led protests, and sacrificed their lives alongside men. Their resistance is symbolic and deeply embedded in the movement itself, shaping its course through defiance, resilience, and an unyielding demand for justice.

From the early days of the resistance, women-led organizations such as Dukhtaran-e-Millat and Muslim Khawateen Markaz have mobilized women for political activism. They have organized protests, led marches, and stood fearlessly before heavily armed soldiers, demanding justice and accountability. Despite brutal crackdowns, arbitrary arrests, and enforced disappearances, Kashmiri women have not backed down. They continue to fill the streets with their chants of resistance, carrying placards, raising slogans, and confronting an occupation that seeks to erase their voices.

Yet, beyond the streets, their role in the resistance is even more profound and often goes unnoticed. They provide sanctuary to political activists on the run, care for the wounded in makeshift clinics, and act as secret messengers, carrying vital information through militarized zones where every movement is monitored. Many risk their lives to smuggle food, medical supplies, and letters to political prisoners, ensuring the movement never loses momentum.

When men are imprisoned or martyred, it is the women who hold families together. Thousands of Kashmiri women have been widowed or left in agonizing limbo as "half-widows"—women whose husbands have disappeared in custody, leaving them in an endless cycle of waiting and uncertainty. Without death certificates, they are denied pensions, bank accounts, and property rights. A death certificate can only be acquired if the family proves that the victim

was never involved in militant activities. Many 'half-widows' face homelessness as in-laws or family members withhold property rights, citing religious grounds that a wife cannot claim her husband's assets until he is declared dead.

WHETHER IT WAS LAL DED, SHARING HER MYSTICAL WISDOM, OR HABBA KHATOON, SINGING BALLADS OF LOVE AND LOSS, KASHMIRI WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS FOUND A WAY TO EXPRESS THEIR EMOTIONS AND EXPERIENCES. THIS LEGACY HAS BEEN THEIR STRENGTH IN OVER SEVEN DECADES OF OCCUPATION AND OPPRESSION.

Traditional Kashmiri society often does not allow these women to work or remarry. Many scholars have noted that influential figures exploit them under the pretense of providing information about their missing husbands, while others take advantage of them in the name of religion. Yet, their plight remains unheard. Instead of succumbing to despair, these women have turned their pain into strength. They have become activists, petitioners, and relentless seekers of justice in a system designed to silence them.

Since August 5, 2019, the Indian government has introduced nearly 800 new laws and enforced draconian curbs on traditional and social media, effectively silencing reports of these brutalities from reaching the outside world. In recent years, the situation has further deteriorated, particularly after the revocation of Article 370. Reports indicate that more than 870 lives have been lost, including 20 women. Many women have been widowed, and countless children orphaned. Over 20,000 individuals have been arrested and sent to distant, infamous prisons like Tihar Jail—850 miles from their homeland—forcing families to undertake grueling 17-to-20 hour journeys just for a brief visit.

FROM THE EARLY DAYS OF THE RESISTANCE, WOMEN-LED ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS DUKHTARAN-E-MILLAT AND MUSLIM KHAWATEEN MARKAZ HAVE MOBILIZED WOMEN FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISM. THEY HAVE ORGANIZED PROTESTS, LED MARCHES, AND STOOD FEARLESSLY BEFORE HEAVILY ARMED SOLDIERS, DEMANDING JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

A close friend, Arjumand, has endured this agony

firsthand. Her husband has spent most of the past 26 years in Tihar Jail. Despite multiple rulings from India's Supreme Court ordering his release, each time, he is falsely implicated in a new case, keeping him imprisoned without trial. Yet, Arjumand continues her relentless journey to Delhi, spending hours travelling to see him—clinging to hope in the face of unrelenting injustice.

THOUSANDS OF KASHMIRI WOMEN HAVE BEEN WIDOWED OR LEFT IN AGONIZING LIMBO AS "HALF-WIDOWS"—WOMEN WHOSE HUSBANDS HAVE DISAPPEARED IN CUSTODY, LEAVING THEM IN AN ENDLESS CYCLE OF WAITING AND UNCERTAINTY. WITHOUT DEATH CERTIFICATES, THEY ARE DENIED PENSIONS, BANK ACCOUNTS, AND PROPERTY RIGHTS.

For decades, and particularly since the 1989 uprising, the repression in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir has disproportionately affected women and children. The scale of brutality goes beyond human rights violations; it constitutes crimes against humanity. The Kunan-Poshpura mass rape of 1991 remains one of the most horrifying examples of this cruelty, where Indian soldiers gang-raped dozens of women in a single night. Yet, despite the trauma, the survivors have refused to be broken. They have continued their fight for justice, defying an indifferent judicial system that seeks to bury their case.

Every year, in memory of this atrocity, Kashmiri women do not just mourn in silence—they commemorate this day as "Kashmiri Women's Resistance Day." It is a day of remembrance, resilience, and a reminder to the world that they will not allow their suffering to be forgotten.

Parveena Ahangar, the founder of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), is one of the most powerful examples of this resilience. When security forces forcibly took her son, she refused to accept silence. Instead, she turned her grief into a movement, meticulously documenting disappearances, organizing protests, and standing as a voice for thousands of families searching for their loved ones. The APDP continues to demand answers, even as the state attempts to erase their existence.

Another significant initiative is *Zanaan Wanaan* (ZW), a Srinagar-based feminist collective advocating for women's rights in Kashmir. The name is a combination of the Kashmiri words "zanaan," meaning "women," and "wanaan," meaning "to speak."

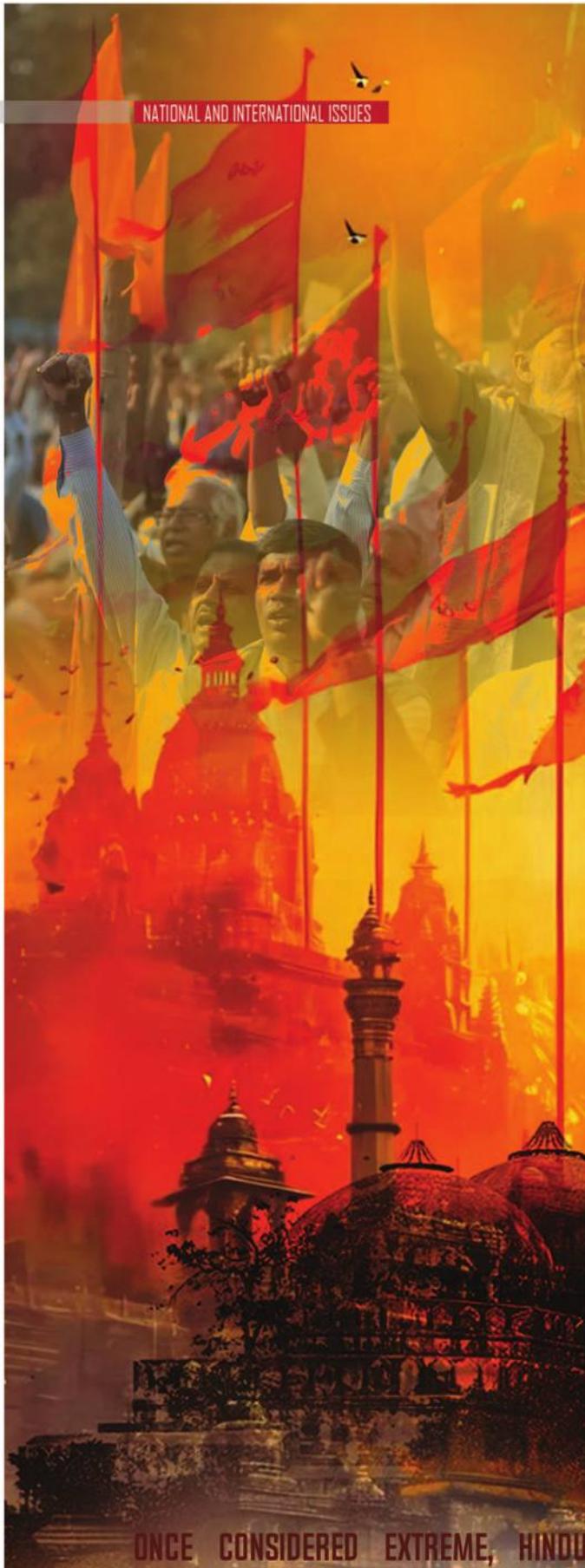
Kashmiri women embody resistance in every form. In the prisons of India, they stand as unyielding symbols of defiance—Asiya Andrabi, Naheeda Nasreen, and Fehmida Sofi continue to resist behind bars, their voices echoing beyond the prison walls. On the streets, they wield the power of truth—Masrat Zahra, with a camera in hand, documents atrocities, ensuring that the world does not turn a blind eye to Kashmir's suffering.

