

Fortnightly

# The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

15<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2025

ABC Certified

Gaza War

Deadly Attacks on Journalists

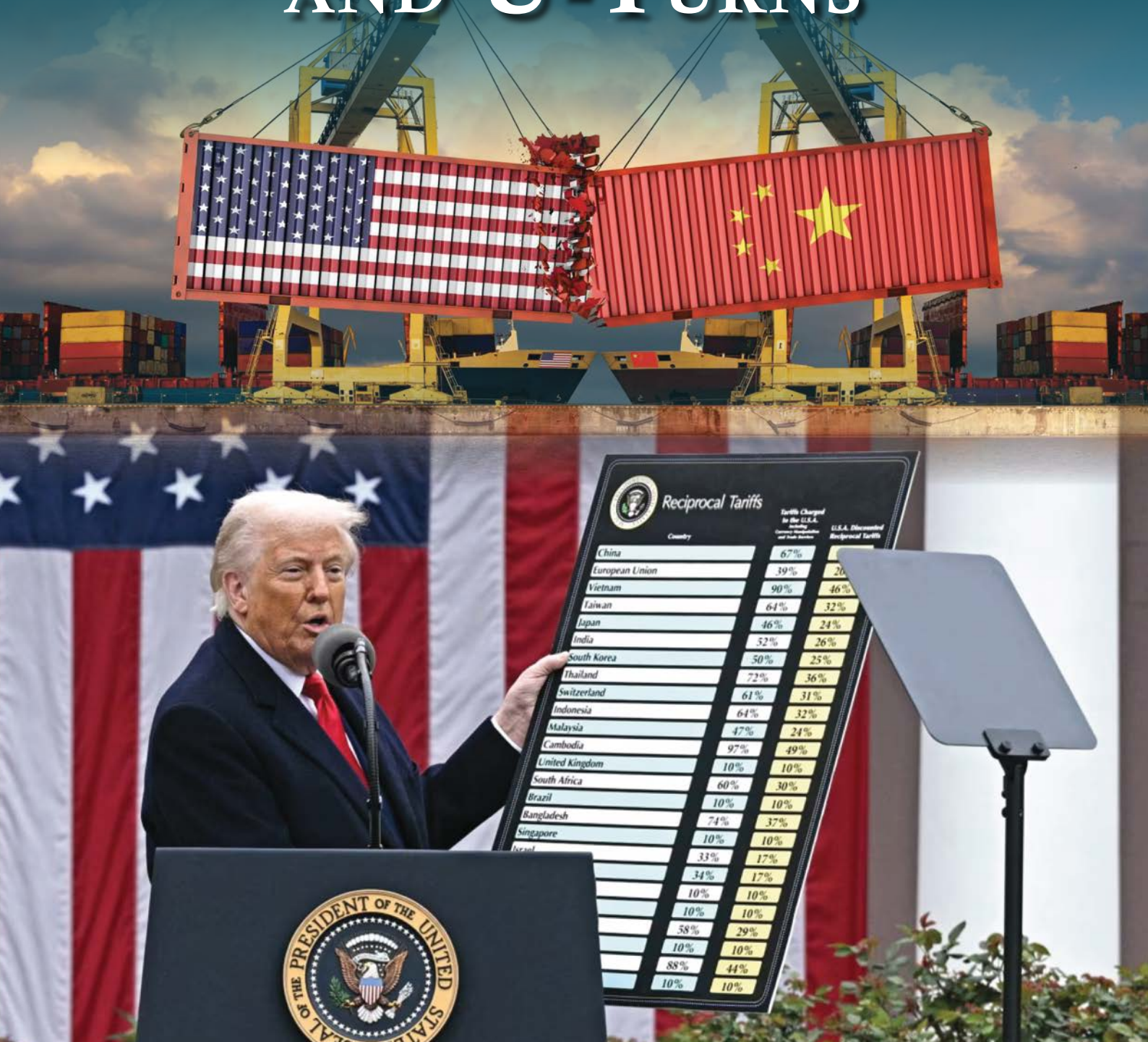
Pakistan's Minerals

Unlocking Untapped Potential

Bridging the Gaps

Early Childhood Education Challenges in Pakistan

## TRUMP'S TARIFFS AND U-TURNS





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Price: Rs. 435

### Publisher:

Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

### Printer:

Masha Allah Printers  
Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq  
Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

### Design & Layout:

Abdul Qadir

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# Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum Draws Interest Amid Promises of Security and Economic Reform



The two-day Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum saw a strong turnout from both international and local investors, with government leaders emphasizing reassurances on security and economic stability. Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif addressed the forum with a focus on resolving investors' legitimate economic concerns, while Chief of Army Staff General Asif Munir pledged a robust security framework to protect investor interests.

The Prime Minister highlighted Balochistan's vast untapped mineral potential, particularly referencing Reko Diq—one of the world's largest undeveloped copper-gold deposits—as a major success story. He lauded Barrick Gold President and CEO Mark Bristow for revitalizing the long-stalled project.

Reko Diq's ownership structure, which had once sparked significant legal and political controversy, is now contractually settled:

- 50% by Barrick Gold
- 25% by three federal state-owned enterprises
- 25% by the Government of

Balochistan (15% fully funded, 10% free carried)

Barrick Gold confirmed on its website that the project's restructuring was finalized in December 2022—marking a turning point for the mine's development and Pakistan's mineral sector at large.

Although numerous Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed on the forum's opening day, officials did not disclose the total investment value involved.

The forum served as a reminder of past delays, caused by unresolved legal, political, and federal-provincial challenges. The successful renegotiation of the Reko Diq deal underscores the importance of policy continuity and institutional stability, especially in high-value, long-term investment projects.

Yet, structural issues persist. Many investment contracts in Pakistan have historically lacked transparency and due diligence, often leading to costly international arbitration losses. The forum called attention to the need for contracts to be vetted by legal experts and aligned with provincial concerns to avoid future disputes.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's economy continues to struggle. The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has reported a revenue shortfall of PKR 703 billion in the first eight months of the fiscal year—largely due to stringent monetary and fiscal measures under the ongoing IMF program.

Despite reaching a staff-level agreement with the IMF, the government has committed to imposing higher taxes, particularly indirect ones that disproportionately affect low-income groups, potentially stifling already slow economic growth.

There are also concerns regarding the profit repatriation issues faced by existing foreign investors, stemming from Pakistan's foreign exchange limitations. Much of the country's reserve increase is attributed to rollovers from allied nations, limiting financial flexibility.

The forum emphasized a crucial takeaway: to attract and retain serious investment, Pakistan must ensure contractual integrity, regulatory transparency, and institutional coordination—across successive governments.

# Trump pauses reciprocal tariffs for most nations, targets China with 125% tariffs after bulldozing markets



By Javed Mahmood

In a major shift in U.S. trade policy, President Donald Trump announced a 90-day pause on higher tariffs for most countries on Wednesday, while simultaneously escalating tensions with China by imposing a dramatic tariff hike to 125%.

Trump announced this at his Truth Social platform, explaining that the pause follows negotiations with more than 75 countries that have not retaliated against U.S. tariffs. However, China was notably excluded from the reprieve.

"I have authorized a 90-day PAUSE on higher tariffs," Trump wrote, adding that the decision was a result of "productive talks" with nations that chose not to retaliate. "But China continues to rip us off," he continued, citing ongoing concerns over Beijing's trade practices. "I am hereby raising the Tariff charged to China by the United States of America to 125%, effective immediately."

The announcement followed a period of market turbulence, but Wall Street reacted positively, with the S&P 500 surging 6%—a sharp reversal after several days of declines.

Previously, U.S. tariffs on Chinese imports stood at 104%, with China responding by increasing its duties to 84%. The ongoing tit-for-tat has intensified what has already become a heated trade war between the world's two largest economies.

The European Union also entered the fray, announcing countermeasures worth over €20 billion, targeting American exports such as soybeans, motorcycles, and cosmetics. However, the EU stopped short of retaliating against the new 20% tariffs that the U.S. applied across the board on Wednesday.

Just days earlier, Trump had proposed a blanket 10% tariff on all imports beginning Saturday, with steeper rates for countries running large trade surpluses with the U.S., particularly China and the EU. To calm nerves amid market volatility, Trump urged the public to "BE COOL!" and assured Americans that "Everything is going to work out well."

Trump has repeatedly argued that his trade strategy is aimed at revitalizing American manufacturing by discouraging companies from outsourcing and

confronting China's economic practices. He has long accused Beijing of overproduction and flooding global markets with cheap goods, which he says undermines U.S. industries.

Despite outreach to other countries, China has stood firm. The Chinese finance ministry criticized the U.S. move, calling the new tariffs a "serious misjudgment" that would only worsen an already fragile situation.

Meanwhile, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent warned other nations against aligning too closely with China, citing potential economic consequences. The U.S. also raised security concerns, with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, during a visit to Panama—highlighting perceived threats from China as part of broader geopolitical tensions.

In response, China issued a travel advisory urging its citizens to "fully assess the risks" before traveling to the United States, adding another layer of tension to an already strained relationship.

Earlier, amid a sharp global market downturn sparked by a new wave of



reciprocal tariffs, former U.S. President Donald Trump stood by his administration's decision, calling the move a necessary "medicine" to correct deep-rooted economic imbalances.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday night, Trump dismissed concerns that the tariffs were aimed at triggering a market sell-off. "I don't want anything to go down," he said, "but sometimes you have to take medicine to fix something."

The comments came after a brutal week on Wall Street. Major indices suffered their steepest losses since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Dow Jones Industrial Average dropped 2,231 points, or 5.5%, while the Nasdaq Composite tumbled 5.8%, entering bear market territory. The S&P 500 also recorded its worst week since March 2020, with the overall market value plunging by an estimated \$6.6 trillion. Futures trading on Sunday night pointed to continued declines. S&P 500 E-minis were down 4%, with Dow and Nasdaq futures falling 3.8% and 4.6%, respectively, as investors feared global retaliation.

The market chaos followed Trump's announcement of sweeping new tariffs, including a 34% levy on Chinese imports on top of existing 20% duties. China responded with matching tariffs on all U.S. goods, escalating trade tensions dramatically.

Posting on Truth Social, Trump defended the tariffs as a long-overdue fix for persistent trade deficits. "The only way this problem can be cured is with tariffs, which are now bringing tens of billions of dollars to the U.S.," he wrote. "Some day people will realise that tariffs, for the United States of America, are a very beautiful thing!"

Trump also blamed President Joe Biden for mismanaging international trade relations. "We have been treated so badly by other countries because we had stupid leadership that allowed this to happen," he said, adding that trade surpluses with countries like China and EU members have grown under Biden's watch. When asked about the possibility of a trade deal with China, Trump remained firm. "Unless we solve that problem [the trade deficit], I'm not going to make a deal," he said.

The White House has linked the new tariffs to China's alleged failure to stop illegal fentanyl exports to the U.S., further heightening tensions. As of Saturday, U.S. customs officials began collecting a 10% unilateral tariff on all imports from several countries, with additional retaliatory rates — ranging from 11% to 50% — set to take effect early Wednesday.

The reintroduction of sweeping tariffs marks a stark return to the protectionist policies of Trump's previous term, raising fears of a renewed global trade war. As markets struggle with inflation, geopolitical instability, and financial sector stress, critics warn that prolonged trade conflict could further strain. While supporters hail the move as a bold correction to unfair trade practices, opponents caution that the economic fallout could be severe and long-lasting. In the global economy, and puts American consumers in the crosshairs.

Meanwhile, the customs agents in the United States began enforcing President Donald Trump's unilateral 10% tariff on imports from numerous countries on Saturday, with higher tariffs on goods from 57 larger trading partners.

The 10% "baseline" tariff went into effect at U.S. seaports, airports, and customs warehouses immediately, marking a significant shift in trade policy under Trump's administration. This move signals his full rejection of the post-World War II system of mutually agreed tariff rates.

"This is the single biggest trade action of our lifetime," said Kelly Ann Shaw, a trade lawyer at Hogan Lovells and former White House trade adviser during Trump's first term. Shaw, speaking at a Brookings Institution event on Thursday, anticipated that the tariffs would evolve as countries seek to negotiate lower rates. "But this is huge. This is a seismic shift in how we trade with every country on earth," she added.

Trump's tariff announcement on Wednesday rattled global stock markets, leading to a record \$5 trillion loss in stock market value for S&P 500 companies by Friday's close, marking a dramatic two-day decline. Commodity and oil prices plummeted, and investors flocked to the safety of government bonds. The initial countries impacted by the 10% tariff include Australia, Britain, Colombia, Argentina, Egypt, and Saudi

Arabia. A U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) bulletin to shippers confirmed that there would be no grace period for cargoes arriving after midnight Saturday. However, a 51-day grace period was provided for cargoes loaded before 12:01 am ET on Saturday. These shipments must arrive in the U.S. by 12:01 am ET on May 27 to avoid the new tariff.

Additionally, Trump's higher "reciprocal" tariffs, ranging from 11% to 50%, became effective on Wednesday (April 2). The European Union will face a 20% tariff on imports, while Chinese goods will be hit with a 34% tariff, bringing the total new levies on China to 54%. Vietnam, which benefited from the shift of U.S. supply chains away from China during Trump's first-term trade war, will face a 46% tariff and agreed to discuss a deal with Trump on Friday.

Canada and Mexico were excluded from the new duties, as they remain subject to a 25% tariff related to the U.S. fentanyl crisis for goods that do not meet the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) rules of origin. The Trump administration also exempted several product categories from the tariffs, including crude oil, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals, uranium, titanium, lumber, semiconductors, and copper. These exemptions, valued at \$645 billion in imports by 2024, do not include energy products, and the administration is investigating further national security tariffs in some sectors, such as steel, aluminum, cars, trucks, and auto parts.