Through the written word, they challenge oppression and reclaim their history. Samreen Mushtaq and Essar Batool, with their groundbreaking work *Do You Remember Kunan Poshpora?*, force the perpetrators of brutality to confront their crimes. Anjum Zamrooda Habib, in recounting the harrowing nights of her imprisonment, refuses to let the stories of Kashmiri political prisoners be forgotten.

Through their resistance—whether behind bars, behind the lens, or the pen—these women prove that the struggle for justice in Kashmir is not just fought on the streets but in the battle for memory, truth, and narrative. Their defiance is not just in their protests but in their very existence. Every time they march, speak or refuse to forget, they reaffirm that the struggle for freedom is as much theirs as it is anyone else's. The world may try to ignore their voices, but their fight is far from over. It is carried forward in the chants of mothers searching for their sons, the silent endurance of widows waiting for justice, and the unwavering resilience of women who refuse to be broken. ■

The writer is a Ph.D. scholar in International Relations at NUML, a Muzaffarabad-based political and social analyst, and a human rights campaigner.

X: @NylaKayani
E-mail: nyla.kayani@gmail.com



NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

HINDUTVA AND THE MARGINS

How India's
Religious
Minorities Face
an Uncertain
Future

ONCE CONSIDERED EXTREME, HINDUTVA HAS BEEN MAINSTREAMED UNDER BJP RULE,
FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERING HOW INDIA GOVERNS ITSELF AND TREATS ITS RELIGIOUS MINORITIES.



Dr. Muhammad Farooq

Inspired by Hindutva ideology, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) transformed the political landscape of India. After its abrupt ascent in the 2014 elections, the BJP consistently secured victories in the 2019 and 2024 elections. Challenging the heavyweight Congress party, the BJP built its political struggle on two key agendas: anti-Muslim rhetoric and a development-oriented approach. Exploiting Congress's internal conflicts, the BJP aggressively pursued an anti-Pakistan policy, adopted a confrontational stance against regional states, and promoted Hindu nationalism during its governance. On the domestic front, it undermined secularism, implemented discriminatory policies against minorities—particularly Muslims—and incited anti-Muslim violence.

Hindutva emerged as a political ideology in India in 1923. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a Hindu politician influenced by Hitler's Nazi philosophy, published his Hindutva ideology, which advocated for transforming India into a Hindu Rashtra (state). Rooted in Brahmanical traditions, it was developed as a Hindu nationalist response to preserving Hindu identity in the face of Islamic influence. Hindutva also promoted Hindu majoritarian politics, aiming to establish Hindu dominance in post-British India.¹ The objectives of the Hindutva ideology were manifold. However, two primary elements were emphasized: the unity of the Hindu nation and the forced expulsion of the "others," including Muslims. Religious and cultural commonalities were highlighted to unify the historically fragmented Hindu society, which was often divided by myths and caste distinctions. The establishment of Sabhas in various regions to safeguard Hindu interests eventually led to the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1914, aimed at establishing a Hindu nationalist government in post-British India.² The second aspect of Hindutva was anti-Muslim discrimination to subjugate them in post-British India.

To achieve its objectives and transform India into a Hindu state, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar founded the paramilitary organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925.³ The organization was trained to foster an environment of insecurity and deterrence for Muslims and Christians, whose ideologies and cultures were seen as conflicting with Hindutva

principles. Hindu nationalists frequently instigated riots and violence against these communities, subjecting them to persecution and systematic discrimination while undermining their fundamental rights.

INSPIRED BY NAZISM, THE HINDUTVA IDEOLOGY WAS FOUNDED ON CONCEPTS OF DEPRIVATION, THE PURSUIT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND A DESIRE FOR REVENGE AGAINST MUSLIMS.

The discriminatory environment in the country compelled Muslims to fight for a separate state where they could freely practice their religious beliefs. The RSS refused to accept the creation of Pakistan through the partition of India and remained steadfast in its anti-Pakistan stance. Domestically, it opposed India's secular framework and consistently advocated for the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra through the marginalization and elimination of Muslims. The intensification of Mandir-Masjid politics and anti-Muslim riots enabled the RSS to further its Hindutva agenda. Additionally, the BJP was founded to challenge the Congress on the political front and advance its ideological objectives.

With the support of the Hindu majority, the BJP formed a coalition government in the 2014 elections, enabling it to accelerate its Hindutva agenda. In addition to implementing discriminatory policies against Muslims, the BJP pursued a strategy of disengagement with Pakistan, contributing to regional instability and a fragile security environment. By promoting exaggerated development statistics and fueling anti-Muslim sentiment, the BJP successfully retained its majority in the 2019 and 2024 elections. Its political dominance further emboldened both the RSS and BJP to deprive Muslims of their fundamental rights while maintaining a hostile stance toward Pakistan at various intervals. The revocation of Article 370 and the removal of the special status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in 2019 heightened regional instability and led to a diplomatic rupture in bilateral relations.

Expansion of RSS and its Hindutva Ideology

Inspired by Nazism, the Hindutva ideology was founded on concepts of deprivation, the pursuit of national identity, and a desire for revenge against

Muslims.⁴ Originally conceived by Savarkar, Hindutva gained further strength in India following the departure of the British in 1947. Perceived as a 'threat' to Hindu identity, hostility toward Muslims remained at its peak in post-independence India, leading to growing support for the RSS ideology.⁵ Muslims were relegated to second-class citizenship due to their religious beliefs and cultural differences.⁶ Hence, the focus remained on 'one nation, one goal' for guaranteed security and peace.⁷

Savarkar believed that the Hindus could be reunited through shared interests and also by presenting them with a common enemy in the form of Muslims. Muslim rule in the past was projected as the main reason for Hindu decline and economic failure. Myth-based history, religious alignment, false heroes, and superior culture were focused on uniting the Hindu majority.⁸

Hindu nationalists used violence and anti-Muslim riots as instruments to unite Hindus against Muslims. Playing music in front of mosques during prayer times and staging alleged terror acts became routine, triggering frequent Hindu-Muslim clashes. This growing violence led to the creation of the RSS in 1925, tasked with executing such actions and protecting Hindu rights through coercive means.⁹ The mission given to RSS was 'Our one supreme goal is to bring to life the all-round glory and greatness of our Hindu Rashtra.'¹⁰

RSS members were recruited from the grassroots level and trained in *Shakhas*, where they received ideological education, anti-Muslim indoctrination, and physical training to incite violence and mass killings. Millions of RSS members are enrolled in more than 73,000 *Shakhas* (branches), funded by the organization's central resources.¹¹ Over time, the RSS expanded its influence across all segments of society, including women, farmers, lawyers, and the business community, collectively forming the Sangh Parivar.

Today, Sangh Parivar coordinates the activities of various affiliated organizations, including the RSS, BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and Shiv Sena.¹² The BJP was established in 1980 following the collapse of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) to safeguard the political interests of the RSS. BJP's political leaders are primarily drawn from RSS ranks, and its decisions remain deeply influenced by Hindutva ideology.

After regaining strength in the 1990s, the Sangh Parivar organized rallies to demonstrate its power and establish its political presence in India by inciting controversies. It pushed for the institutionalization of Hindi as the official national language and the revival of Sanskrit. Additionally, it influenced the Hindi film industry to depict Muslims as enemies and instigated Hindu-Muslim riots.¹³ The 2002 Gujarat massacre,

carried out under the influence of the RSS, marked a turning point in Hindu nationalist ideology, intensifying the marginalization and persecution of Muslims. Narendra Modi gained significant popularity among Hindu nationalists due to his unwavering support for the Gujarat massacre during his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat. His steadfast loyalty to the RSS propelled him to the position of Prime Minister in the 2014 elections, securing consecutive victories in 2019 and 2024.

Hindutva Ideology and the Future of India

Hindutva ideology perceives Muslims as the enemy of Hindus and a threat to their identity and survival.¹⁴ The Muslims were allegedly responsible for the division of India in 1947. Hence, their presence may lead to another division owing to their population growth. To effectively guard against the constant 'threat', the RSS-BJP nexus is committed to marginalizing the Muslims and ensuring their eviction from the country. They justify their coercive tactics, violence, and extrajudicial killings of Muslims as a national security paradigm. Additionally, they have imposed severe restrictions on religious freedoms through Mandir-Masjid politics, the burning of mosques, and bans on cow slaughter.¹⁵ Discrimination against Muslims in business, education, and employment is reinforced through the judiciary, media, and law enforcement agencies. The 1992 destruction of Babri Masjid and the subsequent construction of Ram Mandir are clear indicators of India's shifting social and political landscape.

Since taking control of India's political landscape, the BJP and RSS have operated with unchecked freedom, targeting minorities, particularly Muslims, who increasingly feel insecure and vulnerable. BJP leaders have openly expressed anti-Muslim sentiments and pursued policies aimed at marginalizing the community.

Muslim children are forced to sing the Indian national anthem in schools, while history is being rewritten to glorify Hindu civilization. The BJP has also undertaken a widespread renaming campaign, replacing Muslim names of cities, roads, and airports with those of Hindu figures. Religious insecurity among Muslims has intensified as the BJP continues to target mosques, using these actions to consolidate majority support. The RSS claims that the mosques in Kashi and Mathura are disputed sites, alleging that Hindu temples were demolished during Mughal rule to construct them.

The BJP government has pursued a rigid and confrontational foreign policy toward Pakistan. In addition to disengaging Pakistan from any future dialogue, it made unilateral decisions regarding IIOJK in 2019 by revoking Article 370 of the Indian

Constitution. The arrest and confession of Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav exposed India's involvement in sabotage activities and its links with terrorist groups to destabilize Pakistan.

The BJP government also collaborated with anti-Pakistan elements in Afghanistan to disrupt regional connectivity and fuel territorial and water disputes between the two neighboring Islamic countries. Its efforts to isolate Pakistan on the global stage and weaken its economy through mechanisms like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) failed to achieve the desired results.

After the failure of its covert operations, India resorted to direct interference through air strikes inside Pakistan in February 2019. However, Pakistan responded swiftly and decisively, targeting Indian military assets, shooting down two aircraft, and capturing an Indian pilot. The BJP distorted the facts and leveraged the incident to its advantage in the 2019 elections, securing another victory.

Hindutva has deviated from the secular nature of Indian society and rejects the idea of coexistence with minorities, particularly Muslims. For the RSS, secularism is seen as a threat to Hindu identity, as it provides equal opportunities to minorities. The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the Hijab controversy have further polarized Indian society, deepening divisions between communities. Planned anti-Muslim riots often receive tacit, and at times explicit, support from BJP leaders and RSS members, as reflected in the frequency of such incidents.¹⁶

Such an environment could prove disastrous for India's unity and stability, with far-reaching negative repercussions. The 'Hindu-only' approach is likely to fuel instability, hatred, and division in society,

potentially leading to more armed conflicts. These policies have been consistently criticized and condemned by Islamic countries and neighboring Muslim communities; their continuation could contribute to India's regional and global isolation. Moreover, economic progress may be reversed if volatility escalates due to existing policies. Marginalized communities, facing social injustice and violent treatment from the RSS with government backing, may be compelled to resort to armed liberation movements.

Hindutva has evolved into a movement with a socially radical doctrine that rejects rationalism, liberalism, democracy, secularism, the rule of law, and fundamental human rights for Muslims. It upholds the dominance of the strong and the majority over the weak and politically suppressed. Although Hindutva has gained significant momentum, its ultimate fate may mirror that of its inspiration—Nazism, which ended in disaster. The suppression of Muslims, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the revocation of Article 370, and anti-Muslim riots are all elements borrowed from Nazism. Additionally, its aggressive policies and the subjugation of neighboring territories through expansionism further align it with Nazi ideology. Consequently, both movements may meet similar fates. Hindutva's survival is uncertain, as growing resistance from oppressed communities within India, supported by the Congress and other opposition forces, continues to challenge its existence. ■

The writer works under the Ministry of Defense.

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STRENGTH IN MEGAWATTS

SECURING PAKISTAN IN THE DIGITAL THEATER

IN THE NEW COLD WAR, PAKISTAN MUST TRANSFORM SURPLUS ENERGY INTO DIGITAL FIREPOWER, USING BITCOIN MINING AS A STRATEGIC ASSET TO FORTIFY ECONOMIC DEFENSES.



Dr. Farrukh Saleem

The Cold War (1947-1991) defined global power through a tense 44-year standoff, unveiling a lethal triad: intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear-powered submarines, and

strategic heavy bombers. These advancements, paired with stealth technology and hardened silos, cast a shadow of mutually assured destruction over the world.

IN THIS 'NEW COLD WAR,' STRENGTH IS MEASURED NOT ONLY IN MEGATONS BUT INCREASINGLY IN MEGAWATTS AND COMPUTATIONAL CAPACITY, WITH BITCOIN MINING AND BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY EMERGING AS VITAL TOOLS TO SECURE ECONOMIC FRONTS.

Fast forward to 2025, and the battlespace has evolved. While kinetic dominance—rooted in firepower and physical force—remains a critical pillar of national defense, it now shares the stage with a digital theater where cyber operations and financial supremacy hold sway. In this 'New Cold War,' strength is measured not only in megatons but increasingly in megawatts and computational capacity, with Bitcoin mining and blockchain technology emerging as vital tools to secure economic fronts.

TRUMP'S "CRYPTO CAPITAL," PUTIN'S EMBRACE OF BITCOIN, AND CHINA'S PUSH FOR A DIGITAL YUAN ALL SIGNAL THAT FINANCIAL SOVEREIGNTY IS THE NEW BATTLEFIELD.

Is the modern battlefield transcending traditional warfare? While mass and maneuver, logistics, and rapid troop deployments remain vital pillars of military strategy, a new reality is emerging. Dominance increasingly depends on mastering digital networks and decentralized systems, where cryptographic security yields significant influence. Pakistan, weighed down by a USD 133 billion external debt and a fragile USD 11 billion in State Bank reserves—barely covering two months of imports—faces an economic siege. As International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts waver amid shifting global alliances, Pakistan possesses a strategic asset: 11,519 MW of operational hydropower capacity, a latent force poised for deployment in this digital contest.

Bitcoin is a decentralized, cryptographic "munition" in the new cold war's digital theater. Bitcoin is a weapon that disrupts enemy financial encirclement. Bitcoin secures strategic economic flanks. Bitcoin delivers precision strikes against centralized monetary control. Bitcoin's cryptographic security (256-bit keys) is an impregnable bunker. Bitcoin resists cyber-attacks that cripple centralized grids. Bitcoin is not just a currency; it's a force multiplier to outmaneuver adversaries in a borderless battlefield.

Like a Stinger missile toppling a chopper, Bitcoin's

decentralized blockchain topples dollar hegemony. As a tank column breaches fortified lines, Bitcoin's decentralized ledger overruns monetary monopolies. Like a cruise missile striking a command bunker, Bitcoin's blockchain obliterates dollar-centric control. Think of Bitcoin's hash rate as artillery range. Envision Bitcoin's hash rate as the thrust of a tank's cannon volley. Think of Bitcoin mining as a state-led, military-aligned weapon in the "New Cold War".

Consider Bhutan, 2,072 km from Pakistan. This Himalayan nation leverages its hydroelectric surplus to mine up to 15 Bitcoins daily, amassing over 13,000 BTC—worth USD 1 billion, nearly 30 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP). Bhutan has turned power into prosperity. On March 4, 2025, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko directed his Energy Minister to follow suit, tapping surplus electricity for Bitcoin mining. Pakistan, with 11,519 MW of operational hydroelectric capacity, is primed for a similar move. By dedicating just 900 MW, we could mine 20 Bitcoins daily, generating USD 700 million annually—a strategic reserve to reinforce our monetary perimeter.

DOMINANCE INCREASINGLY DEPENDS ON MASTERING DIGITAL NETWORKS AND DECENTRALIZED SYSTEMS, WHERE CRYPTOGRAPHIC SECURITY WIELDS SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE.

Beyond hydropower, Pakistan's untapped resources—150 shut-in gas wells, 70 orphaned wells, the Gharo-Keti Bandar wind corridor, and the Thar Coalfields—offer additional firepower. A military-led operation could secure these assets, channeling their output into Bitcoin mining to fortify our economic defenses. The infrastructure is straightforward: high-efficiency Application-Specific Integrated Circuits (ASIC) miners, cooling systems, and power distribution upgrades, all deployable at strategic sites like Tarbela, Ghazi-Barotha, and Neelum-Jhelum, where military oversight ensures operational integrity.

In the escalating 'New Cold War,' Pakistan with its 11,519 MW of hydropower and untapped energy reserves offer a strategic edge in the digital theater, where Bitcoin mining and blockchain technology are redefining power. By harnessing these assets, Pakistan can transform megawatts into economic resilience, countering financial encirclement with decentralized might. ■

The writer is an eminent analyst who regularly contributes for national and international print and electronic media.
X: @SaleemFarrukh

THE NEW SILICON VALLEY?

China's
Unstoppable
Rise in
Global
Science

CHINA'S RAPID ASCENT IN SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION AND INNOVATION IS RESHAPING GLOBAL LEADERSHIP, WITH ITS RESEARCHERS NOW OUTPACING THE U.S. IN KEY METRICS OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT.



Dr. Gulzar Ahmed

A

comprehensive survey of over 18,000 universities globally establishes Chinese universities as the world leaders in teaching hard sciences. China now has 29 percent of the world's scientists, surpassing the U.S., which had 28 percent last year.

Spurred by these momentous findings, I recall an article I published in 2012, projecting China's rise to global dominance in scientific education and power by 2050. Access to the English language would be a major factor driving the Chinese to surpass the U.S. beyond 2050.

Reflecting on my firsthand experience at Stanford University during the 1980s—when it had just sparked the digital revolution in Silicon Valley—I could easily foresee it as the impending future led by Silicon Valley. At the time, however, China had yet to emerge in my view.