## Trump Slaps 104% Tariff on Chinese Imports, Escalating U.S.-China Trade War to Historic High

Earlier, in a dramatic escalation of the U.S.-China trade conflict, President Donald Trump announced on Monday that the United States will impose a staggering 104% tariff on all Chinese imports, effective at midnight on Tuesday, April 8. Later on, he raised the tariffs for China to 125 percent. This unprecedented move significantly heightens tensions between the two global superpowers and marks the most severe trade action taken during the ongoing dispute.

The new tariff rate includes a 34% increase previously scheduled to take effect on Wednesday, bringing the total duties to an extraordinary level. The White House stated the measure is a direct response to China's recent retaliatory tariffs against U.S. goods—actions Trump has described as a breach of earlier warnings.

"This is about fairness," Trump declared. "We will no longer allow China to take advantage of the United States through one-sided trade deals and manipulative practices."

The President warned that any further retaliation from Beijing would result in "immediate and substantially higher" tariffs. He also confirmed the U.S. is halting ongoing trade talks with China, opting instead to seek new trade arrangements with other nations.

## A Global Warning from the U.N.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres weighed in with a stark caution, emphasizing the far-reaching consequences of a prolonged trade war. "Nobody wins in a trade war," Guterres said. "The greatest harm will fall on the world's poorest countries, who are most vulnerable to economic shocks."

## No Turning Back: White House Confirms Tariff Timing

At a press briefing, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt affirmed the administration's commitment to enforcing the tariffs without delay. The duties will take effect at 12:01 a.m. local time (05:01 BST) Wednesday, with no plans for postponement.

Leavitt noted that nearly 70 countries have reached out to the U.S. to explore new tariff negotiations. However, she stressed that any future trade deals will be custom-tailored to prioritize American workers and industries. She reiterated Trump's position that China miscalculated by retaliating, adding, "If Beijing is ready to engage, President Trump will be open—but only on terms that benefit the U.S."

## Tensions Within the Administration

As trade tensions mount, internal disagreements have surfaced. Trade advisor Peter Navarro has urged for even tougher measures, while tech billionaire Elon Musk has expressed concern over the potential fallout of escalating the dispute. Leavitt downplayed the tension, brushing off the disagreement as a clash of strong personalities: "boys will be boys."

## A New Phase of Economic Warfare

Trump's tariff push is not limited to China. The administration's broader strategy involves discussions with dozens of countries, indicating a wide-ranging

increase above their already long-term trading abuses by tomorrow, April 8th, 2025, the United States will impose ADDITIONAL Tariffs on China of 50%, effective April 9th."

The warning comes as tensions between the world's two largest economies intensify. Last week, Trump announced a new round of steep tariffs on Chinese goods, citing China's alleged involvement in the fentanyl supply chain. This included a 20% hike, with an additional 34% duty set to take effect on Wednesday, pushing the total tariff burden to 54%.

In response, Beijing has unveiled counter-measures, including export restrictions on rare earth elements and a 34% tariff on U.S. goods, which is scheduled to go into effect on April 10. These tariffs will stack atop existing Chinese trade levies.



re-evaluation of global trade and economic relationships. These talks may expand to include foreign aid and military alliances, signaling a holistic reassessment of America's international commitments. As the world watches closely, the full impact of these sweeping tariffs remains uncertain. Economists and policymakers alike are bracing for ripple effects across global markets—and a potentially turbulent new chapter in international trade.

Earlier, U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday issued a stark warning to China, threatening to impose massive new tariffs if Beijing does not back down from its latest retaliatory trade measures.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump declared, "If China does not withdraw its 34%

It remains unclear how Trump's new 50% tariff threat would align with or replace the already announced measures.

Trump also used his platform to criticize China's trade policies, accusing it of using "non-monetary tariffs" and providing "illegal subsidisation of companies." He stated that all communications with China regarding requested trade meetings would be cut off. However, he noted that the U.S. would immediately begin trade negotiations with other countries that have shown interest.

The escalating rhetoric signals a potential deepening of the trade conflict, with global markets and supply chains watching closely for the next move.



## China Vows to 'Fight to the End' as Trump's Tariff Threats Deepen Trade War

China pledged on Tuesday to "fight to the end" in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's latest threat to impose 50% tariffs on Chinese imports, intensifying an already volatile trade war that has rattled global markets.

Trump's announcement last week of sweeping new tariffs sent shockwaves through the global economy, triggering fears of a looming international recession. Despite a dramatic sell-off in financial markets, Trump has remained steadfast in his hardline trade stance.

going its own way, China will fight it to the end," a spokesperson for China's Ministry of Commerce said Tuesday. The spokesperson added that the latest threat "once again exposes the U.S.'s blackmailing nature."

Beijing reiterated its readiness for dialogue but warned that any further escalation would be met with firm countermeasures. "There are no winners in a trade war," the ministry emphasized, calling for negotiations but insisting on defending China's economic interests.

Markets have responded with intense volatility. On Monday, Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index plunged 13.2%—its worst single-day drop since the Asian financial crisis—before partially rebounding in early Tuesday trading. The turmoil underscores the high stakes of the ongoing trade

robust diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"We were spared because of the good relationship our government has with the U.S. administration," Sheinbaum told reporters, highlighting the value of ongoing cooperation and open channels of communication in managing complex trade dynamics.

Her remarks come as many feared the new tariffs would deal a heavy blow to Mexico's economy—particularly its automotive sector, which is heavily reliant on exports to the United States. Under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), the Mexican economy remains closely intertwined with the U.S., with over 80% of its exports heading north. The automotive industry alone accounts for a significant share of this trade.

Each year, Mexico exports approximately three million vehicles to the U.S., and global automakers like Ford, General Motors, BMW, Volkswagen, and Toyota have major production operations within the country. This deep integration has made Mexico a key pillar of North America's manufacturing ecosystem.

While the USMCA has shielded many Mexican-made vehicles and parts from the new tariffs, the broader implications of the U.S. policy shift are beginning to surface. Stellantis, which runs major plants in Toluca and Saltillo, announced a pause in production of its Dodge and RAM truck lines. The automaker also plans to shutter its Chrysler facility in Windsor, Canada—underscoring the far-reaching effects of Washington's trade moves.

Mexico's Economy Secretary, Marcelo Ebrard, lauded the USMCA as a "major achievement" that continues to safeguard Mexico's economic interests. He emphasized that the trade agreement remains intact despite the new tariffs and reaffirmed Mexico's dedication to strengthening its economic partnership with the United States.

Ebrard also noted that negotiations are underway to secure favorable conditions for critical industries, including automotive manufacturing, steel, and aluminum—sectors vital to Mexico's industrial output and regional competitiveness.



Beijing, Washington's chief economic rival, retaliated swiftly, announcing its own 34% tariff on U.S. goods set to take effect Thursday. The tit-for-tat escalation pits the world's two largest economies against each other in a deepening standoff.

In response to China's countermeasures, Trump issued a fresh warning, vowing to raise the total tariff burden on Chinese products to a staggering 104% if Beijing continued to retaliate. "I have great respect for China, but they cannot do this," Trump said during remarks at the White House. "We're going to have one shot at this... and I'll tell you what, it's an honour to do it."

China fired back, accusing the U.S. of "blackmail" and rejecting what it described as coercive tactics. "If the U.S. insists on

conflict, with investors watching closely for any signs of de-escalation.

## Mexico Exempt from U.S. Auto Tariffs

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has expressed relief and optimism after Mexico was excluded from the latest round of U.S. import tariffs introduced by President Donald Trump's administration.

The new measures, which took effect Thursday, include a steep 25% tariff on foreign-made cars and light trucks, raising alarm across international markets. Despite being one of America's largest trading partners, Mexico was spared from the tariff hikes—an outcome Sheinbaum credited to



## Over 70 countries seek tariff negotiations with the United States

More than 70 countries have approached the White House to initiate trade negotiations following President Donald Trump's sweeping new tariffs, top administration officials revealed on Sunday. The officials defended the controversial tariffs, which erased more than \$6 trillion from U.S. stock market value last week, while attempting to downplay the broader economic repercussions.

Speaking on Sunday morning news programs, Trump's senior economic advisers framed the tariff move as a strategic recalibration of the U.S. role in global trade. They also worked to reassure markets and investors ahead of an expected rocky start to the week in Asian stock markets.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent stated that over 50 nations had begun trade discussions with the U.S. since Wednesday's announcement, positioning Trump as a dominant player on the world stage. While Bessent and other officials did not disclose the names of the countries or specifics of the negotiations, the sheer volume of talks could present a significant logistical challenge for the administration. The duration and outcomes of these discussions remain uncertain.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te offered a bold proposal on Sunday, suggesting zero tariffs as a foundation for trade talks with the U.S. He pledged to eliminate trade barriers and encouraged Taiwanese companies to boost their investments in America.

"He's created maximum leverage for himself," Bessent said during an appearance on NBC's Meet the Press.

Bessent also sought to downplay last week's sharp stock market losses, insisting that there's "no reason" to expect a recession as a result of the tariffs. He pointed to unexpectedly strong job growth numbers released on Friday as a sign of continued economic momentum.

"We saw the jobs number on Friday beat expectations, which shows we're moving

forward," Bessent said. "So I see no reason to price in a recession."

Trump's announcement of broad tariffs on U.S. imports sent shockwaves through the global economy, prompting retaliatory measures from China and igniting fears of a full-blown trade war and potential recession. U.S. markets reacted sharply, with stocks plummeting roughly 10% over two days—largely in response to the more aggressive trade measures than analysts had anticipated.

Economists and major investors have widely criticized the move, warning that the tariffs could fuel inflation and hinder growth. JPMorgan economists revised their forecasts, now projecting that the tariffs will reduce U.S. GDP growth by 0.3% for the year—down from an earlier estimate of 1.3%. They also expect the unemployment rate to rise from 4.2% to 5.3%.

## Mass Protests Erupt in the United States and Europe

Mass protests broke out across the United States and several European cities on Saturday as over 250,000 demonstrators rallied under the "Hands Off" slogan to oppose the Trump administration's sweeping reforms targeting federal agencies. The controversial changes, driven in part by billionaire adviser Elon Musk, have sparked widespread outrage over job cuts and growing concerns about the future of social welfare programs.

Organisers reported more than 1,200 coordinated demonstrations throughout the U.S., protesting the formation of the newly established Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), overseen by Musk. The reforms have already led to the elimination of over 200,000 federal jobs, including 20,000 positions at the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). The Social Security Administration (SSA), responsible for managing retirement and disability benefits, has also experienced major reductions, raising alarm among senior citizens.

In Washington, protesters filled the National Mall, condemning what they described as a dismantling of essential public institutions. Paul Kretschmann, a 74-year-old

retired lawyer from Stamford, joined a protest for the first time. "I fear Social Security is being gutted," he said. "This seems like a strategy to break down the government and help Trump cling to power."

Outside SSA headquarters near Baltimore, Linda Falcao, 64, voiced her frustration. "I've paid into Social Security since I was 16. I want my benefits," she told the crowd, which erupted into chants of "It's our money!"

In New York City's Bryant Park, demonstrators carried signs such as "Unplug Elon" and "I can only write this because there used to be a Department of Education." Labor rights and job security dominated protests in Chicago, while rallies were also reported in Atlanta, Boston, Miami, Charlotte, and other cities.

## Global Solidarity

American expatriates and local allies in cities like Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt, and London held parallel protests. In Paris, crowds gathered at Place de la République holding placards reading "Resist Tyrant," "Rule of Law," and "Feminists for Freedom not Fascism." A spokesperson for Democrats Abroad stressed the global nature of the resistance, urging solidarity with demonstrations across the U.S.

Ezra Levin, co-founder of Indivisible, one of the lead organizing groups, emphasized that the protests sent a resounding message: "This is a strong statement to Musk, Trump, and MAGA Republicans — we reject their grip on our democracy."

## Administration's Response

The White House defended the restructuring efforts, claiming the reforms target inefficiencies and are not meant to compromise vital services. Assistant Press Secretary Liz Huston stated, "President Trump is committed to safeguarding Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid for eligible recipients." She also accused political opponents of endangering these programs by extending benefits to undocumented immigrants, a claim that remains contested.

However, the administration's statement

did not specifically address the extensive job losses or disruptions within federal agencies.

Now in its second term, the Trump administration is pursuing a conservative roadmap known as Project 2025, aimed at consolidating executive power and reshaping federal operations. Critics warn that the initiative could weaken democratic safeguards and destabilize longstanding public welfare systems.

## Wider Discontent Surfaces

The demonstrations also drew participation from other advocacy groups. In Washington, pro-Palestinian activists condemned the U.S. government's support for Israeli military operations in Gaza and the suppression of student-led protests on college campuses.

Kelley Robinson, president of the Human Rights Campaign, spoke to crowds in the capital, asserting, "These attacks aren't just political — they're deeply personal." She accused the government of targeting vulnerable communities under the guise of reform.

Philip Friedman, a seasoned activist who attended the rally in Philadelphia, summed up the mood: "I thought I was done protesting. But now we have Musk and Trump in charge."

Organizers emphasized that the protests

were only the beginning of a larger resistance effort. "This isn't over," said Levin. "The American people are watching — and we will not be silent."

## Trump Seeking Third Term Would Be a "Heavy Lift," Says Pam Bondi

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said on Sunday that any attempt by Donald Trump to legally pursue a third term as president would face nearly insurmountable legal and constitutional hurdles.

"I wish we could have him for 20 years as our president," Bondi told Fox News Sunday. "But I think he's going to be finished, probably, after this term."

The U.S. Constitution, following the 22nd Amendment passed in 1947, limits presidents to two terms in office. Changing that rule would require a constitutional amendment — a process that demands two-thirds approval in both the House and Senate, along with ratification from three-quarters of U.S. states — a feat experts view as highly improbable in the current political climate.

"That's really the only way to do it," Bondi acknowledged. "It'd be a heavy lift."

Trump, now 78, sparked controversy on March 31 when he told NBC News he was "not joking" about exploring ways to run for a third term, claiming there are unspeci-

fied "methods" that could allow it.

While many dismissed Trump's remarks as rhetorical flair, Bondi's comments — especially as a staunch ally serving as attorney general — signal that the legal pathway is virtually non-existent under current constitutional law.

During her appearance, Bondi also criticized the intense legal scrutiny the Trump administration has faced, noting that over 170 lawsuits have been filed against the White House. "That should be the constitutional crisis right there," she said. "We'll continue to fight."

She also defended the Justice Department's decision to seek the death penalty in the high-profile case of Luigi Mangione, accused of murdering health insurance executive Brian Thompson in New York on December 4, 2024.

"The president's directive was very clear: we are to seek the death penalty when possible," Bondi said. "If there was ever a death case, this is one."

Bondi further celebrated a recent Supreme Court win for the administration, which upheld the Education Department's move to freeze \$64 million in DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) grants related to teacher training and professional development — a move that critics called politically charged, but one the administration defended as a recalibration of federal spending priorities.





# Tariff Turmoil: How Trump's Trade Policy Shook Global Financial Markets



By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

In early 2025, President Donald Trump enacted a series of significant tariffs that sent shockwaves through the global economy. These tariffs, which were part of a broader "America First" agenda, aimed to address perceived imbalances in U.S. trade relationships, particularly with China, the European Union, and other large trading partners. The U.S. government imposed sweeping tariffs, reaching 10% on most imports, with up to 20% tariffs on key sectors such as technology, automotive, and steel. The announcement of these tariffs led to immediate and severe reactions across global financial markets. Stock indices across the U.S. and around the world experienced steep declines, while commodity markets, particularly oil and cryptocurrency, faced significant turbulence.

## Immediate Impact on the U.S. Stock Market

The reaction to President Trump's tariffs was swift and severe, with U.S. financial markets experiencing one of their most volatile periods in recent history. The stock

market, which had been on a relatively stable upward trajectory for much of 2024, saw its largest one-day drops in years following the tariff announcement.

### A. Major Indices Performance

On April 3, 2025, the S&P 500 experienced a sharp decline of 4.88%, marking its second-largest point loss in history. The index's fall was driven by broad losses across multiple sectors, with industries most affected by tariffs, such as technology, manufacturing, and consumer goods, taking the hardest hits. This marked a stark departure from the market's relatively stable behavior in the preceding months.

The Nasdaq Composite fared even worse, falling 5.97% in a single day. This was the most significant point drop in the Nasdaq's history, driven largely by the severe losses experienced by technology companies. Apple, Amazon, and Tesla, all major tech giants with international supply chains, saw their stock prices plummet by over 10%. The market's reaction reflected investor fears of rising operational costs and potential disruptions in supply chains caused by the tariffs.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, which tracks the performance of 30 large U.S. companies, also plunged by 3.98%, equating to a loss of nearly 1,700 points. This marked the steepest decline the Dow had seen since the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and highlighted how deeply the tariffs were affecting market sentiment.

### B. Sectoral Responses

Industries that rely heavily on international trade and global supply chains were particularly impacted. The tech sector, which has been a key driver of the U.S. economy in recent years, was the hardest hit. Companies like Apple, Amazon, and Tesla saw their stock prices fall by over 10% each, as investors worried about the potential for reduced demand and higher production costs. Apple, which relies heavily on Chinese manufacturers, faced scrutiny as trade tensions escalated with China.

The manufacturing sector also faced significant downturns, with companies like General Motors and Ford seeing their stock prices decrease by 8% and 9%, respectively. These companies are particularly vulnerable to tariff increases on imported parts and

materials, which drive up production costs. In addition to these direct effects, consumer-facing industries like Procter & Gamble also saw their stock prices fall as tariffs increased the cost of goods sold, impacting their profitability.

### C. Shift in Investor Behavior

In response to the heightened volatility in global markets triggered by President Trump's tariffs, investors shifted their focus towards safer, more conservative investments. Money-market funds experienced a significant influx of over \$60 billion in early April, bringing the total assets in these funds to a record \$7.4 trillion. This surge reflects a broader trend of risk aversion, with investors moving their capital into low-risk, short-term instruments such as cash-equivalents and government bonds. The shift was driven by growing uncertainty surrounding the economic fallout from the tariffs, leading investors to pull funds away from equities, commodities, and other riskier assets. With concerns over potential global recession and market instability, money-market funds have become a preferred safe haven for capital preservation, highlighting the ongoing flight to safety in uncertain times.

### A. International Stock Markets

Asia: The announcement of tariffs by President Trump created waves of uncertainty across global markets, particularly affecting major Asian stock indices. Asian economies, heavily reliant on trade with the U.S. and other Western markets, were hit hard by the growing prospect of a global economic slowdown and the disruptions that the tariffs could cause. One of the most significant impacts was felt in Japan, where the Nikkei 225 stock index fell by 8% over a few days. This marked its largest drop in over a decade, reflecting the severity of the market's reaction to the tariffs.

Similarly, Taiwan's TAIEX index saw a sharp decline, plummeting nearly 10% within the same timeframe. This was a concerning development, given Taiwan's strong export links with the U.S., particularly in the tech and electronics sectors, which are vital to the island's economy. The prospect of reduced demand from the U.S. for Taiwanese goods due to the tariffs was a major factor contributing to the market's negative sentiment.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index was another casualty, falling by 10.7%, with investors concerned about the longer-term

markets were a direct result of concerns over reduced demand from the U.S., as well as the broader economic repercussions of the tariffs. The disruption to supply chains, which could affect industries such as technology, automotive, and consumer goods, added to the anxiety. Asian economies that depend heavily on exports to the U.S. and other Western markets were particularly at risk, with many seeing sharp declines in their stock indices as a reflection of investor unease about the future.

Europe: In Europe, the situation was similarly bleak, as European markets, already grappling with their own economic challenges, experienced steep declines. Germany's DAX index, which is often seen as a barometer for the European economy, fell by 3.54%. The German economy, with its manufacturing-heavy sector and strong export ties to both the U.S. and China, was particularly vulnerable to the impact of tariffs.

The United Kingdom's FTSE 100 also saw a notable drop, falling by 2.7%. The UK, which has a long-standing trade relationship with the U.S., faced the dual challenge of potential disruptions to its exports due to the tariffs, along with the ongoing uncertainty surrounding Brexit. European markets were already under pressure due to slower economic growth, rising energy prices, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the imposition of tariffs only exacerbated these challenges.

The European Union faced significant risks due to its extensive trade ties to the U.S. As one of the world's largest trading blocs, Europe is particularly sensitive to disruptions in global trade. The tariffs not only affected goods directly traded between the U.S. and Europe but also heightened the uncertainty surrounding the global supply chains that European industries rely on. The concern that tariffs would worsen the already fragile global trade environment led to a wave of pessimism among European investors, reflected in the declines across European stock indices.

### B. Trade Relations and Retaliatory Measures

As the U.S. imposed tariffs, countries around the world responded with their own measures. China, in particular, retaliated with new tariffs on U.S. agricultural



## Global Economic and Market Repercussions

The U.S. tariffs had a far-reaching impact, extending beyond American markets to global stock exchanges, commodity prices, and trade relations. The interconnectedness of modern economies means that any significant policy change in one major economy, like the U.S., can have a ripple effect across the world.

effects of disrupted global supply chains. Hong Kong's status as a global financial hub and its dependence on trade, especially with China and the U.S., made it particularly vulnerable. The growing fears of an economic slowdown and the potential for tariffs to escalate into a broader trade war sent shockwaves through the region's markets.

Overall, the declines in major Asian stock



imports, including soybeans, corn, and pork. The Chinese government also filed complaints with the World Trade Organization (WTO), arguing that the U.S. tariffs violated international trade rules. This moves intensified tensions between the two largest economies in the world, increasing uncertainty in global markets.

Canada and Mexico also responded by imposing retaliatory tariffs on a range of U.S. goods, including steel, aluminum, and agricultural products. These actions further complicated the trade environment, with the prospect of an escalating trade war becoming a central concern for global investors.

## Impact on Commodity Markets

The global commodity markets were not immune to the turmoil triggered by the U.S. tariffs. Oil, a key global commodity, saw a sharp decline in prices, while the cryptocurrency market also experienced significant volatility.

### A. Oil Market

The global oil market has faced significant turbulence following the recent tariff imposition by President Trump, contributing to sharp declines in oil prices. Brent crude, which had been trading higher, saw a marked decrease, dropping to approximately \$63.08 per barrel. Similarly, West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude prices plunged to around \$60.45 per barrel, marking their lowest levels since 2021. These drops in prices reflect growing fears of a global economic slowdown, particularly tied to the escalating trade tensions between the United States and China.

Concerns about reduced demand for oil have been amplified by the fear of a contraction in global economic activity. As tariffs increase the cost of doing business and disrupt global supply chains, particularly in key industries such as automotive manufacturing—which is a major consumer of oil—there is a growing expectation that demand for energy will weaken.

In addition to these demand-side concerns, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) has announced plans to increase oil production by 411,000 barrels per day, further contributing to

market oversupply. This has exacerbated concerns among investors about the future price trajectory of oil. Financial institutions have since revised their price forecasts for the year, with Citi Research lowering its Brent crude price forecast to \$60 per barrel and Goldman Sachs adjusting its 2025 price outlook downward. These developments highlight the complexity of the oil market in an environment shaped by ongoing global trade disruptions.



### B. Cryptocurrency Market

The global cryptocurrency market has been significantly impacted by the recent market downturn, with a sharp decline in Bitcoin and other major digital assets wiping an estimated \$1.3 trillion from the market. Bitcoin's price fell below \$77,000, marking a drop of more than 10% from its record high of nearly \$90,000 just a week prior. The downward spiral extended to other major cryptocurrencies, including Ethereum, XRP, Solana, and Dogecoin, which all experienced even steeper losses of around 15% within a 24-hour period.

Bitcoin, which had recently been trading in the \$82,000 to \$83,000 range, saw a breakdown of its crucial \$79,000 to \$80,000 support level. This marked a significant shift from the stability it had maintained over the past month. The downturn in the cryptocurrency market followed the heightened volatility in global markets, sparked by President Trump's announcement of sweeping tariffs under what has been referred to as the "Liberation Day" tariffs. This move has stoked fears of a potential global economic crisis, which has sent shockwaves through both traditional equities and digital asset markets.

The sudden decline in Bitcoin's price is part of a broader trend of risk aversion across financial markets. The cryptocurrency market, trading 24/7, saw significant liquidations over the weekend, with over \$247 million in long Bitcoin positions being liquidated in just 24 hours. Ether, the second-largest cryptocurrency, followed with \$217 million in liquidations. These forced selloffs reflect the broader sentiment of uncertainty, as investors retreat from

riskier assets amidst fears of a global recession triggered by trade tensions.

This crypto sell-off has mirrored the severe losses in global equities, where U.S. stocks experienced their worst two-day loss since 2020. The S&P Global Broad Market Index reported a \$7.46 trillion market value loss, with U.S. stocks accounting for \$5.87 trillion of that total. The immediate impacts on the cryptocurrency market, particularly Bitcoin, which is often seen as a barometer for tech stocks and risk appetite, show that it is not immune to broader economic shifts.

Bitcoin, now down 15% since the start of 2025, faces an uncertain future. Analysts are now turning their attention to potential policy responses, particularly from the U.S. Federal Reserve, which may cut interest rates to stave off a possible recession. Such a move could inject much-needed liquidity into the financial system and potentially stabilize the cryptocurrency market.

Looking ahead, the possibility of a rebound in Bitcoin's price may depend on political shifts or emergency interventions. A change in stance from President Trump or swift actions from the Federal Reserve



could provide the necessary catalyst for the digital asset market to recover. However, the current losses represent the largest market drawdown for cryptocurrencies in 2025, coinciding with increased debate in Congress about potential regulatory changes to the digital asset sector.

## Broader Economic Implications

Beyond the immediate reactions in stock and commodity markets, the U.S. tariffs had broader implications for the global economy.

### A. Recession Fears

One of the most significant concerns arising from the imposition of tariffs was the heightened risk of a U.S. recession. Analysts warned that the tariffs, by disrupting global trade and increasing the cost of imports, could lead to a slowdown in economic activity. The impact on manufacturers and consumers would be substantial, as the increased costs would likely be passed on to end-users, which could decrease consumer spending and reduce overall demand for goods and services.

As businesses faced higher operational costs due to the tariffs, many began to scale back on investment plans, particularly in

industries reliant on global supply chains such as technology, automotive, and electronics. In turn, this contributed to fears that a contraction in business investment would lead to an economic slowdown, as companies become more hesitant to hire, expand, or innovate.

Moreover, consumer confidence began to falter as the costs of everyday goods, including electronics, clothing, and vehicles, rose due to the tariffs. As household budgets stretched to accommodate higher prices, discretionary spending was likely to decline. This cautious approach to spending could have a ripple effect, potentially leading to reduced economic growth. Some analysts even suggested that if the trade tensions escalated further, the U.S. could be heading toward a scenario like the Great Depression, where prolonged economic stagnation could take a heavy toll on employment, business activity, and overall economic stability.

### B. Inflationary Pressures

The imposition of tariffs also exacerbated inflationary pressures, as the cost of imports surged. Key goods, such as electronics, automobiles, clothing, and machinery, saw price hikes due to the added tariffs, directly impacting consumers. These inflationary pressures were

particularly concerning for lower-income households, which tend to spend a larger portion of their income on essential goods, many of which are imported.

The price increases, particularly in sectors like electronics and automotive, put additional strain on consumer purchasing power. With many families already facing economic uncertainty, the added burden of rising prices made it harder for households to maintain their standard of living. These inflationary effects contributed to broader economic anxiety and raised concerns that the U.S. could face stagflation—a combination of high inflation and stagnant economic growth.

As inflationary pressures grew, the Federal Reserve came under increased scrutiny. Policymakers were caught between a rock and a hard place, as they faced pressure to curb rising prices while also avoiding further slowing of the economy. The central bank had to consider adjusting interest rates to manage inflation without stifling economic growth, a delicate balancing act in times of trade-induced uncertainty.