At the time, I believed that technological breakthroughs could not originate in China without a strong foundation in the language of technology. With that in mind, I strongly suggested that China should mass-recruit English teachers to enhance proficiency in the language while striving to catch up in scientific knowledge.

THE OVERWHELMING ADVANTAGE ENJOYED BY CHINA IN ITS VAST NUMBER OF HARDWORKING PEOPLE, COUPLED WITH ITS SIGNIFICANT ADVANCEMENTS IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH, POINTS TO A MUCH BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE MOST POPULOUS NATION ON EARTH.

Reflecting on my Stanford days in the 1980s, I recall my firsthand experience with Chinese scholars. In my MS class in Petroleum Engineering, there was a Chinese American student who had come from UT Austin. He was very social and outgoing. I observed that, while he was not particularly intellectually driven, he compensated with his assertive social skills.

At the time, I had returned to my studies after a gap and was struggling to find my footing. However, I had a uniquely diverse academic background, having earned multiple talent scholarships. Our professor, the head of the Petroleum Engineering department, assigned us an exciting project that required developing a mathematical model and applying computing skills to analyze the results.

Chang, a Chinese American classmate from UT Austin, was quick to partner with me. While he didn't seem particularly driven academically, he made up for it with his strong social skills. As we worked on the week-long assignment, I had no difficulty creating a competitive mathematical model—it felt like the more straightforward part to me. Chang, however, eagerly took on the computing aspect.

When we presented our work, the professor showcased our results to the class, commending the quality of our joint effort. In the end, we received the highest evaluation for our project.

I now move to another senior Chinese student who has joined Stanford University for his PhD in petroleum engineering. Realizing his language difficulty, he pursued experimental research and built a clever bridge. Fred was on his work bridge most of the working time. A very committed and industrious scholar, Fred always looked devoted to his work. Stanford University Petroleum Research Institute made me the Research Group Leader of projects, including Fred's research work. I had to follow his work creatively, projecting it to the petroleum industry. In this role, I had to know and understand Fred's work and its potential to impact the industry positively. It was a case of the Opposite nature to that of Chang I had mentioned earlier.

I had drawn my conclusions from my extensive experience and observations from my widespread

experience at Stanford in projecting the rise of China by 2050. It is only 2025, a good quarter. A century earlier, an international ranking came out with a report on teaching science. This report places China ahead of the U.S. in teaching science in universities in terms of the number of patents granted, the ranking number of research scholars, and the number of published papers. My visualized fears of language difficulty are shrinking faster than I had visualized while writing that seminal article.

The overwhelming advantage enjoyed by China in its vast number of hardworking people, coupled with its significant advancements in scientific research, points to a much brighter future for the most populous nation on Earth. This progress is further reinforced by the increasing number of high-achieving scientists and the growing volume of patents granted to Chinese universities.

The factors behind this remarkable development are a topic worthy of deeper exploration in a future article.

One key factor contributing to this rapid scientific advancement is China's long-standing practice of engaging with scientific knowledge in a foreign language. Due to this age-old approach, the Chinese people have been able to catch up with global scientific developments at an astonishing speed.

The second point I want to highlight is the role of language in explaining scientific discoveries. As more scientific breakthroughs are described in the Chinese language, the ability to articulate complex scientific concepts in Chinese continues to improve, enriching the language itself in the process.

It may well be that the Freds of the future will rise to lead the world! Who can set a definitive timeframe for this, especially when I was not entirely accurate in my earlier prediction?

One thing is certain: the world will continue to learn to respect China as a rising giant. While it is beneficial to embrace the emerging knowledge and innovations coming from China, the true path forward lies not only in competition but also in shared progress. The future of global advancement depends on the collective wisdom of all nations, working together to address the pressing challenges of our time. ■

The author, who holds a PhD from Stanford University, has served as the Chairman/CEO of OGDCL, NEPRA, and OGRA, as well as the Federal Secretary of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources. Additionally, he has worked as the COO of Pakistan Petroleum and as a Consultant for Mari Petroleum Company Limited. E-mail: gulfrazahmed@gmail.com

Connecting the Unconnected

PAKSAT's Satellite Internet Expands Pakistan's Digital Frontier

PAKISTAN'S NEW HTS SATELLITE INTERNET, POWERED BY PAKSAT-MM1, IS BRIDGING THE NATION'S DIGITAL DIVIDE, UNLOCKING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, AND ENSURING SECURE, HIGH-SPEED CONNECTIVITY FOR EVEN THE REMOTEST REGIONS.



Muhammad Omer

PAKSAT's High Throughput Satellite (HTS) Internet service is bringing high-speed connectivity to Pakistan's most remote regions, offering a reliable digital lifeline that fuels economic growth and strengthens national security.

In an era where internet access is a fundamental necessity, more than half of Pakistan's population—54.3 percent—remains without high-speed internet. Decades of investment in terrestrial infrastructure, including over 55,000 base transceiver stations and 150,000 kilometers of fiber-optic networks, have yet to bridge the gap. Vast stretches of the country remain unconnected, cutting millions off from economic, educational, and technological opportunities.

IN AN ERA WHERE INTERNET ACCESS IS A FUNDAMENTAL NECESSITY, MORE THAN HALF OF PAKISTAN'S POPULATION—54.3 PERCENT—REMAINS WITHOUT HIGH-SPEED INTERNET. DECADES OF INVESTMENT IN TERRESTRIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, INCLUDING OVER 55,000 BASE TRANSCEIVER STATIONS AND 150,000 KILOMETERS OF FIBER-OPTIC NETWORKS, HAVE YET TO BRIDGE THE GAP.

PAKSAT's HTS service is stepping in to change that, extending fast and reliable internet to the farthest corners of the country, ensuring that no region is left behind in the digital age.

Pakistan's government is advancing its vision of digital empowerment through cutting-edge information and communications technology (ICT) initiatives. At the heart of this effort is the HTS Internet service, powered by the Pakistan Multi-Mission Communication Satellite (PAKSAT-MM1), which is set to revolutionize connectivity across the country—particularly in its most remote and underserved regions.

In a strategic move to reduce reliance on foreign Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite networks, Pakistan's National Space Agency has introduced HTS as a homegrown alternative. Unlike LEO-based systems—such as Starlink, OneWeb, and Amazon's Kuiper—PAKSAT's HTS service operates via an advanced geostationary satellite, ensuring expansive, uninterrupted coverage nationwide. This positions PAKSAT-MM1 as a transformative solution for bridging Pakistan's digital divide, reaching areas where terrestrial infrastructure has struggled to deliver.

Pakistan's HTS Internet is doing more than just connecting people—it is fueling the country's growing

tech sector. As startups, freelancers, and IT hubs expand at an unprecedented pace, even the most remote regions are becoming part of this digital transformation. From rugged mountains to vast oceans, from military installations to border regions, PAKSAT's HTS service is delivering secure and reliable connectivity where traditional networks falter.

A Game-Changer for Pakistan

The HTS Internet Service offered by PAKSAT-MM1 is a beacon of hope for rural and remote areas where traditional internet infrastructure is either inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. Compact and efficient HTS terminals (measuring 0.98–1.2 meters) enable communities to access broadband services through easy and quick deployment, without requiring extensive ground infrastructure.

PAKSAT's HTS service, with high data rates of up to 160 Mbps and targeted beams, ensures consistent internet quality, making it ideal for telecommunications, e-commerce, and e-learning, hence empowering individuals and businesses by providing high-speed internet access, driving economic growth, and bridging the digital divide.

Beyond personal use, HTS Internet serves as a lifeline for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), including IT and telecom service providers. Traditionally, satellite communication services have been deployed as a backup for ICT infrastructure and cellular backhauling. However, with the advent of HTS, consumers can now directly benefit from satellite internet anywhere and everywhere. Initially utilized by government and enterprise sectors, PAKSAT HTS is set to expand to the general public soon. While communities stand to benefit, entrepreneurs can access global markets, promote local products, and scale their businesses, making them key contributors to Pakistan's economy.

A Substitute for LEO Constellations: PAKSAT's Edge

LEO satellites promise low latency and high-speed connectivity, but their implementation faces several challenges. These include the requirement for a constellation of satellites to ensure adequate coverage, the need for expensive tracking terminals due to complex handovers between satellites, weak reception in rugged terrains caused by varying view angles, and network congestion.

In contrast, PAKSAT-MM1's HTS service offers nationwide coverage with just one satellite, significantly reducing capital costs for both the Government of Pakistan and end users compared to traditional C-band and Ku-band VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal) systems.

As a state-owned satellite, PAKSAT-MM1 holds a competitive edge as a viable alternative to global service providers, ensuring data privacy and security—something international LEO service

providers cannot guarantee. Additionally, PAKSAT's technical support teams are available 24/7, stationed in major cities across the country to cater to the needs of geographically dispersed customers. Foreign LEO competitors may lack on-ground technical support, making PAKSAT a more reliable service provider and the preferred choice for users.