### C. Long-Term Economic Outlook

Looking ahead, the long-term effects of the tariffs remain hotly debated. Proponents of



protectionist policies argue that these tariffs could ultimately strengthen the U.S. economy by encouraging domestic production and reducing trade imbalances. By making imports more expensive, tariffs may prompt American businesses to invest in domestic manufacturing, potentially creating jobs and boosting local industries that had previously been outsourced.

However, critics warn that the disruptions to global supply chains, combined with the erosion of international trade relationships, could have lasting negative consequences. Tariffs could lead to retaliatory actions from other countries, escalating trade wars and reducing the overall efficiency of global markets. The resulting trade fragmentation could hurt U.S. consumers with higher prices and fewer product choices, while also making American products less competitive abroad.

## Government and Institutional Responses

Governments and international institutions have struggled to respond effectively to the rapidly shifting economic landscape caused by the tariffs.

### A. U.S. Government Stance

The Trump administration defended the

imposition of tariffs as a necessary step to address what it perceived as unfair trade practices by other nations. President Trump referred to the tariffs as "medicine" for the U.S. economy, asserting that although they would cause short-term economic pain, they would ultimately lead to long-term benefits for American industries. The administration maintained that the tariffs were essential to correcting trade imbalances, reducing the U.S.'s reliance on imports, and encouraging domestic production. Despite the significant market volatility and concerns over a potential economic downturn, the Trump administration remained resolute in its commitment to the tariff policy, framing it as a crucial move for national economic security and global trade fairness. The stance was firmly rooted in the belief that the long-term benefits of leveling the global trade playing field would outweigh the immediate challenges faced by businesses and consumers.

### B. International Reactions

Internationally, nations directly affected by the tariffs responded with both economic measures and legal actions. Canada, Mexico, and the European Union swiftly pursued retaliatory tariffs, targeting U.S. exports in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing. These measures aimed to

pressure the U.S. into reconsidering its tariff strategy. Additionally, China escalated its response by imposing tariffs on U.S. agricultural products and filing complaints with the World Trade Organization (WTO). These nations, along with others, expressed strong opposition to the U.S. tariffs, but the diplomatic and legal pathways to resolve the issue remained uncertain, with global trade tensions continuing to rise.

## Conclusion

The tariffs imposed by President Trump in 2025 had far-reaching consequences for both the U.S. economy and the global financial system. While intended to address trade imbalances and bolster domestic industries, the tariffs contributed to significant market volatility, inflationary pressures, and growing concerns about a potential recession. As global trade tensions mounted, financial markets responded with steep declines, while commodity markets and cryptocurrencies also experienced significant losses. The situation highlighted the risks of protectionist policies in an increasingly interconnected world, underscoring the need for careful policy consideration to mitigate the economic fallout and preserve global economic stability.



# Trade Wars Have No Winners



By Hammad Hassan

As markets shake in the aftermath of the U.S. tariff hike unveiled by President Trump on April 2, 2025, it's becoming increasingly apparent that this economic tempest is not merely about trade imbalances—it's about the precarious interconnectedness of the world economy. The comprehensive tariffs, slapped on a broad spectrum of imports, especially big players in the global arena like China, the European Union, and Japan, have triggered a reactionary tide at stock exchanges all over the world. From Wall Street to Tokyo, the effect has been irreversible: stock markets dipped, and economic analysts are cautioning that the economy is about to take a downturn.

But beyond the initial shock, what is the long-term cost? And above all, what can policymakers and firms do to get the world economy back on track?

The market reaction to President Trump's announcement has been instant and merciless. During one of the biggest one-day declines since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. markets—particularly technology-laden indexes such as the Nasdaq Composite—plummeted in a record way. The S&P 500 and Dow Jones did the same, and foreign markets suffered

as well. The Nikkei 225 lost 8%, and Canada's TSX Index declined close to 5%.

These drops were broadly led by growing fear of an all-out trade war, and not only by fear of tariffs per se but of the retaliation they could spawn and that has the potential to sabotage global supply chains and threaten global growth. Even if near-term effect on GDP looks minute—estimates indicate the world economy will grow by 0.3% less by the year 2026—the trend picture is that uncertainty is escalating. In a global economy that depends on interdependent trade and international supply chains, the ripple effects of protectionism can be much more destabilizing than expected.

Perhaps the most troubling part of this scenario is the risk of tit-for-tat escalation. China has already imposed retaliatory tariffs on U.S. imports, and the European Union has said it will do the same. What we stand to witness is not merely a long period of volatility, but a full-blown trade war that could last for years, hurting both economies and global growth prospects.

In the worst-case scenario, the tariffs cause more protectionist measures, increased isolationist attitudes, and less cooperation among countries. The result could be

disastrous: international trade could be severely curtailed, and companies that depend on global markets will be confronted with unpredictable barriers.

What is more disturbing is that this economic reprisal is not limited to trade alone. Nations, particularly emerging economies, may suffer under the impact of global financial instability. Already, the World Bank has cautioned that such an event would mean even fewer options for international investments and economic development, particularly in developing areas most exposed to these global changes.

“Economic Growth Under Threat The Larger Context”

But the impact of U.S. tariffs isn't just seen on stock exchanges—they penetrate long into real-economic conditions. There may be higher inflationary pressures as imported products become more expensive. U.S. consumers will notice the bite as they shell out more at the grocery store and for day-to-day products, especially in sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and farming, which are highly reliant on global trade.

Furthermore, economic growth may slow down. The OECD has forecasted a



slowdown in global GDP growth, reducing expectations from 3.2% to 3.0% by 2026. This growth slowdown is worrisome not only for advanced economies, but particularly for developing countries that are dependent on trade and investment to drive their development.

This trade dispute, if prolonged, could ultimately curb consumer spending, lower investment, and cause job losses in sectors that are vulnerable to international trade. While certain industries in the U.S., e.g., steel or manufacturing, might benefit in the short term from protectionism, others, e.g., tech and consumer goods, will suffer from increased costs and diminished market access.

The path forward is unclear, but one thing is certain: The global economy cannot afford to continue down this path of escalation. In my view, there are several critical actions that must be taken to mitigate the damage and return to a path of stability:

**Diplomatic Engagement:** It's crucial that the U.S. and other world powers sit down at the negotiation table once again. Tariffs have never been a permanent fix for trade imbalance or economic disparity. Diplomacy supported by equitable trade agreements can sort out problems better than raising temperatures. The U.S. has to engage its allies to dial back tensions and find commonality on issues related to global trade.

**Multilateral Cooperation:** The world economy stands at the crossroads. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and other institutions need to be reenergized to promote trade disputes resolution to the benefit of all, and not only to the advantage of the most dominant players. Tariffs in bilateral terms destroy the principle of free trade and risk economically and politically isolating nations.

**Diversification of Supply Chains:** In response to increased tariffs, firms need to rethink their supply chains. Exclusive dependence on particular markets, and especially China, has turned out to be a weakness. Firms should diversify their supply chains, both to prevent further increases in tariffs and to provide more resilience against trade disruptions.

**Monetary and Fiscal Policy Reforms:** Central banks both in the U.S. and overseas would also have to revise their monetary policies to mitigate the inflationary impact of tariffs. Fiscal policies need to be revised as well to protect consumers and businesses from increasing the cost of goods. Specific relief for those industries most hit by tariffs—agriculture, technology, and automobiles—can stabilize these critical sectors.

**Public Awareness and Transparency:** Lastly, governments must ensure that there is proper communication to the public

regarding the effects of protectionist policies. There are numerous individuals who might not comprehend the long-term implications of tariff policies. Proper transparency and educating the public regarding the actual implications of such policies in real life can facilitate greater support for trade reforms and establish that international cooperation is the only feasible solution to increasing economic pressures.

The imposition of tariffs by America represents a defining economic moment of today's history. What was meant as a trade imbalance rectifying strategy has already become the trigger of immense world instability. With the globe feeling the ripple effect of the effects of the moves, one realizes that protectionism's economic burden is higher than was expected to begin with. Now, more than ever, leaders need to unite to maintain economic cooperation and restore confidence in the global trading system.

If we persist on this course, we threaten to drive the world economy into a long period of stagnation and volatility. But by using diplomacy, multilateralism, and wise policy choices, we can guide the world back from the edge and put ourselves on a path toward sustainable and inclusive growth. The stakes are great, and the moment is now.



# The War on Gaza: A Deadly Assault on Journalists and the Right to Information



By Hina Kashif

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza has taken a devastating toll on many sectors of society, and one of the most affected groups has been the journalistic community. The war, which has raged for several months, has seen unprecedented violence and destruction, and among the victims are the brave journalists who risk their lives to report on the events unfolding in the region. The Gaza Strip, already crippled by decades of conflict, blockade, and hardship, has now become one of the deadliest places in the world for journalists.

The toll of the war on media personnel in Gaza is heart-wrenching. As of the latest reports, at least 211 journalists have been killed, a staggering number that underscores the gravity of the situation. These journalists were not just reporting; they were human beings doing their jobs, serving as the lifeblood of information dissemination in a region that has long struggled to have its voice heard. Yet, their efforts to bring the truth to the world have been met with deadly force.

## The Tragic Death of Ahmed Mansour

### Palestinian Journalist Burned Alive in Israeli Strikes in Khan Younis

On April 6, 2025 a Palestinian journalist has tragically lost his life after being burned alive in Israeli airstrikes in Khan Younis, southern Gaza. The strike, which targeted a media tent near Nasser Hospital, has resulted in multiple casualties, including the death of Ahmed Mansour, a reporter for Palestine Today.

Disturbing footage of the incident, which surfaced on social media shows the journalist engulfed in flames as Palestinians and rescue workers desperately attempt to extinguish the fire. Reports indicate that Mansour, a father and well-known journalist in Gaza, was among those caught in the attack.

Wael Abo Omar, a fellow Palestinian

journalist, confirmed on social media that Mansour was severely injured after an Israeli missile hit the journalists' camp. "Missiles burned colleague Ahmed Mansour. He is in intensive care, suffering from critical burns after the tent he was in at Nasser Hospital was targeted," Abo Omar stated.

Gaza-based photojournalist Mahmoud Bassam shared his concerns for Mansour, stating, "He needs a miracle to survive this. The burns are severe."

Two other journalists were reportedly killed in the same attack, and several others were injured. The airstrike is part of an ongoing series of Israeli assaults on journalists in Gaza Genocide, which has intensified in recent months.

This latest attack comes just weeks after Israel's airstrikes killed Al Jazeera correspondent Hossam Shabat and Palestine Today reporter Mohammed Mansour in late March. Since the beginning of the current wave of violence, Israel



has made it increasingly difficult for foreign journalists to enter Gaza, while continuing to target Palestinian media workers covering the situation.

In interviews conducted last year, Shabat had noted that the problem was not a lack of foreign press access, but the lack of protection and respect for Palestinian journalists who are risking their lives to document the horrors unfolding in Gaza.

The deaths of these journalists bring the toll of media workers killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza to over 210 since the beginning of the current war of Israel on Gaza. These deaths raise serious concerns about the safety of journalists and the deliberate targeting of the press in war zones.

In response to growing concerns about the targeting of journalists, the United States was recently asked whether such actions could be considered a war crime. However, the U.S. declined to provide a direct response, reiterating its commitment to supporting Israel's security needs.

The ongoing assault on the press in Gaza highlights the dangers faced by journalists in conflict zones, as they continue to be caught in the crossfire while documenting the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The international community has expressed outrage at these attacks, urging calls for accountability and protection of press freedom.

## A Pattern of Targeting Media Workers

According to Gaza's Government Media Office, the deliberate targeting of journalists and media facilities by Israeli forces is not an isolated incident but a part of a broader pattern of aggression. The office has issued statements condemning these acts and calling for international support for Palestinian journalists, many of whom continue to report under the constant threat of violence.

The systematic nature of these attacks suggests an alarming disregard for the safety of journalists and media professionals. International bodies, including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Federation of Arab Journalists, have been urged to speak out against

these crimes. The Gaza Government Media Office has called on all journalistic organizations worldwide to join in denouncing the attacks on Palestinian journalists, calling them not only an assault on press freedom but also on the fundamental right to information.

The impact of these attacks is not limited to the journalists themselves. The entire media infrastructure in Gaza has been severely damaged, which has hindered the flow of information both within the region and to the outside world. Media outlets have been forced to scale back operations, making it harder for the international community to get accurate and timely reports from Gaza. In many ways, these attacks are an attempt to silence the voices of those reporting from the ground, ensuring that the true scale of the violence and destruction does not reach the global audience.



## The Role of Journalists in War zone

Journalists play a crucial role in war zones. They are the eyes and ears of the international community, providing critical information about the situation on the ground. They document human rights violations, offer a platform for the voices of the oppressed, and ensure that the world remains informed about the realities of war. In Gaza, where the media landscape is already heavily restricted, journalists are even more vital in bringing attention to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In many ways, Gaza has become a symbol of the challenges faced by journalists in war

zones. The region is home to a vibrant and courageous press corps, many of whom continue to report despite the risks to their lives as Israeli army deliberately target civilians, health workers and Journalists. For these journalists, the desire to inform the world outweighs the dangers they face from Israeli war crimes. But as the death toll rises and media outlets are destroyed, the risks are becoming increasingly untenable.

The deaths of 211 journalists by Israeli army including Ahmed Mansour, are a stark reminder that the pursuit of truth comes at a high price. These journalists did not choose to be targets; they were simply doing their jobs. In a war zone as intense and polarizing as the one Israel war on Gaza, it is essential that the international community recognizes the vital role of journalists and the need to protect them from harm.

## International Outrage and Calls for Accountability

The killing of so many journalists in Gaza deliberately by Israeli army has prompted outrage from the international community. Human rights organizations, media watchdogs, and advocacy groups have all condemned Israel's actions, calling them war crimes. The international community, however, has been slow to act, with many governments choosing to remain silent or failing to take meaningful action to hold Israel accountable for its actions.

In addition to the physical toll on journal-



ists, the lack of protection and accountability in Gaza has further eroded trust in international institutions tasked with safeguarding human rights. The United Nations and other global bodies have called for an independent investigation into the deaths of journalists, but the results of these calls have yet to materialize.

Meanwhile, Israel's government has defended its actions, brutal murders of civilians and innocent kids, claiming that the attacks on media outlets and journalists were part of its broader military strategy to target Hamas and other militant groups. However, these justifications have been met with skepticism, as many of the targeted media outlets were not affiliated with militant groups but were instead civilian news organizations.

## The Need for Global Support and Protection

The deaths of 211 journalists in Gaza highlight the urgent need for international support for Palestinian journalists. These media workers are on the frontlines of a conflict that is not only a humanitarian crisis but also a battle for the truth. As the Israel war on Gaza continues, the international community must recognize the vital

role of journalists in conflict zones and take concrete steps to protect them.

In addition to providing physical protection for journalists, the international community must also demand accountability for the deaths of those who have already been killed. The killing of journalists is not only a violation of their rights but also an attack on the right of all people to access reliable information. In a war as complex as the one between Israel war on Gaza, it is essential that the world continues to hear the voices of those reporting from the ground, even as their safety is increasingly threatened.

The global response to the deaths of journalists in Gaza must go beyond mere statements of condemnation. It must result in real action to hold those responsible accountable and ensure that journalists in Gaza and other war zones are provided with the protection and support they need to carry out their essential work. The lives of 211 journalists, including Ahmed Mansour, should not be in vain. Their sacrifice should serve as a wake-up call for the international community to take stronger action in defense of press freedom and the protection of journalists in war zones and specially take notice of Israel war crimes and genocide on Gaza.

## Conclusion

As Israel's war on Gaza continues, the region has become one of the deadliest places for journalists, with 211 media workers killed in the line of duty. These journalists were not just reporting the news; they were risking their lives to ensure that the world knew what was happening in Gaza. Their deaths are a tragic reminder of the dangers faced by journalists in war zones and the critical role they play in ensuring that the truth is heard.

The international community must do more to protect journalists and hold those responsible for their deaths accountable. The call for global support for Palestinian journalists is not just a call for justice for the lives lost, but a call to preserve the fundamental right to free and accurate reporting in war zones. As the war continues, it is crucial that the world recognizes the importance of protecting journalists and their right to report without fear of violence or retribution. The memory of those lost, including Ahmed Mansour, must serve as a powerful reminder of the need to defend press freedom at all costs.





# Shaken Grounds, Shaken Lives: Earthquake Aftermath in Thailand and Myanmar



By Saad Jadoon

On March 28, 2025, a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake struck central Myanmar near Mandalay, with tremors reaching as far as Bangkok, Thailand. This catastrophic event led to significant destruction, widespread panic, and a humanitarian crisis that quickly unfolded.

Myanmar suffered the heaviest losses, with over 3,300 deaths reported, thousands injured, and countless buildings reduced to rubble. The quake caused widespread devastation across six major regions and states, including the capital city, Naypyitaw. As of April 6, the official death toll stands at 3,564, with 5,012 injured and 210 individuals still missing, according to military spokesperson Maj. Gen. Zaw Min Tun. The disaster has left thousands homeless, damaged vital infrastructure, and paralyzed communication systems in many regions. Entire communities were left without electricity, phone, or internet services, further complicating rescue and assessment efforts. Roads and bridges sustained heavy damage, making it difficult for aid and rescue teams to reach the worst-hit areas.

In Mandalay, one of the epicenters of destruction, rescuers faced harsh weather conditions. Heavy rain forced them to temporarily halt operations involving electric tools and heavy machinery, although efforts resumed as soon as conditions allowed. According to a member of the Myanmar Rescue Federation in Mandalay—who spoke on condition of anonymity due to fear of arrest—rescue efforts continued despite the challenging environment. Another local rescuer reported that strong winds and rain caused further building collapses, intensifying the already dire situation for displaced residents.

The quake also led to significant loss of life in Mandalay, where, according to reports from The Irrawaddy, at least 80 bodies were recovered from the ruins of the Great Wall Hotel following hours of digging through rubble. Additionally, Myanmar's Fire Services Department reported the recovery of five more bodies from collapsed structures. However, the full extent of the devastation remains difficult to gauge due to limited access and ongoing communication breakdowns.

Myanmar's political climate has further complicated relief efforts. Since the military coup in February 2021, the country has been under authoritarian rule, suppressing free speech and battling pro-democracy resistance groups and ethnic armed forces. The military government tolerates no dissent, which has led to widespread fear among citizens and aid workers alike.

According to the military government's own estimates, the earthquake damaged 5,223 buildings, 1,824 schools, 2,752 monastic residences, 4,817 pagodas and temples, 167 healthcare facilities, 169 bridges, 198 dams, and 184 sections of the country's main highway network. The scale of destruction underscores the urgent need for international support, as Myanmar struggles to recover from one of its most devastating natural disasters in recent history.

In Thailand, the quake caused the collapse of several high-rise structures, resulting in at least 23 deaths and considerable infrastructural damage.

The earthquake disrupted daily life, paralyzed transportation systems, and left thousands homeless. The United Nations and international organizations immediately issued appeals for humanitarian aid, citing the dire need for medical supplies, temporary shelters, clean water, sanitation facilities, and food. With health services overwhelmed and infrastructure damaged, survivors faced immense challenges, especially in remote and rural areas.

Stories of heroism and resilience have emerged amidst the tragedy. In Bangkok, a father's daring leap between collapsing buildings to save his family symbolized the courage and determination of those affected. Communities have shown unity, opening their homes to displaced families and sharing limited resources. These stories highlight the strength of human spirit even in the darkest times.



Environmental and health risks remain high in the aftermath. The threat of aftershocks, potential landslides due to unseasonal rains, and the lack of clean water have raised concerns about disease outbreaks and further loss of life. Recovery will require a comprehensive strategy focusing on rebuilding infrastructure, supporting livelihoods, and addressing the mental health of survivors.

## Regional Leaders Assess Quake Damage as Myanmar Struggles with Aftermath

The devastating earthquake that recently struck Myanmar has left the nation

grappling with immense challenges, as international aid begins to transition from emergency response to long-term recovery. Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa and Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan visited Naypyitaw last Saturday to survey the damage and coordinate relief efforts with Myanmar officials. Their assessment revealed a dire situation, with critical infrastructure compromised and hundreds of thousands of displaced survivors in urgent need of assistance.

## Immediate Needs: Medical Care and Shelter Top Priorities

During a press briefing on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Maris outlined Myanmar's most pressing requirements. "What Myanmar needs right now are field

hospitals," he emphasized. "Many existing medical facilities have sustained structural damage or are operating at reduced capacity due to power outages and equipment failures." The lack of functional hospitals has forced doctors to treat patients in makeshift tents, raising concerns about infection control and the ability to handle complex medical cases.

Beyond healthcare, shelter remains a major crisis. Entire villages have been flattened, leaving families exposed to the elements. With daytime temperatures soaring and monsoon rains on the horizon, temporary housing solutions are desperately needed. "We're seeing a severe shortage of tents, tarpaulins, and basic supplies like mosquito nets," Maris added. "Without proper

shelter, the risks of disease outbreaks—malaria, dengue, cholera—increase dramatically." Clean water is another critical concern, as damaged pipelines and contaminated wells have forced survivors to rely on unsafe sources.

## International Response: Rescue Teams Depart as Relief Efforts Continue

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) confirmed on Wednesday that more than 30 search-and-rescue teams from 13 countries had been deployed across Myanmar in the quake's immediate aftermath. These teams, including specialists from China, India, and ASEAN nations, played a vital role in locating survivors and providing emergency medical care. "Their expertise was crucial in those first critical days," OCHA stated in a social media post. "They helped communities through their darkest hours."

However, as the window for finding survivors closes, many international teams have begun withdrawing. China's search-and-rescue unit, one of the largest foreign contingents, completed its mission and departed Myanmar on Wednesday. Before leaving, it delivered a fifth batch of emergency supplies—a 91-ton shipment that included 266 tents, thousands of mosquito nets, and heavy-duty tarpaulins for temporary shelters. Other nations, including Thailand and Malaysia, have shifted focus from rescue operations to delivering medical aid, food, and reconstruction materials.

## Challenges Ahead: From Emergency Relief to Sustainable Recovery

While the initial global response has been robust, aid workers warn that the hardest phase—long-term recovery—is just beginning. Thousands of families remain displaced, and rebuilding homes, schools, and hospitals will take months, if not years. Compounding the crisis is Myanmar's pre-existing political instability, which has strained local governance and slowed the distribution of aid in some regions.



The approaching monsoon season adds another layer of urgency. Heavy rains could trigger landslides in already unstable areas, further damaging roads and delaying reconstruction. Humanitarian groups are racing to reinforce temporary shelters and pre-position supplies before the weather worsens. "If we don't act now, we'll face a second wave of suffering," said one UN official involved in the response.

## ASEAN's Role and the Path Forward

As a neighboring bloc, ASEAN countries have taken a leading role in coordinating aid. Thailand and Malaysia, in particular, have pledged ongoing support, including medical teams and funding for rebuilding efforts. Yet with Myanmar's needs far exceeding current resources, international donors will need to sustain their commitment well beyond the initial emergency phase.

Foreign Minister Maris stressed the importance of global solidarity. "The world must not look away now," he said. "Recovery has only just begun, and Myanmar cannot do this alone." His call echoes the sentiments of humanitarian organizations, which are urging governments and private donors to maintain funding for housing, healthcare, and infrastructure projects in the coming year.

Pakistan responded promptly to the disaster by dispatching humanitarian assistance to Myanmar. On April 6, 2025, the Pakistani government, through the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), delivered a second consignment of 35 tonnes of emergency relief supplies, bringing the total aid to 70 tonnes. These supplies included tents, food items, medical kits, and hygiene essentials. Pakistan's Ambassador to Myanmar, Imran Haider, officially handed over the aid to local authorities, demonstrating Pakistan's solidarity with the affected people.

International efforts to provide relief have been complicated by Myanmar's political instability. The military junta's grip on power and ongoing conflicts with ethnic rebel groups have hindered access to some of the worst-hit regions. Furthermore, damaged infrastructure and disrupted communication networks have made it

difficult for aid to reach those in need efficiently. Despite these challenges, neighboring countries such as China and India have also sent rescue teams and medical support, emphasizing regional cooperation.

## US Aid Team Fired Amid Myanmar Earthquake Relief Efforts

While Myanmar's neighbors, including China, India, and Southeast Asian nations, have swiftly delivered relief supplies and rescue teams following last week's devastating earthquake, the US response has been mired in internal turmoil. Despite pledging at least \$9 million in aid, the US has faced criticism over the abrupt termination of its own disaster response workers in Myanmar.



## Aid Workers Fired During Critical Mission

Three US Agency for International Development (USAID) staff members, deployed to assist earthquake-affected communities, were unexpectedly informed that their jobs were being cut. Marcia Wong, a former senior USAID official, confirmed the dismissals to Reuters, calling the timing "demoralizing."

"This team is working tirelessly to deliver humanitarian aid to those in desperate need. To receive termination notices in the middle of such a mission—how can that not impact morale?" Wong said.

The affected workers have reportedly been sleeping in the earthquake zone, assisting

survivors in dire conditions, even as their own employment hangs in the balance. Their terminations are set to take effect in the coming months.

## Broader Cuts to US Foreign Aid

The dismissals come amid a wider dismantling of US foreign aid programs, which current and former officials say has weakened America's ability to respond to global crises. Until recently, the US was the world's leading humanitarian donor, but budget cuts and shifting priorities have reduced its operational capacity.

The earthquake has tested Myanmar's resilience, but it has also highlighted the power of international cooperation. From the rapid deployment of search teams to the

ongoing delivery of aid, the global response has saved lives and provided hope. Yet the road ahead remains long and fraught with challenges. Ensuring that survivors have safe housing, medical care, and livelihoods will require sustained effort—and a recognition that true recovery extends far beyond the headlines.

## A Nation on the Brink: Earthquake Compounds Myanmar's Crises

The devastating earthquake that recently struck Myanmar has delivered a crushing blow to a country already teetering on the edge of collapse. Even before the ground shook, Myanmar was grappling with a perfect storm of challenges - a wilting

economy under international sanctions, a brutal civil war ignited by the 2021 military coup, and a staggering 3.5 million people internally displaced, according to United Nations figures. This natural disaster has not only created new victims but has dramatically worsened the plight of millions already struggling to survive in what was once Southeast Asia's most promising emerging economy.

The earthquake's timing could hardly have been worse for Myanmar. The country's infrastructure, already weakened by years of conflict and neglect, proved horrifyingly vulnerable to the seismic shocks. In urban centers, poorly constructed buildings



collapsed like houses of cards, while in rural areas, entire villages were flattened in moments. The disaster has laid bare the consequences of decades of mismanagement and underinvestment, with critical facilities like hospitals and schools among the worst affected. For a population already enduring what the UN calls one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, the quake has added yet another layer of suffering.

In a rare moment of potential hope, both the military junta and various rebel groups announced unilateral ceasefires to facilitate relief efforts. However, this fragile peace has been undermined by persistent accusations from both sides of ceasefire violations. The junta has blamed ethnic armed organizations for attacking relief convoys, while rebel groups accuse the military of using the disaster as cover to reinforce positions. This atmosphere of mutual distrust has compli-

cated the already Herculean task of delivering aid to affected regions, particularly in conflict zones where access was difficult even before the earthquake.

Junta leader Min Aung Hlaing made a surprising admission in state media, acknowledging the need for improved construction standards. "It is necessary to take lessons of dreadful losses in past events," he was quoted as saying. "Officials need to supervise the construction of buildings rigorously." These comments mark a rare recognition of systemic failures from a regime that typically blames external factors for Myanmar's problems. However, skeptics question whether these



words will translate into meaningful action, given the junta's track record and the country's dire economic situation.