Innovative Beginning: PAKSAT's Journey of Excellence

PAKSAT's journey began in 2011 with the launch of PAKSAT-1R, laying the foundation for Pakistan's satellite communications. Over the years, it has evolved to keep pace with the demands of an increasingly digital world. The launch of PAKSAT-MM1 in May 2024 marked a significant leap forward, introducing advanced C, Ku, Ka, and L-band (SBAS) capabilities to support a wide range of applications across Asia, Africa, and Europe.

With more than 120 TV channels distributed via its network, PAKSAT has emerged as a vital force in media and communications, strengthening Pakistan's presence in the global satellite industry. Its commitment to technological advancement aligns with the Digital Pakistan initiative, bridging the divide between urban centers and remote regions through seamless satellite connectivity.

PAKSAT's HTS technology has the power to bridge the digital divide, enhance education and healthcare, transform industries like agriculture and disaster management, and drive economic growth—ushering in a new era of nationwide connectivity and progress.

- **Bridging Gaps in Education and Healthcare.** PAKSAT's HTS technology is more than just high-speed connectivity—it's a catalyst for progress. In education, it powers virtual classrooms, e-libraries, and online learning platforms, ensuring that students in remote areas have the same opportunities as those in urban centers. With HTS, teachers in far-flung schools can access professional training and digital resources, narrowing the educational divide. In healthcare, HTS internet enables telemedicine, linking rural patients with specialists in major cities. Real-time consultations and remote diagnostics bring critical medical expertise to underserved communities, transforming healthcare accessibility. By revolutionizing education and healthcare, PAKSAT's HTS service is shaping a more connected and equitable future.
- **Transforming Agriculture, Disaster Response, and Beyond.** PAKSAT's HTS service is unlocking new possibilities across industries, from agriculture to emergency management. For farmers, HTS-powered connectivity can provide real-time weather updates, crop health monitoring, and market insights, enhancing productivity and food security.



PAKSAT HTS User Terminal (0.98m | Supports Speeds up to 160 Mbps)

In disaster-prone areas, HTS can play a critical role in emergency response, enabling rapid coordination of relief efforts and life-saving operations. Beyond this, the technology can support tourism, mining, oil exploration, defense, maritime operations, aviation, and surveillance—redefining connectivity across sectors. Keeping the above in view, PAKSAT has signed an agreement with the Forest, Wildlife, and Environment Department to provide satellite internet services, ensuring digital transformation in their offices in Gilgit-Baltistan.

- **Driving Economic Growth Through Digital Inclusion.** As Pakistan embraces the digital revolution, HTS Internet is fueling an e-commerce boom. Remote communities can now connect with online marketplaces, linking small businesses to national and global buyers. By expanding digital access, PAKSAT's HTS service is fostering entrepreneurship, creating new economic opportunities, and bridging the urban-rural divide.

HTS and the Future of Digital Pakistan

PAKSAT's HTS internet service is a reflection of Pakistan's potential to lead in space technology and digital connectivity. By providing high-speed internet to millions, PAKSAT is not just competing globally but also setting a benchmark for inclusive growth.

As Pakistan embraces this transformative technology, the vision of a connected and prosperous nation is becoming a reality. More than just an internet service, PAKSAT HTS is a gateway to opportunity, progress, and a brighter future for all.

The ripple effects of HTS connectivity are evident, from urban IT hubs to rural farmlands. As more sectors integrate satellite-enabled solutions, Pakistan's journey toward a sustainable digital future accelerates, paving the way for future generations to drive innovation and progress. ■

The author is an engineer, as well as an IT and technical expert. He can be reached at eng.umer@gmail.com

SHIFTING SEZS FROM A REAL ESTATE MODEL TO A CLASSIC SEZ MODEL

Implications for Industrial Growth and Economic Development in Pakistan



STRATEGIC POLICY SHIFTS BY THE SPECIAL INVESTMENT FACILITATION COUNCIL (SIFC) HAVE REDEFINED PAKISTAN'S SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES (SEZS), TRANSITIONING FROM A REAL ESTATE MODEL TO A DYNAMIC ECONOMIC HUB FRAMEWORK, ENHANCING INVESTOR ACCESSIBILITY, INDUSTRIAL GROWTH, AND NATIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.



Lieutenant Colonel Rizwan Mir (R)

The effort to optimize Special Economic Zones (SEZs) is among the top priorities of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). Over the past one and a half years, among other success stories, the re-invigoration of SEZs has been a significant achievement for SIFC. Initially operating under a real estate model, these zones have now been transformed into a classic SEZ model to enhance their utility and facilitate investors, industrialists, and entrepreneurs in developing them into economic hubs.

In this article, I will examine the current state of SEZs and the strategic policy changes that have positively impacted key industries. I will conclude by outlining the challenges and opportunities in revitalizing SEZs and comparing them with existing successful models.

The Special Economic Zones Act of 2012 was promulgated to strengthen Pakistan's industrial base. Its primary objective was to facilitate domestic and foreign investors by allowing the duty-free import of machinery to promote local manufacturing. The incentives and special exemptions also included a ten-year income tax holiday for zone developers to sell as zone enterprises.

The concept is based on the Chinese model of developing a complete ecosystem around the industry. To align with the technological, infrastructure, and operational requirements of conducting business with developed economies, the SEZ initiative coincided with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

(CPEC)—a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In addition to independent SEZs, Pakistan identified several zones along the CPEC route where economic activity could be undertaken.

The establishment of SEZs was a proactive measure to maximize the potential benefits of CPEC. However, a significant flaw in the initial framework hindered their success. The zones were designed based on a real estate model, requiring investors to purchase land before developing infrastructure and initiating economic activities.

Despite government efforts to incentivize investors, SEZs have struggled to attract businesses due to the inherent limitations of this model. Investors were first required to acquire large plots of land—an expensive undertaking—before investing further in infrastructure development, which placed an additional financial burden. Whatever remained was then allocated to business operations, including the costly import of machinery and equipment. A cost-benefit analysis often led potential investors to abandon the idea, despite tax holidays, exemptions from customs duties, and other incentives.

For over a decade, a state of stagnation persisted between the government and investors, with no viable solution in sight. Upon the establishment of SIFC, the matter was referred to the council to break the deadlock. It is often said that complex problems sometimes have simple solutions, and SIFC devised a practical approach: leasing land to investors for 30 years (extendable).

The lease amount was set at an affordable rate,



allowing investors to focus their capital on business development rather than land acquisition. With reduced expenditure on land, infrastructure construction, energy costs (only 9 cents per unit), and the import of machinery and equipment, investors can now establish and expand businesses with greater ease—creating new opportunities for entrepreneurs. This strategic policy shift has opened investment avenues for both domestic and foreign investors to develop SEZ-based enterprises.

The development of SEZs has undergone several evolutionary stages since the inception of the concept. With the passage and subsequent promulgation of the 2012 SEZ Act, three SEZs were established in 2015 under the DSEZ Ordinance. The following year, relevant amendments were introduced to integrate SEZs into Pakistan's customs territory, enabling domestic businesses to operate within these zones. In 2018, the scope of the SEZ Act was further expanded to include the service sector.

By 2019, as the system matured, the government took proactive steps to provide utilities, approve six new SEZs, and reconstitute SEZ Committees to accelerate the SEZ colonization process. In 2020, the SEZ incentive package was revised, and eight additional SEZs were approved. However, the most transformative measure that facilitated SEZ growth was the launch of the SEZ MIS Module, which digitized the entire system and integrated it with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP).