The international response has been complicated by Myanmar's political isolation. While humanitarian aid continues to flow, the complex web of international sanctions and the junta's suspicion of foreign interference have created obstacles. Thailand's Foreign Minister Maris Sangiamongsa revealed that regional partners are working on coordinated, multi-phase assistance plans. These include immediate relief operations in the hardest-hit areas, medium-term plans for infrastructure repair and medical support, and long-term reconstruction strategies being developed with ASEAN partners.

A pragmatic division of labor is emerging among Myanmar's neighbors. Malaysia has taken responsibility for coordinating relief

efforts in Sagaing region, while Thailand is overseeing operations in Mandalay - both critical zones near the earthquake's epicenter. This geographical specialization aims to maximize efficiency in a country where both natural and man-made obstacles complicate relief work. The arrangement also reflects the delicate political balancing act required to operate in Myanmar, where different regions are controlled by different factions.

The disaster has exposed Myanmar's vulnerabilities on multiple fronts. The country's collapsing infrastructure, a result of years of conflict and underinvestment, proved woefully unprepared for the seismic activity. Relief workers now face the unprecedented challenge of operating in areas dealing with both earthquake damage and active conflict. The economic situation presents another hurdle - with the kyat in freefall and the banking system in crisis, even basic reconstruction efforts face funding challenges.

Perhaps most tragically, the earthquake has disproportionately affected those already most vulnerable. Displacement camps housing people who fled earlier violence were among the worst hit, creating a crisis within a crisis. International aid organizations report heartbreaking scenes of families who had already lost everything to war now losing their temporary shelters to the quake. The psychological toll is immense, with survivors showing signs of severe trauma compounded by years of conflict-related stress.

For now, the people of Myanmar continue to endure, supported by the generosity of neighboring nations and the international community. Their struggle is a reminder that in the face of disaster, solidarity is not just a moral obligation—it is a necessity.

This earthquake has reminded the world of the vulnerability of the region to natural disasters and the urgent need for disaster preparedness and resilient infrastructure. Continued global support, including from countries like Pakistan, will be crucial in the months to come. Through collective effort and compassion, there is hope for healing, rebuilding, and a stronger future for the affected communities in Myanmar and Thailand.



# Imran Khan's Vision for a 'Hard State': A New Paradigm for Pakistan's Governance and National Security

By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

In Pakistan's shifting political landscape, calls for transforming governance and national security strategies are gaining momentum. One of the most significant proposals comes from Imran Khan, the imprisoned founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), who has endorsed the idea of Pakistan becoming a "hard state." A "hard state" refers to a centralized, robust governance model where the rule of law is strictly enforced, and national security concerns are addressed with firm legal measures. Khan's endorsement follows his ongoing imprisonment since August 2023 on charges ranging from corruption to terrorism, amid rising national security challenges. His stance aligns with similar views from Pakistan's military leadership, particularly Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, who has advocated for stronger governance to tackle terrorism and security failures. However, the "hard state" proposal raises crucial concerns about the balance between ensuring national security and safeguarding democratic freedoms, an issue central to Pakistan's future political trajectory.

## What is a 'Hard State'? Defining the Concept

The idea of a "hard state" is not new in political discourse, especially in the context of nations facing internal strife, security challenges, and governance failures. A "hard state" is characterized by a strong central government with the power to enforce laws decisively and uniformly across all segments of society. In essence, it implies a state that is unyielding in its application of laws, where the government holds absolute authority to secure national interests, sometimes at the expense of civil liberties or political freedoms.



Key features of a "hard state" include:

- **Centralized Authority:** The government maintains full control over key institutions, including law enforcement, the military, and the judiciary.
- **Strict Law Enforcement:** The state imposes rigorous laws that are enforced without exception or leniency, ensuring that criminal behavior is dealt with decisively.
- **Limited Political Dissent:** In a "hard state," opposition and dissent may be restricted, particularly if deemed a threat to national security or public order.
- **National Security Focus:** A "hard state" prioritizes national security above all other concerns, ensuring that the state's sovereignty and stability are maintained at any cost.

For Pakistan, the concept of a "hard state" is intertwined with its national security concerns, as the country faces mounting threats from terrorism, insurgency, and political instability. Proponents argue that adopting a more rigid governance structure could enable

Pakistan to deal more effectively with these threats. However, critics worry that such an approach may lead to authoritarianism and suppress democratic processes.

## Imran Khan's Endorsement of a 'Hard State'

Imran Khan's endorsement of the concept of a "hard state" comes at a critical juncture in Pakistan's political and security landscape. Amid ongoing challenges to governance and the rule of law, Khan, the imprisoned founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has articulated his belief that the country must transform into a "hard state" to address its pressing issues. According to Barrister Gohar Ali Khan, the Chairman of PTI, Imran Khan's vision for Pakistan is centered around the idea of a state where the rule of law is unwavering, and equal justice is dispensed without exception. Khan has expressed his concern that Pakistan's current legal system is too lenient, with laws being inconsistently enforced, which ultimately erodes the integrity of the judicial process. This, Khan argues, leads to a situation where citizens are



not treated equally before the law, and the state's authority to maintain order is undermined.

Imran Khan's call for a "hard state" aligns with similar statements made by Pakistan's military leadership, particularly Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir. In interviews and public speeches, Khan has stressed the need for Pakistan to move away from its current "soft state" status—a term that refers to a state where the enforcement of laws is weak, and governance is often characterized by inefficiency, corruption, and disorder. In contrast, a "hard state," as envisioned by Khan, would ensure that laws are applied consistently, without favor or discrimination, and would focus on reinforcing state authority in critical areas such as security, law enforcement, and judicial integrity.

This vision for a "hard state" reflects Imran Khan's broader agenda for governance reforms, which he has championed throughout his political career. He has long advocated for a system that is more transparent, accountable, and capable of addressing the issues of corruption, political instability, and insecurity that have plagued Pakistan for decades. However, his endorsement of a "hard state" also raises profound questions about the future of Pakistan's democracy. Critics of the idea argue that the imposition of a "hard state" could pave the way for authoritarianism, with unchecked powers concentrated in the hands of the state. The transformation into such a model could risk undermining the democratic institutions that Pakistan has worked hard to build and could lead to the erosion of civil liberties and political freedoms.

The implications of a "hard state" are far-reaching and raise concerns about the balance between security and democracy. While the need for stronger governance is clear in the face of rising security challenges and governance failures, the shift toward a "hard state" must be carefully weighed against the risks it poses to political pluralism and the fundamental rights of citizens. Imran Khan's endorsement of this concept signals a desire to confront Pakistan's deep-rooted issues with governance, but it also necessitates an open discussion about the potential costs and consequences for the country's democratic future.

## General Asim Munir's Advocacy for a 'Hard State'

The concept of a "hard state" is not just a political slogan but a strategic shift advocated by some of Pakistan's top military officials, including General Asim Munir, the country's Chief of Army Staff. In March 2025, General Munir publicly stated that Pakistan needed to adopt a more robust approach to governance considering the growing security challenges posed by terrorism and insurgency.

General Munir's remarks came in the wake of a major terrorist attack in Balochistan, where militants from the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) targeted the Jaffar Express, a passenger train carrying over 400 people. The attack resulted in several casualties and a hostage situation that was only resolved after a military operation neutralized the attackers. This attack highlighted the vulnerabilities in Pakistan's internal security and the need for more effective governance.

During a session of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security, which was boycotted by several opposition parties, General Munir questioned how long the armed forces would continue to bear the brunt of governance failures. He emphasized that national security must take precedence over all other considerations, calling for a more cohesive and unified approach to governance. His call for a "hard state" echoed Imran Khan's earlier remarks, signaling a growing consensus within Pakistan's power structures on the need for stronger governance.

## Security Challenges in Pakistan: A Driving Force Behind the 'Hard State' Debate

The debate over transforming Pakistan into a "hard state" is inextricably linked to the country's increasingly deteriorating security situation. Pakistan has faced numerous internal and external threats over the years, particularly from militant groups, insurgent movements, and organized criminal

networks. These threats have escalated in recent years, contributing to a growing environment of instability and insecurity, especially in the border regions and conflict zones.

Pakistan's porous borders, particularly with Afghanistan, have made it a hotbed for extremist groups that operate with relative impunity. Groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), and ISIS affiliates have intensified their attacks, targeting both military personnel and civilians. These attacks, ranging from bombings to ambushes, have not only resulted in significant loss of life but have also disrupted the country's fragile social and economic structure. For instance, BLA's violent activities in Balochistan, coupled with the rising terror from TTP and ISIS factions, further exacerbate the security concerns.

The failure of effective governance, especially in regions plagued by insurgency, has allowed these extremist elements to thrive. In such areas, the absence of a strong, centralized authority has fostered a vacuum that these groups have exploited. In this context, proponents of a "hard state" argue that by centralizing power and strengthening law enforcement, Pakistan can combat the rising tide of extremism. The idea is that a more robust and unified approach to governance would help restore stability, weaken militant influence, and re-establish the rule of law in areas where it is currently undermined.

## PTI's Role in the 'Hard State' Debate

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has become a pivotal force in the national debate surrounding the concept of a "hard state." Imran Khan, the party's founder and former Prime Minister, has long championed reforms aimed at creating a corruption-free Pakistan, with a legal system that serves all citizens equally. His endorsement of a "hard state" is presented as part of this broader vision, where governance is more efficient, and laws are consistently enforced to ensure justice for all. Khan has repeatedly emphasized the need for stronger governance to tackle the corruption and inefficiency that have historically plagued Pakistan's political system.





However, PTI's stance on a "hard state" is far from uncontroversial. Since Khan's removal from office in April 2022 and his subsequent imprisonment in August 2023, PTI has found itself in direct opposition to the ruling government. Party leaders and workers have consistently protested Khan's detention, alleging that it constitutes a violation of Pakistan's Constitution and that the treatment of PTI figures has been politically motivated. PTI claims that the government's actions are undermining Pakistan's democratic processes by centralizing control and stifling political opposition.

Omar Ayub Khan, the Opposition Leader from PTI, has been one of the most vocal critics of the government's handling of the situation. In a recent protest inside the Parliament House, Ayub led party members in chanting slogans demanding the release of Imran Khan and an end to what they characterize as politically motivated arrests. According to Ayub and other PTI leaders, the arrests and harassment of party members are indicative of a broader effort to suppress political freedoms and concentrate power in the hands of the ruling elite.

For PTI, the debate over a "hard state" is deeply tied to the larger issue of political freedom. While the party advocates for stronger governance to address the security and legal challenges Pakistan faces, it also raises concerns about the potential risks of authoritarianism. PTI stresses the importance of preserving democratic principles, such as checks and balances, freedom of speech, and the protection of civil rights. In this context, PTI's endorsement of a "hard state" is seen as a double-edged sword—while it advocates for better governance and rule of law, it simultaneously warns against the erosion of democratic freedoms that could accompany such a transformation.

## Implications of a 'Hard State' for Pakistan's Democracy

The concept of a "hard state" in Pakistan, while offering potential solutions to the country's mounting security challenges, also raises serious concerns about the future of its democracy. Proponents argue that a

"hard state" could address the country's critical issues, such as terrorism, corruption, and weak law enforcement, by ensuring stronger governance and consistent law enforcement. However, this approach carries significant risks to Pakistan's democratic fabric, particularly the potential concentration of power in the hands of a few, which could undermine the essential checks and balances that are critical for a healthy democracy.

The shift toward a "hard state" could lead to the erosion of political freedoms and civil liberties, as such models often come with heightened state control, censorship, and the suppression of political dissent. In countries with "hard state" frameworks, the government's consolidation of power can limit the space for opposition parties and



civil society, leading to the stifling of political competition and free expression. This is a particular concern for Pakistan, where political pluralism has allowed various parties to compete and contribute to the political discourse.

Pakistan's political system, though flawed and facing challenges, has historically allowed for the peaceful transfer of power and political engagement across party lines. Moving towards a "hard state" model could threaten these democratic gains, potentially paving the way for a more centralized, authoritarian regime. Such a transformation risks undermining the democratic institutions that Pakistan has worked

tirelessly to build, leading to a situation where political freedoms and individual rights are sacrificed for the sake of security and centralized control. The balance between security and democracy must be carefully managed to avoid the perils of authoritarianism.

## Conclusion

The debate over transforming Pakistan into a "hard state" is a complex and multifaceted issue. While the country faces serious security challenges, including terrorism and insurgency, it is equally important to ensure that efforts to address these issues do not come at the cost of Pakistan's democratic freedoms.

Imran Khan's endorsement of the "hard

state" concept reflects a growing sense of urgency within Pakistan's political and military leadership to address governance failures and strengthen national security. However, as Pakistan grapples with its future direction, it must carefully consider the implications of such a transformation, balancing the need for strong governance with the preservation of democratic values and civil liberties.

As the country continues to navigate these difficult challenges, it is essential for Pakistan's leaders to work collaboratively, ensuring that the security of the nation does not come at the expense of its democratic future.

# Pakistan's Mineral Investment Opportunities: Insights from the 2025 Forum on Unlocking Untapped Potential



By Romana Afsheen

Pakistan's mineral sector is one of the nation's greatest untapped economic potentials, with a rich diversity of minerals including copper, gold, coal, and precious stones. However, despite its considerable resources, the sector has been underdeveloped for years due to a combination of inadequate infrastructure, regulatory hurdles, and political instability. The Pakistan Mineral Investment Forum 2025 (PMIF 2025), held on April 8-9, 2025, in Islamabad, was a groundbreaking initiative aimed at unlocking the immense value of the country's mineral resources and attracting international investment. The forum provided a platform for government leaders, policymakers, business figures, and international investors to discuss opportunities in Pakistan's mining industry.

The PMIF 2025 brought to the forefront Pakistan's long-standing ambition to develop its mineral sector and position itself as a competitive player in the global mining market. The strategic goal is not only to capitalize on the sector's potential but also to

foster long-term economic growth, generate employment, and boost exports through sustainable mining practices.

## Strategic Focus on Mineral Development

The mineral sector was a focal point of the speeches made by Pakistan's top leadership, each of whom underscored its importance in the country's future development. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir, and Finance Minister Ishaq Dar all delivered significant statements that demonstrated the government's commitment to developing Pakistan's mineral sector.

In his keynote address, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif highlighted the government's dedication to facilitating investment in the mineral sector. He emphasized that the government was working hard to implement critical reforms aimed at making Pakistan's mining industry a leading driver of economic growth. Prime Minister Sharif's

remarks focused on the creation of a favorable investment climate, the simplification of regulatory frameworks, and the introduction of robust legal protections for investors. He also acknowledged that Pakistan's mineral resources are a significant national asset that could serve as a cornerstone for the country's industrial development.

He stated, "The government is committed to ensuring that Pakistan's mineral resources are utilized in a way that benefits the people and the economy. Our efforts to streamline mining laws, ensure security for investors, and foster transparency are part of a broader strategy to position Pakistan as a global player in the mining sector."

General Asim Munir, the Chief of Army Staff, also delivered a powerful message emphasizing the strategic importance of the mining sector in terms of national security and economic stability. His statement underscored that a developed and secure mining industry is vital for Pakistan's economic sovereignty. He pointed out that the



extraction of valuable minerals such as copper, gold, and rare earth elements would not only boost foreign exchange reserves but also create thousands of jobs and elevate Pakistan's standing in the international market.

General Munir remarked, "The role of the Pakistan Army in the mining sector is not just limited to providing security to investors but also includes fostering a sense of national unity through sustainable resource management. We are committed to ensuring that mining operations are secure and contribute to the long-term stability of the nation's economy."

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar further solidified the commitment of the government by outlining fiscal policies designed to support the growth of the mining sector. Dar's remarks focused on the National Minerals Harmonization Framework, which seeks to create a more unified and investor-friendly regulatory environment for the mining sector. This framework is expected to streamline procedures, eliminate bureaucratic obstacles, and ensure that Pakistan's mining resources are utilized in the most efficient and effective way possible.

He stated, "Pakistan is ready to transform its mineral wealth into tangible economic benefits. Through reforms, investment incentives, and the introduction of modern mining technologies, we aim to create a robust mining industry that will drive long-term prosperity for the nation."

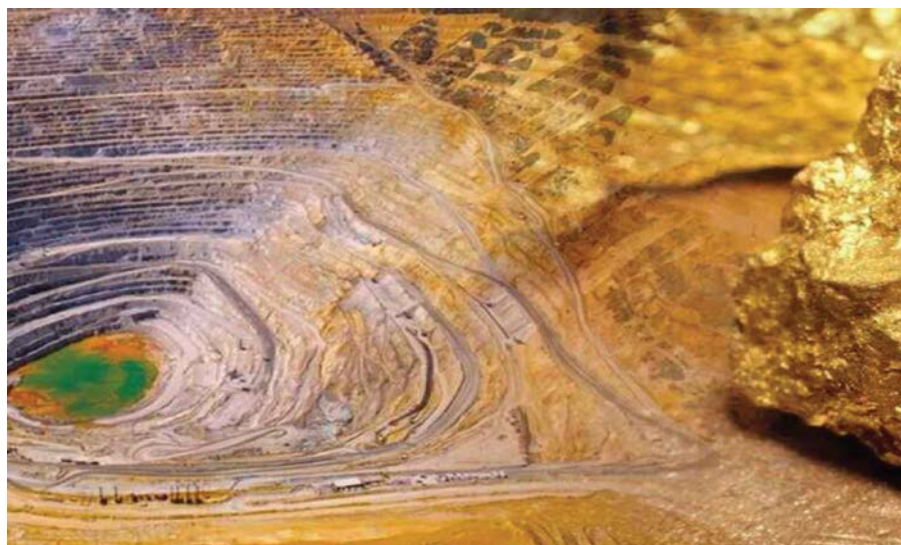
## Key Projects and the Role of Reko Diq

A central focus of the PMIF 2025 was the Reko Diq project, one of the world's largest untapped copper and gold reserves, located in the Tethyan Metallogenic Belt in Balochistan. This project has been a subject of major international interest, as it has the potential to generate significant foreign exchange, boost job creation, and attract billions in investment.

The Reko Diq copper-gold mine, which has faced several hurdles in the past, is now set to be developed in partnership with global mining giant Barrick Gold. The project is expected to be a major source of revenue and economic activity for Pakistan. Barrick Gold, in collaboration with the Pakistani

government, has committed to the phased development of the project, with the first phase of production expected to begin by 2028. The successful development of Reko Diq could significantly alter the economic trajectory of Balochistan, a region long considered one of Pakistan's most underdeveloped.

During the forum, Barrick Gold officials discussed the project in detail, emphasizing the significant benefits it would bring to the Pakistani economy. With estimated reserves of over 5 billion tons of copper and gold, Reko Diq has the potential to not only be a revenue generator but also a symbol of Pakistan's capability to attract large-scale foreign investments. Barrick's involvement is seen as a step toward ensuring the responsible development of Pakistan's mineral wealth, adhering to global standards of environmental and social sustainability.



## International Investment and the Role of Foreign Partnerships

International investment in Pakistan's mineral sector is seen as crucial for unlocking the true potential of its resources. Pakistan has long been considered a high-risk investment destination due to security concerns, regulatory complexities, and political instability. However, the PMIF 2025 was aimed at assuring potential investors that the government is committed to mitigating these risks through reforms and initiatives designed to create a secure, transparent, and investor-friendly environment.

Eric Meyer, the senior U.S. official for South and Central Asia Affairs, expressed optimism during the forum, highlighting the United States' continued support for Pakistan's efforts to develop its mineral sector. Meyer remarked that the U.S. government recognizes the potential of Pakistan's mineral resources and encourages private American companies to explore investment opportunities in the sector.

Meyer stated, "The United States remains committed to supporting Pakistan's efforts to unlock its mineral potential. We believe that greater cooperation between our nations, particularly in the mining sector, will lead to long-term prosperity for Pakistan."

In addition to the United States, China and Australia have also shown significant interest in Pakistan's mineral resources. Chinese companies are keen on exploring

Pakistan's coal, gold, and copper reserves, while Australian firms are particularly interested in the extraction of rare earth minerals, which are in high demand for technology and renewable energy production.

The government has emphasized that international partnerships are not only critical for bringing in much-needed capital but also for transferring technological expertise. As Pakistan seeks to modernize its mining practices and implement sustainable methods, partnerships with foreign companies are seen as essential for the long-term success of the sector.

## Policy Reforms and Investment Incentives

The National Minerals Harmonization Framework was introduced at the forum as a crucial part of Pakistan's strategy to modernize and streamline the mining industry. This framework is designed to address the regulatory challenges that have long hindered the sector. By offering tax breaks, reduced bureaucratic hurdles, and incentives for both domestic and foreign investors, the government aims to create an environment conducive to large-scale investment in mining.

Additionally, infrastructure development plays a pivotal role in supporting the growth of the sector. Pakistan's mining regions, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are remote and require substantial investment in transportation and logistics infrastructure. The government is committed to enhancing these infrastructures, such as roads, railways, and ports, to ensure that the extraction and transportation of minerals are efficient and cost-effective.

## Sustainability in Mining

Sustainability is another crucial theme that was discussed during the forum. Pakistan's leadership has committed to ensuring that its mining sector not only drives economic growth but also adheres to high environmental and social standards. The government aims to implement policies that will minimize environmental damage, particularly in resource-rich regions such as Balochistan.

In his remarks, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar reiterated the importance of developing the mining sector in a manner that benefits local communities and protects natural resources. He emphasized that long-term growth in the sector must be balanced with environmental conservation efforts.

He stated, "While we are focused on maximizing the economic benefits of our mineral resources, we are equally committed to preserving the environment and ensuring that local communities benefit from mining operations. This is a fundamental part of our vision for sustainable development."

## Key Mineral Projects and Economic Impact

The Pakistan Mineral Investment Forum 2025 (PMIF 2025) presented an opportunity for government leaders to showcase key mineral projects that have the potential to transform the country's economy. Several major mineral projects were discussed at the forum, highlighting their projected economic benefits and the strategic importance of these ventures. These projects are not only critical for the mining sector but also for the development of Pakistan's overall economy, particularly in terms of employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and regional economic growth.

## The Reko Diq Project: A Game-Changer for Pakistan's Economy

The Reko Diq project, located in Balochistan, is one of the world's largest untapped copper and gold mines. It holds over 5 billion tons of copper and significant gold deposits. With Barrick Gold's involvement, the project will bring crucial investment, technology, and expertise. First production is expected by 2028, and the project is set to generate billions in foreign exchange and create thousands of jobs in Balochistan.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called Reko Diq a "game-changer," emphasizing its potential benefits for Pakistan's economy and local communities. General Asim Munir, COAS, assured investors of the Pakistan Army's commitment to security for the project, underlining the importance of the mining sector for the country's economic future.

## Economic and Employment Impact of Reko Diq

Reko Diq could generate around \$2 billion annually in export revenue, boosting Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves. The project is expected to create 20,000 direct jobs and 50,000 indirect jobs in sectors like logistics and construction, offering significant employment benefits to Balochistan.

## Other Key Mining Projects

Other significant mining projects include the Thar Coal Project in Sindh, which holds 175 billion tons of coal. The project aims to produce 50 million tons annually, enhancing energy security and creating jobs. Additionally, Pakistan's resources of chromite, marble, and gemstones are attracting foreign investment, especially from China, India, and Turkey, further contributing to economic growth.

## Strategic Focus on Sustainability

With the increasing interest in Pakistan's mineral sector, sustainability has become a central theme in the development of these resources. The Pakistani government, in partnership with international investors, is committed to ensuring that the mining sector grows in a responsible and environmentally conscious manner.

The National Mineral Policy, introduced in 2025, sets clear guidelines for the sustainable extraction of minerals, with a focus on minimizing environmental damage. The policy includes provisions for the rehabilitation of mining sites, the protection of water resources, and the preservation of biodiversity. It also mandates that mining companies invest in the local community, including through social development programs, healthcare, and education.

Ishaq Dar, the Finance Minister, highlighted these sustainability efforts during his address at the forum, saying, "The development of Pakistan's mineral resources must go hand in hand with the protection of our environment and the well-being of our people. We are committed to ensuring that our mining projects are developed sustainably, with the interests of future generations in mind."

## Challenges in the Mining Sector

While the potential for growth in Pakistan's mineral sector is substantial, there are significant challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term success. One of the primary challenges is the lack of infrastructure in many of the mineral-rich areas, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These regions are remote and lack the necessary roads,



electricity, and telecommunications infrastructure to support large-scale mining operations.

Another challenge is security concerns in some areas, particularly in Balochistan, where insurgent groups have historically disrupted development projects. However, as General Asim Munir pointed out, the government is working closely with the Pakistan Army to ensure that mining operations are adequately secured. The establishment of secure zones for mining activities is a critical step in attracting both local and international investors.

Moreover, the regulatory environment has historically been a barrier to growth in the mining sector. Pakistan's mining laws were outdated and cumbersome, making it difficult for investors to navigate the system. The government is addressing this issue through the National Minerals Harmonization Framework, which aims to simplify the regulatory process, reduce bureaucratic red tape, and make the sector more attractive to investors.

### Investment Incentives and International Partnerships

The government is offering a variety of incentives to attract both domestic and international investors to the mineral sector. These incentives include tax holidays, reduced royalties, and special economic zones for mining companies. Additionally, the government is working to improve access to financing for local and international companies that wish to invest in the mining industry.

International partnerships, particularly with companies from China, Australia, and the United States, are seen as a critical part of Pakistan's strategy to modernize its mining sector. These partnerships not only bring in capital but also help to transfer much-needed technology and expertise to Pakistan's mining industry.

## Fiscal Policies, Global Partnerships, and Future Projections

The government of Pakistan is making significant strides in creating a conducive environment for mining investments,

ensuring that the sector can grow in a sustainable and profitable manner. These efforts are essential in realizing the full potential of Pakistan's mineral resources and ensuring that they contribute significantly to the national economy.

### Fiscal Policies and Investment Incentives

Pakistan's strategy for developing its mining industry focuses on introducing favorable fiscal policies and investment incentives, as showcased at the Pakistan Mineral Investment Forum (PMIF 2025).



Key reforms to attract both local and foreign investment include:

- 1. Tax Breaks and Incentives:** To encourage investment, the government is offering tax breaks for mining companies operating in mineral-rich areas like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, easing initial capital burdens and promoting long-term investment.
- 2. Royalties and Revenue Sharing:** The government has introduced competitive royalty rates, aiming to generate revenue while ensuring mining operations remain economically viable.
- 3. Special Economic Zones (SEZs):** The creation of SEZs around major mining projects, such as Reko Diq and Thar

Coal, offers incentives like customs exemptions, land-use benefits, and preferential infrastructure access.

- 4. Improved Financing Options:** Collaboration with banks and financial institutions aims to enhance access to financing, particularly for small and medium-sized mining companies.

These fiscal measures aim to position Pakistan as a leading mining investment destination, unlock its untapped mineral wealth, and foster long-term growth in the sector.

### Global Partnerships: Unlocking Potential with International Investors

Global partnerships are a critical element of Pakistan's strategy to enhance its mining sector. Given the scale of the investment required to develop the country's mineral resources, collaboration with international mining companies and investors is essential. During the PMIF 2025, several high-profile global stakeholders highlighted their interest in Pakistan's mineral industry and committed to forging long-term partnerships with the government.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasized the importance of global cooperation in developing Pakistan's mineral wealth. He mentioned that Pakistan has always been

open to international partnerships, especially with countries that have the necessary expertise and technology to develop mining operations sustainably. "Pakistan is committed to fostering strong international partnerships," the Prime Minister said. "We are open to working with leading mining companies and global investors who can help us unlock the full potential of our mineral resources."