By 2021, according to data published by the Board of Investment (BoI), 22 SEZs had been established, including four dedicated to CPEC, three private SEZs,

and a Science and Technology Park set up by NUST in Islamabad.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21, the 21 economic zones approved by the BoI span over 14,000 acres across the country, as detailed in the table below:

Year	Name of SEZ
FY 2014	Bin Qasim Industrial Park (BQIP), Karachi, Sindh
	Khairpur Special Economic Zone (KSEZ), Khaipur, Sindh
	Korangi Creek Industrial Park (KCIP), Karachi, Sindh
FY 2016	Hattar Special Economic Zone (HSEZ), Haripur, KP
	M3 Industrial City (M3IC), Faisalabad, Punjab
	Value Addition City (VAC), Faisalabad, Punjab
FY 2019	Oil Village SEZ (OVSEZ), Rawalpindi, Punjab
	Rachna Industrial Park (RIP), Sheikhupura, Punjab
	Rahimyar Khan Industrial Estate (RIE), Rahimyar Khan, Punjab
	Rashakai Special Economic Zone (RSEZ), Nowshera, KP
	Vehari Industrial Estate (VIE), Vehari, Punjab
	Bhalwal Industrial Estate (BIE), Sargodha, Punjab
	Bostan Special Economic Zone (BSEZ), Pishin, Balochistan
	Hub Sepcial Economic Zone (HUBSEZ), Lasbela, Balochistan
	Naushera Feroz Industrial park (NFIP), Naushero Feroz, Sindh
FY 2021	Allama Iqbal Industrial City (AIIC), Faisalabad, Punjab
	National Science and Technology Park (NSTP), Islamabad, ICT
	JW-SEZ China-Pakistan SEC (JWSEZ), Lahore, Punjab
	Quaid-e-Azam Business Park (QABP), Sheikhupura, Punjab
	Service Long March Tyres SEZ (SLSEZ), Jamshoro Sindh
	Siddiqsons Tinplate SEZ (STSEZ), Lasbela, Balochistan

As mentioned earlier, the advent of digitization has significantly boosted investment in the activation of zone enterprises. Combined with the revision of the incentive package, the classic SEZ model has become an attractive option for both local and foreign investors. However, several challenges must be

addressed to maximize the program's benefits for the country:

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SEZS WAS A PROACTIVE MEASURE TO MAXIMIZE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF CPEC. HOWEVER, A SIGNIFICANT FLAW IN THE INITIAL FRAMEWORK HINDERED THEIR SUCCESS. THE ZONES WERE DESIGNED BASED ON A REAL ESTATE MODEL, REQUIRING INVESTORS TO PURCHASE LAND BEFORE DEVELOPING INFRASTRUCTURE AND INITIATING ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES.

- The foremost concern is providing safety and security to both local and foreign investors. While substantial efforts are being made in this regard, the recent surge in terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan is deterring foreign investors, who seek foolproof security measures. However, keeping investors—especially foreigners—confined to limited areas could negatively impact investment prospects.
- Due to recent international reports highlighting Pakistan's lowest rankings in human rights, justice, and terrorism, it is even more crucial to address these challenges if meaningful results are to be achieved. As the country's hidden potential comes to light, Pakistan is gaining prominence on the global stage. The key requirement is to strengthen institutions and ensure their transparent and effective functioning.
- The SEZ Act addresses coordination issues between the federal and provincial governments. However, significant work remains to achieve seamless collaboration. The authorities and committees established for horizontal and vertical coordination are yielding positive results. SIFC itself is playing a vital role in providing a one-stop platform for all stakeholders on SEZ-related matters.
- To foster a business-friendly environment and attract investors, the incentives and exemptions granted to them should be implemented in letter and spirit. Additionally, coordination among various stakeholders must be enhanced to resolve issues before they escalate.
- To make the SEZ concept more comprehensive, different sectors related to SEZs should be integrated to create synergy and maximize benefits. Just as the IT, textile, petroleum, and automobile sectors have been incorporated into SEZs, agri-malls should also be integrated in a similar manner.

There is a prevailing negative sentiment among the masses that SEZs are detrimental to the country's



economic growth. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also been cited as stating that Pakistan should impose restrictions on the establishment of SEZs, as they may become unsustainable due to the significant investment requirements and the substantial subsidies provided to investors in the form of tax holidays, customs reliefs, and other benefits.

Pakistan stands at a critical crossroads in determining its future—whether to remain dependent on and subjugated to international pressures, shaping policies to appease global organizations, or to assert itself as an independent nation, taking control of its own future. The decision must be made based on what serves the country's best interests.

The SEZ model is a highly profitable system that can yield remarkable results if implemented in true letter and spirit. Pakistan is not the only country adopting this model; many nations are developing their economies based on a similar framework. The most notable example in the region is China, which has steadily grown into a global economic powerhouse by leveraging the SEZ model. Almost every country has established such zones, enclaves, and territories that offer special incentives to investors and businesses, ultimately contributing to economic development.

Pakistan must take decisive measures to stabilize its economy. While indicators suggest that the country is steadily progressing toward prosperity, the prevailing security situation presents challenges in attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and fostering industrial growth. However, with unwavering determination and a relentless push toward economic progress, we can achieve remarkable success. It is high time for Pakistanis to unite as a nation and work in harmony to steer the country out of financial instability. ■

The author is a PhD scholar in Management Sciences with extensive experience in Project Management.

The Future of Dogfights?

THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN FIGHTER JETS COULD ALTER MILITARY STRATEGY WORLDWIDE.



Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Arslan Qadeer (R)

In the ever-evolving theater of modern warfare, air superiority often determines strategic dominance. With reports of China's development of sixth-generation fighter jets making global headlines, the term "generation" has become a focal point in discussions about military technology. But what does "generation" mean when applied to fighter jets, and why is the concept crucial to understanding the progression of aerial combat capabilities?

This piece explores the defining characteristics of fighter jet generations, the benchmarks that distinguish each evolutionary stage, and what the emergence of sixth-generation aircraft could mean for global security.

THE FIRST GENERATION OF FIGHTER JETS MARKED THE TRANSITION FROM PROPELLER-DRIVEN AIRCRAFT TO JET PROPULSION.

What is a Fighter Jet Generation?

The term "generation" refers to a classification system that groups fighter aircraft based on their technological sophistication, capabilities, and the era in which they were developed. Each generation reflects advancements in aerodynamics, propulsion, avionics, weaponry, and survivability.

This framework provides a historical roadmap of fighter jet evolution, from the piston-engine planes of World War II to today's stealth-enabled, networked platforms. Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of each generation, the classification is broadly accepted by military analysts and defense experts.

The Evolution of Fighter Jet Generations

- **First Generation: The Dawn of Jet-Powered Flight (1940s-1950s).** The first generation of

THE SECOND GENERATION USHERED IN THE AGE OF SUPERSONIC FLIGHT. AIRCRAFT LIKE THE MIG-21 AND THE F-104 STARFIGHTER FEATURED SWEPT-WING DESIGNS AND JET ENGINES CAPABLE OF EXCEEDING THE SPEED OF SOUND.

fighter jets marked the transition from propeller-driven aircraft to jet propulsion. Early models, such as the Messerschmitt Me 262 and the F-86 Sabre, were rudimentary by modern standards but represented a significant leap in speed and combat capabilities.

These jets were primarily designed for air-to-air combat, with little emphasis on versatility. Dogfights still relied on machine guns and cannons, reflecting the tactics of earlier eras.

- **Second Generation: Supersonic Flight and Air-to-Air Missiles (1950s-1960s).** The second generation ushered in the age of supersonic flight. Aircraft like the MiG-21 and the F-104 Starfighter featured swept-wing designs and jet engines capable of exceeding the speed of sound. This era also saw the introduction of rudimentary radar systems and the first air-to-air missiles, such as the AIM-9 Sidewinder. However, the technology remained imperfect—early missiles had limited accuracy, and pilots still relied heavily on close-range dogfighting.

- **Third Generation: Multirole Capabilities and Advanced Avionics (1960s-1970s).** By the 1960s, fighter jets evolved beyond single-purpose platforms. Aircrafts like the F-4 Phantom II and later MiG-21 variants introduced:
 - Multirole capabilities, enabling both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions.
 - Enhanced radar and avionics, improving

SIXTH-GENERATION JETS ARE EXPECTED TO INCORPORATE AI FOR DECISION-MAKING, THREAT ANALYSIS, AND EVEN AUTONOMOUS OPERATIONS.

target acquisition and situational awareness.

- Greater speed and maneuverability, allowing for more agile combat performance.

The Vietnam War exposed the shortcomings of early missile technology, leading to a renewed emphasis on pilot training and traditional dogfighting skills.

- **Fourth Generation: Maneuverability and Versatility (1970s-1990s).** Fourth-generation fighters, such as the F-15 Eagle, Su-27 Flanker, and F-16 Fighting Falcon, prioritized agility and multirole functionality. These aircraft featured:
 - Superior aerodynamic performance, including high thrust-to-weight ratios.
 - Advanced radar and targeting systems for improved situational awareness.
 - Expanded weapons payloads, including precision-guided munitions.

The focus shifted toward integrating aircraft into larger battle networks, laying the groundwork for the digital battlefield. This generation also introduced fly-by-wire control systems, enabling unprecedented maneuverability.

THE ADVENT OF SIXTH-GENERATION FIGHTER JETS IS POISED TO RESHAPE THE LANDSCAPE OF MODERN AIR COMBAT, WITH NATIONS AT THE FOREFRONT OF THIS TECHNOLOGY GAINING A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE IN DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE.

- **4.5 Generation: Bridging the Gap.** The so-called "4.5 generation" emerged in the 1990s as a transitional stage. Fighters like the Eurofighter Typhoon and the Su-35 featured:
 - Active electronically scanned array (AESA) radars for improved target tracking and engagement.
 - Reduced radar cross-sections for limited stealth capabilities.
 - Enhanced data links to support network-centric warfare.

While not full-fledged fifth-generation fighters, these aircraft remain highly capable and cost-effective solutions for modern air forces.

- **Fifth Generation: Stealth and**

Network-Centric Warfare (2000s-Present).

The fifth generation of fighter jets is defined by stealth technology, advanced avionics, and seamless integration into networked battle environments. Aircraft like the F-22 Raptor, F-35 Lightning II, and China's J-20 exemplify this category. Key features include:

- Stealth design to minimize radar and infrared signatures.
- Supercruise capability, allowing sustained supersonic flight without afterburners.
- Advanced sensor fusion for unparalleled situational awareness.

Fifth-generation jets are not just platforms; they serve as nodes in a broader combat network, capable of sharing real-time data with other assets, such as drones and ground forces.

- **The Sixth Generation: A Quantum Leap?** As reports of China's sixth-generation fighter jets surface, the world is left speculating about what this new era of aircraft might entail. While details remain classified, defense analysts have identified several likely characteristics:

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration.** Sixth-generation jets are expected to incorporate AI for decision-making, threat analysis, and even autonomous operations. AI could enhance pilot performance by managing complex tasks and providing real-time tactical guidance.
- **Unmanned Capability.** The distinction between manned and unmanned platforms may blur. These aircraft are likely to feature optional manning, allowing for both autonomous and piloted operations depending on mission requirements.
- **Hypersonic Speeds.** Advancements in propulsion technology may enable these jets to reach hypersonic speeds (Mach 5+), making them nearly impossible to intercept.
- **Enhanced Stealth and Survivability.** Beyond radar stealth, sixth-generation aircraft may incorporate advanced materials and active camouflage to minimize electromagnetic and thermal signatures.
- **Directed-Energy Weapons.** Lasers and other directed-energy weapons could become standard, capable of neutralizing incoming threats such as missiles and drones.
- **Swarm Warfare.** These jets may function as command hubs for swarms of autonomous drones, significantly amplifying their combat effectiveness.
- **Global Power Projection.** Extended operational ranges and advanced refueling

capabilities will allow these aircraft to conduct missions worldwide with minimal logistical support.

THE EVOLUTION OF FIGHTER JETS IS A STORY OF RELENTLESS TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT, EACH GENERATION REDEFINING THE NATURE OF AERIAL COMBAT.

The Strategic Implications of Sixth-Generation Fighters

The advent of sixth-generation fighter jets is poised to reshape the landscape of modern air combat, with nations at the forefront of this technology gaining a strategic advantage in defense and deterrence.

China's progress in this domain reflects its commitment to advancing military aviation, contributing to a broader shift in global air power capabilities. If Beijing successfully fields a sixth-generation fighter alongside other leading nations, it could mark a significant evolution in aerial warfare and regional security dynamics.

For countries such as Russia, India, and key European powers, the pursuit of comparable advancements will likely accelerate. Collaborative efforts, including NATO-led development programs, may become increasingly important as nations seek to keep pace with next-generation military aviation.

The development of sixth-generation fighter jets presents both opportunities and challenges. While these advancements promise to enhance air combat capabilities, they also come with certain complexities:

- **High Development Costs.** The sophistication of these platforms requires substantial investment, which may influence procurement strategies.
- **Technological Hurdles.** Innovations in AI, stealth, and hypersonic technology demand rigorous testing and refinement, potentially leading to delays.
- **Ethical Considerations.** The integration of AI and autonomous systems raises important discussions about human oversight and operational decision-making.

The evolution of fighter jets is a story of relentless technological advancement, each generation redefining the nature of aerial combat. From the rudimentary jets of the 1940s to today's sophisticated warplanes, these aircraft have transformed modern warfare, pushing the limits of speed, stealth, and firepower.

Now, with reports of China's progress in developing sixth-generation fighters, the next phase of this

evolution is taking shape. These aircraft promise unparalleled capabilities—integrating AI, advanced stealth, and hypersonic speeds—but also raise complex strategic, financial, and ethical considerations.

Beyond the hardware, the race for next-generation air superiority signals a deeper shift in global influence. As nations invest in these transformative technologies, the contest is no longer just about military might—it is about shaping the future balance of power in an era where innovation itself becomes the ultimate weapon. ■

The writer is a retired cavalry officer, historian, and regular contributor to *The Nation*.

DEPUTY MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND COMMANDER OF THE ADF AND AIR FORCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN CALLS ON THE CJCSC

On February 27, 2025, the Deputy Minister of Defense and Commander of the Air Defense Forces (ADF) and Air Force of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Major General Burkhanov Akhmad Jamalovich, called on the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, NI (M), at Joint Staff Headquarters (JSHQ), Rawalpindi.

During the meeting, both sides discussed matters of bilateral strategic interest, with a particular focus on the evolving regional security situation. They also expressed a keen interest in strengthening bilateral military-to-military cooperation.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of the Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in the fight against terrorism.

Earlier, upon arrival at JSHQ, a smartly turned-out tri-services contingent presented a Guard of Honor to the visiting dignitary.



COMMANDER BAHRAIN NATIONAL GUARD CALLS ON CJCSC

On March 13, 2025, H.H. Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, called on Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, NI (M), at Joint Staff Headquarters (JSHQ), Rawalpindi.

During the meeting, both military leaders discussed the evolving regional environment and related security issues. Furthermore, they emphasized broadening the scope and depth of existing bilateral military engagements and cooperation between the two countries.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of the Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in the fight against terrorism.

Earlier, upon arrival at JSHQ, a smartly turned-out tri-services contingent presented a Guard of Honor to the visiting dignitary.



COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN CALLS ON COAS



On March 18, 2025, the Commander of the National Guard of the Kingdom of Bahrain, H.H. General Sheikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa, called on the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), at General Headquarters (GHQ).

During the meeting, both leaders discussed matters of mutual interest, the regional security landscape, and avenues for strengthening bilateral military cooperation. The COAS underscored the importance of enhanced collaboration in addressing shared security challenges and fostering peace and stability in the region.

The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of the Pakistan Armed Forces and commended their unwavering efforts in combating terrorism.

COAS' VISIT TO BANNU: STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND REAFFIRMING COMMITMENT TO COMBAT TERRORISM

COAS, General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), visited Bannu on March 6, 2025, following the foiled terrorist attack on Bannu Cantonment by *khwarij* on March 4, 2025.

During the visit, the COAS was briefed on ongoing operations and the overall security situation in the area. He also visited Combined Military Hospital (CMH) Bannu to inquire about the health and well-being of the injured soldiers, acknowledging their resilience and unwavering dedication.

The COAS commended the high morale and steadfast resolve of the troops, reaffirming that the Pakistan Army would continue to serve as a bulwark against terrorism to ensure the security and stability of the state.

The COAS expressed profound condolences to the families of the innocent civilians who lost their lives in this heinous and cowardly terrorist incident. He also assured that while the perpetrators were instantly neutralized by the valiant soldiers, the planners and facilitators of the dastardly attack would also be brought to justice soon, wherever they may be.



He underscored that the barbaric targeting of civilians, including children, women, and the elderly, exposed the true intentions of *khwarij* as enemies of Islam. Emphasizing the pivotal role of the local community, he reiterated that national unity is imperative in the fight against terrorism and assured that the Armed Forces would spare no effort in ensuring the safety and security of the people of Pakistan.

While addressing the troops, the COAS lauded their heroic actions, recognizing their swift and decisive response in neutralizing the attackers and thwarting their nefarious designs. He further stated that the fight against *khwarij* and their facilitators, acting at the behest of hostile elements, would continue until its logical conclusion.

The COAS highlighted that terrorist groups, including *Fitna Al-Khawarij* (FAK), continued to operate from Afghan soil against Pakistan. He underscored that the use of foreign weapons and equipment in recent terrorist attacks was clear evidence that Afghanistan remained a safe haven for such elements. He reaffirmed that no entity would be allowed to disrupt Pakistan's peace and stability.

Earlier, upon his arrival, the COAS was received by the Commander Peshawar Corps.



COAS VISITS BAHAWALPUR CANTONMENT, COMMENDS TROOPS' READINESS AND INAUGURATES KEY INITIATIVES



On March 1, 2025, COAS General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), visited Bahawalpur Cantonment where he was apprised about operational preparedness and training aspects of Bahawalpur Corps. While addressing officers and troops, he commended their unwavering dedication, high morale, and combat readiness. He reiterated that rigorous training remains the cornerstone of a soldier's professional development and must continue to be the defining attribute of the Pakistan Army in overcoming the challenges of modern warfare.

The COAS inaugurated the CMH Institute of Medical Sciences (CIMS), Innovista Cholistan, and the Integrated Combat Simulator Arena—pioneering initiatives aimed at advancing medical education, information technology, and combat readiness.

While at CIMS, he engaged with students from various universities across Bahawalpur, underscoring the Army's commitment to nurturing the nation's youth. COAS encouraged students to pursue academic excellence with dedication and equip themselves with the skills necessary to contribute meaningfully to national development. He lauded the pivotal role of the youth in shaping Pakistan's future and reaffirmed the Army's support for initiatives that empower young talent.

Earlier, upon his arrival, the COAS was received by the Commander Bahawalpur Corps.

COMMANDER BAHRAIN NATIONAL GUARD CALLS ON CAS



On March 13, 2025, Commander Bahrain National Guard, General Shaikh Mohammed Bin Isa Bin Salman Al Khalifa called on Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Air Chief Marshal (ACM) Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, during his visit to Air Headquarters (AHQ), Islamabad. During the meeting, several key areas of mutual interest focused on enhancing collaboration between the two Air Forces were discussed.

The CAS shared the broad contours of the PAF's modernization plan, including smart acquisitions from allied countries, infrastructure upgrades, and the revamping of training to address contemporary warfare challenges.

He highlighted that both countries share deep-rooted religious and historical ties, reflected in their unprecedented brotherly relations. He also reiterated his commitment to further strengthening bilateral military-to-military cooperation and collaboration in the training domain.

The CAS further stated, "Pakistan values its strong diplomatic, economic, and defense relationship with Bahrain, which is based on convergence on all important issues relating to regional peace, security, and stability."

The visiting dignitary praised the professionalism of PAF personnel and the exceptional progress made by the PAF over the years, particularly in the field of indigenization.

The Commander of the Bahrain National Guard expressed a keen desire to enhance Air Force-to-Air Force cooperation between the two countries. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration, he showed strong interest in the PAF's multi-domain capabilities to enhance the operational readiness of the Bahrain Air Force through shared knowledge and technology.

He also expressed interest in seeking PAF's assistance in establishing basic to tactical level training setups in emerging warfare domains, specifically focusing on space, cyber, and electronic warfare operations.

The dignitary also expressed a strong interest in procuring equipment from the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park (NASTP), reflecting Bahrain's goal of enhancing its technological capabilities and modernizing its defense infrastructure. He shared that his visit would be followed by a high-level visit by the Commander of the Bahrain Air Force for formal negotiations in areas of mutual interest.

Both dignitaries vowed to further strengthen cooperation in various fields, including training, emerging technologies, and mutual collaboration in the aviation industry.

Later, the visiting dignitary toured the National ISR & Integrated Air Operations Centre at Air Headquarters, where he was briefed on the operational capabilities of the PAF.

The meeting between the CAS and the Commander of the Bahrain National Guard signifies the resolute commitment of both countries to reinforcing their military partnership, fostering collaboration, and promoting robust bilateral relations.

ACTING SECRETARY OF DEFENSE SOUTH AFRICA VISITS AIR HEADQUARTERS

On March 17, 2025, a high-level defense delegation from the Republic of South Africa, led by Acting Secretary of Defense, Dr. Thobekile Gamede called on Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Pakistan Air Force (PAF), Air Chief Marshal (ACM), Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, at Air Headquarters (AHQ), Islamabad. The visit marked a significant step towards strengthening the enduring military ties between the two countries, focusing on areas of mutual interest and exploring new avenues of cooperation in the aviation industry.

During the meeting, CAS shared insight into various ongoing modernization projects of PAF's operational construct, force goals and plans for the force structure with a keen focus on future warfare. He emphasized the crucial role of the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park in bolstering self-reliance and driving regional defense innovations. The CAS also reiterated PAF's commitment to collaborating with the South African Air Force in military to military cooperation and the training domain.

Dr. Thobekile Gamede commended the professionalism and accomplishments of PAF, highlighting its success in the domains of indigenization and cutting-edge technological advancements. She expressed a strong desire to rebuild South African Air Force, seeking assistance from PAF for its modernization and servicing of critical equipment. The dignitary also conveyed an earnest interest in bolstering the existing cooperation between the Air Forces of both countries. This includes a specific request for increased collaborative efforts to revamp training setups, ranging from basic to tactical levels, across multiple warfare domains. The South African Acting Secretary of Defense was notably impressed by the PAF's multi-domain capabilities showcased during Exercise Indus Shield, which was attended by a South African Air Force delegation as observers. She highlighted that the successful execution of this exercise underscored the professional prowess and versatility of PAF in diverse operational environments. The South African delegation also articulated intentions to re-equip their Air Force and establish an industrial setup aligned with the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park being spearheaded by PAF.

The delegation also visited the National ISR & Integrated Air Operations Centre and PAF Cyber Command, where they received a detailed briefing on the PAF's operational capabilities.

The Acting Secretary of Defense of South Africa's visit to AHQ, Islamabad, is a testament to the strong commitment of both nations to further enhance their military partnership through continued dialogue and collaboration.



PAKISTAN ARMY AVIATION CONDUCTS AERIAL FIELD FIRE AT MUZAFFARGARH FIELD FIRING RANGES



Commander Southern Command and 2 Corps, Lieutenant General Ahsan Gulrez, HI (M), PoP, along with the General Officer Commanding (GOC) Army Aviation, visited Muzaffargarh Field Firing Ranges (MFFR) and witnessed the Aerial Field Fire 1st Half 2024 training of the Army Aviation Group.

Upon arrival, the Commander was briefed on the conduct modalities of the training. Afterwards, combat pilots of Army Aviation demonstrated various modes of flight and movement techniques, along with the use of different firing munitions.

At the end, Commander Southern Command and 2 Corps interacted with the pilots and appreciated their training standards and high morale.



PAKISTAN ARMY ORGANIZES FREE MEDICAL CAMP AT RURAL HEALTH CENTER LADHANA, DISTRICT LAYYAH

Under the auspices of Multan Corps, the Pakistan Army organized a free medical camp at Rural Health Center Ladhana, District Layyah, to provide essential healthcare services to the local population. A team of specialist military doctors, including experts in gynecology, cardiology, pediatrics, ENT, ophthalmology, psychology, and other medical fields, provided high-quality consultations and treatment.

Patients also received diagnostic tests and free medicines. A large number of children, elderly individuals, and women benefited from the camp. Local residents expressed their gratitude for this initiative, appreciating the Pakistan Army's continuous dedication to public welfare and its unwavering commitment to serving the nation.



VISIT OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF DIVISIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOWK AZAM, DISTRICT LAYYAH, TO MULTAN GARRISON

The students and faculty of Divisional Public School Chowk Azam, District Layyah, had an enriching and insightful experience spending a day with the Pakistan Army, where they were introduced to modern defense systems, military skills, and national security protocols.

During the visit, the students paid homage at the *Yadgar-e-Shuhada*, laid floral wreaths, and offered prayers for the elevated ranks of the national heroes. They received a comprehensive briefing on the working principles of radar systems, the Combat Efficiency Test, Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) warfare protection gear, and advanced firing techniques.

Describing the visit as a memorable and inspiring experience, the students expressed deep admiration for the professionalism and discipline of the Pakistan Army and took pride in knowing that their homeland is in safe hands. The teachers also praised the visit as a valuable learning opportunity, emphasizing its role in strengthening the bond between the Armed Forces and the public.

This visit reflected the Pakistan Army's unwavering commitment not only to national defense but also to nurturing military awareness and instilling patriotism in the younger generation. ■





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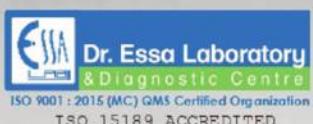
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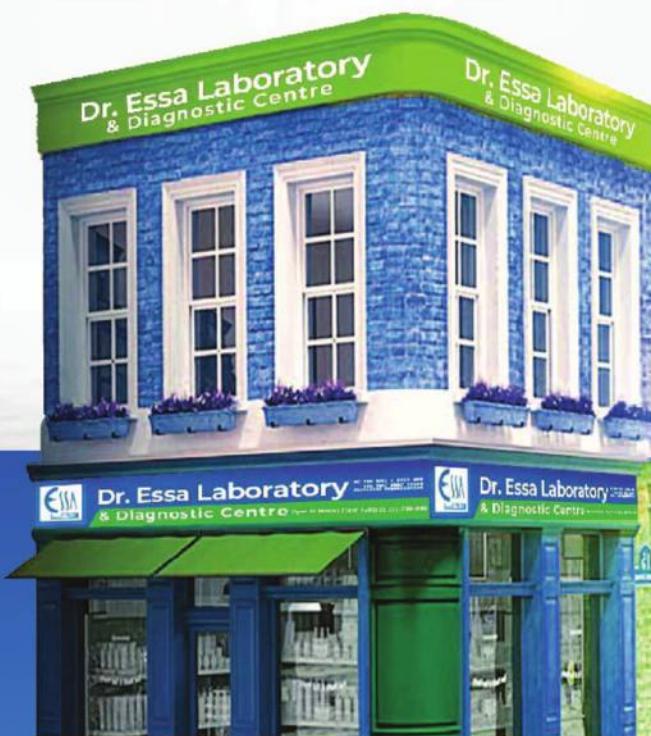
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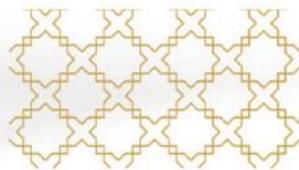
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Plot # IT-01-A3, Korangi Creek
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