Several foreign companies from countries like China, Australia, and Canada have already shown interest in partnering with Pakistan. These companies are bringing both capital and technology to the country, particularly in areas such as exploration, mining techniques, and environmental

security for these international partnerships. He assured investors that the Pakistan Army would provide security to ensure the smooth functioning of mining operations. "Our strategic alliances with international investors are vital for the growth of the sector," General Munir said. "We are committed to providing the security and stability needed for the successful development of mining projects in Pakistan."

## The Role of Technology in Transforming the Mining Sector

Technology is expected to play a crucial role in the transformation of Pakistan's mining industry. With vast untapped

ecological preservation is crucial.

Pakistan's mining sector has the potential to contribute billions of dollars to the national economy by tapping into its vast reserves of copper, gold, coal, chromite, and other minerals. This could improve the balance of payments, reduce reliance on external loans, and generate thousands of jobs. With billions in foreign investment, the sector is poised to become a key contributor to Pakistan's GDP and a global player in the mining industry. The government's focus on infrastructure, regulatory reforms, and investor security is expected to foster sustainable growth, making mining a major driver of economic development in the region.

## Conclusion: A Bright Future for Pakistan's Mining Industry

Pakistan's mineral sector presents immense potential for economic transformation, with vast untapped resources waiting to be harnessed. The government's proactive approach, through fiscal reforms, tax incentives, and the establishment of special economic zones, is paving the way for a more investment-friendly environment. With the development of high-value projects like Reko Diq and Thar Coal, along with other mineral-rich regions, Pakistan stands to gain significant economic returns and create thousands of jobs, which can help reduce reliance on external financial aid.

These large-scale mining ventures not only promise to boost foreign exchange earnings but also enhance the country's energy security and industrial capacity. The influx of investment, paired with technological advancements and expertise, will enable Pakistan to modernize its mining industry and integrate it into the global supply chain.

By focusing on sustainable mining practices, investing in infrastructure, and maintaining strategic international partnerships, Pakistan's mineral sector can become a cornerstone of its economic growth. The future of the sector looks promising, with the potential to contribute significantly to job creation, revenue generation, and long-term economic resilience.



management. The involvement of Barrick Gold in the Reko Diq project, for example, is expected to bring advanced mining technologies and environmentally responsible practices that will serve as a model for future mining ventures.

One of the most promising international partnerships is with China, which has already become a significant player in Pakistan's mining sector. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and trade initiative, has laid the groundwork for closer economic ties between the two nations. As part of this partnership, China is expected to play a pivotal role in the development of Pakistan's mineral resources, particularly through investments in infrastructure, energy, and mining projects.

General Asim Munir, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, also stressed the importance of

mineral resources and the need for modern extraction methods, Pakistan is looking to adopt the latest mining technologies to increase efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and maximize output.

The use of automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics in mining operations is expected to increase in the coming years. These technologies can help improve the accuracy of mineral exploration, streamline extraction processes, and reduce costs. Additionally, AI can be used to optimize mine planning and monitoring, helping mining companies to maximize their operations.

Moreover, green mining technologies will be central to the country's long-term sustainability goals. Pakistan is looking to adopt technologies that reduce the environmental impact of mining, particularly in sensitive areas such as Balochistan, where



# Bridging the Gaps in Early Childhood Education in Pakistan: Challenges, Reforms, and Future Directions



By Kainaat Assad

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Pakistan is an area of growing interest, yet one that continues to face major systemic and structural challenges. ECE is vital in shaping the developmental foundations of a child-cognitive, emotional, and social-before formal schooling begins. Globally, ECE is acknowledged as a powerful investment in the future of societies. In Pakistan, however, its evolution has been slow, with fragmented implementation, inadequate funding, and limited access, especially in rural and underserved communities.

A strong and well-structured Early Childhood Development (ECD) system offers far-reaching benefits that extend beyond individual children to impact families, communities, and the nation as a whole. At the core, quality ECD ensures that children are provided with a nurturing, stimulating environment in the most critical years of brain development, typically from birth to age eight. Research across disciplines has consistently shown that the early years are foundational for cognitive growth, emotional resilience, social competence, and physical health.

When a country invests in ECD, it is not just investing in education, it is investing in human capital, economic productivity, and long-term social stability.

Children who benefit from quality ECD programs are more likely to be school-ready, perform better academically, and progress through the education system with fewer dropouts or grade repetitions. This lays the groundwork for a more educated and skilled workforce in the long term, addressing intergenerational cycles of poverty and inequality. In Pakistan's context, where educational disparities are stark and learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools are alarmingly low, a robust ECD system can act as a powerful equalizer. It can help bridge the gap between children from different socio-economic, geographic, and linguistic backgrounds, ensuring that every child starts formal schooling on more equal footing.

Economically, the returns on investment in ECD are among the highest in the education sector. Studies by economists like James Heckman have demonstrated that every dollar invested

in quality early education yields multiple dollars in return through reduced costs in remedial education, social services, and criminal justice, along with increased productivity and earnings. For developing countries like Pakistan, where fiscal constraints are often cited as a barrier to educational reforms, ECD offers a cost-effective strategy to improve long-term socio-economic indicators.

However, a critical analysis also reveals that simply having an ECD system in place is not enough; it must be equitable, contextually relevant, and well-implemented. In many countries, including Pakistan, ECD services are fragmented, underfunded, and often urban centered, leaving behind children in rural areas, those from disadvantaged communities, and children with disabilities. Moreover, a poorly designed ECD system can actually reinforce inequalities by providing better services to wealthier populations through private providers while neglecting public infrastructure and marginalized groups. Therefore, for an ECD system to be truly beneficial at the national level, it must be inclusive by design and supported by strong gover-

nance, trained personnel, and adequate resources.

There are also indirect but profound social benefits. ECD empowers women by allowing mothers to participate in the labour force while their children are cared for in safe, developmental environments. It strengthens families by promoting positive parenting practices, health awareness, and emotional bonding. Furthermore, when children develop empathy, conflict resolution skills, and self-regulation early on, it contributes to more peaceful and cohesive communities in the long run.



Politically, a government that prioritizes early childhood signals its commitment to long-term development rather than short-term populist gains. This builds public trust and aligns national goals with international commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 4.2, which calls for access to quality early childhood development for all children by 2030). However, political will alone is insufficient without mechanisms to monitor progress, ensure accountability, and adapt policies based on real-time data and community feedback.

The benefits of a good ECD system are multifaceted ranging from educational attainment and economic growth to social equity and political credibility. Yet, the real value of ECD lies in how effectively it is integrated into the broader development agenda of a country. It is not a standalone service but a foundational pillar that supports lifelong learning, inclusive growth, and national resilience. Without

critical attention to its implementation, coverage, and quality, the promise of ECD remains unfulfilled, and the opportunity to build a stronger, more equitable society is lost.

Historically, early learning was not seen as a state responsibility in Pakistan. For many years after independence, early childhood care and development remained confined to informal home settings or madrassahs, and the state made little effort to formally recognize or institutionalize it. It wasn't until the late 1990s and early 2000s that ECE started gaining traction through

international pressure, donor funding, and advocacy from NGOs. A significant milestone was the National Education Policy (NEP) of 2009, which recognized ECE as a separate and essential part of the education system. It outlined the need for trained teachers, separate classrooms, and age-appropriate curricula. In 2017, further revisions reaffirmed the state's commitment to improving access and quality in ECE, aligning it with global frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

International commitments have played a pivotal role in pushing Pakistan to recognize ECE as a developmental priority. As a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action and the SDGs, the country has pledged to ensure that all children have access to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education. These global targets have influenced national and provincial education strategies, at least on paper. However, the translation of these commitments into

actionable plans remains inconsistent and often symbolic.

The gap between policy and practice in ECE is vast. While strategic documents promote a holistic vision of early learning, implementation is weak and highly uneven. One of the key challenges is the devolution of education to the provinces after the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010. While this allowed provinces to design and implement their own education policies, it also resulted in disparities in priorities, budget allocations, and capacity to manage early learning programs. Some provinces like Punjab have made significant investments in setting up ECE corners in public schools and training teachers. Others, like Sindh and Balochistan, have lagged due to political instability, lack of planning, and insufficient resources.

Funding for ECE in Pakistan is severely limited. In many provinces, less than 2% of the education budget is dedicated to early childhood education. This lack of financial commitment restricts the establishment of ECE centers, recruitment of qualified staff, and development of child-friendly learning materials. Infrastructure is another major concern. Many schools lack the physical space to create separate ECE classrooms, and in rural areas, basic amenities like drinking water, toilets, and electricity are often unavailable. In such conditions, expecting quality early learning becomes unrealistic.

The access gap in ECE is also alarming. Nationally, the enrollment rate in ECE is estimated to be around 43%, with wide disparities between urban and rural areas, and among provinces. Punjab has higher enrollment due to government-led initiatives and a relatively stronger infrastructure, while regions like Sindh and Balochistan fall behind. Rural areas face unique challenges such as long travel distances to schools, security concerns, lack of female teachers, and cultural resistance to early education—especially for girls. In many poor households, children are expected to contribute to domestic work or help in income-generating activities instead of attending school. Early education is often seen as an unaffordable luxury rather than a necessity.

Teacher training is another area that



urgently needs reform. A significant proportion of ECE teachers in public schools are untrained or lack specific knowledge about child development. Many are general primary school teachers who have been assigned to ECE classes without any preparation. Effective ECE requires educators who are not only academically qualified but also trained in developmental psychology, child-friendly pedagogies, and emotional support. Currently, there is no national accreditation system for ECE professionals, and in-service training opportunities are limited or nonexistent.

In urban areas, the private sector plays a dominant role in providing ECE. High-end private schools offer Montessori-style education with trained staff, interactive teaching methods, and well-equipped classrooms. However, these facilities are accessible only to affluent families. The cost of private ECE is prohibitive for most Pakistanis, and public alternatives are either substandard or unavailable. This deepens social inequities, with children from poorer families starting formal schooling with major disadvantages.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international donors have attempted to bridge some of these gaps. The Aga Khan Development Network, for instance, has implemented successful ECE models in the northern regions of Pakistan by integrating community participation and female empowerment. UNICEF and UNESCO have supported pilot projects, developed curricula, and trained teachers. Youth-led initiatives have also emerged in recent years, especially in Sindh and southern Punjab, providing alternative models for community-based ECE. These efforts, while impactful, remain localized and unsustainable without government support and long-term planning.

Cultural and social norms also shape ECE participation. In many conservative communities, early education is not prioritized for girls, who are often expected to stay at home or begin domestic responsibilities at a young age. There is also a belief in some areas that formal learning should start later in childhood, undermining the importance of early years. Religious centers sometimes serve as early learning spaces but often lack developmental activities, relying instead on rote memorization.

When it comes to assessing learning outcomes, Pakistan has few reliable and localized tools for evaluating the progress of young children. Most monitoring is done through broad surveys like ASER, which do not fully capture emotional or cognitive development. There is an urgent need to develop culturally appropriate assessment frameworks in local languages that can guide teachers and policymakers in improving ECE delivery.

To move forward, Pakistan must significantly increase public investment in early childhood education. This includes allocating funds for infrastructure, training, and resource development. Teacher education institutions must integrate ECE modules into their programs, and national standards for accreditation and certification must be

the education budget to early childhood initiatives, ensuring that resources are not only planned but actually delivered and used effectively. This investment must cover infrastructure development, provision of learning materials, teacher training, and the establishment of dedicated ECE classrooms, particularly in underprivileged and remote areas.

Another critical step involves the professionalization of the ECE workforce. Teachers must receive specialized training that focuses on child psychology, play-based learning, emotional development, and inclusive pedagogies. Training institutes should include ECE modules in their curriculum, and a national certification and accreditation system should be introduced to ensure quality and consistency across



established. Community engagement is also critical—parents and caregivers must be educated about the value of ECE and empowered to demand quality services. Public-private partnerships can be encouraged, with mechanisms for accountability and quality assurance. Finally, a robust monitoring and evaluation system must be developed to track outcomes and inform decision-making at every level.

To ensure the meaningful progress of early childhood education in Pakistan, future efforts must focus on creating a strong, inclusive, and sustainable foundation that addresses both systemic weaknesses and social barriers. First and foremost, there is an urgent need for increased public investment in ECE. The government should allocate a specific and significant portion of

provinces. Additionally, continuous professional development opportunities should be made available to teachers already in the field, so they can update their knowledge and improve their teaching strategies over time.

Public awareness and community mobilization are equally important. Many parents, especially in rural and low-income communities, are unaware of the long-term benefits of early education. The government, NGOs, and media should work together to run awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of the early years in a child's life. Parents and caregivers should be actively engaged in the learning process through regular meetings, orientation sessions, and parent-teacher dialogues. Schools and community centers can act as

hubs for both learning and parental support, creating a more holistic and cooperative learning environment.

Equity in access must also be prioritized. Girls, children with disabilities, and those living in poverty or conflict-affected areas are often left behind in early education programs. Policy decisions should focus on removing financial, geographic, and cultural barriers. This could include providing stipends or incentives to families for enrolling their children in ECE, recruiting female teachers to make schools more culturally acceptable, and introducing flexible schooling hours or community-based ECE centers in hard-to-reach regions. Local languages and cultural contexts should be integrated into ECE curricula to make learning more relatable and effective for children across different backgrounds.

Coordination among stakeholders is essential for long-term success. A national-level ECE task force comprising government officials, educationists, researchers, and civil society representatives can be established to oversee planning, implementation, and monitoring. This body should ensure that provincial strategies align with

national goals and that there is regular sharing of data, best practices, and innovations across regions. Technology can also play a role in scaling up quality education, especially in areas where physical infrastructure is lacking. Digital learning resources, audio-visual teaching aids, and mobile learning applications should be explored and localized for wider reach.

Monitoring and evaluation systems need to be strengthened to measure both access and quality. Pakistan currently lacks robust, child-sensitive assessment tools tailored to its diverse population. Developing a standardized framework to assess learning outcomes, emotional development, and school readiness will allow policymakers to make informed decisions. Data collection must be regular, disaggregated by gender, geography, and socio-economic status, and used to refine and improve strategies on an ongoing basis.

Fostering partnerships between the public and private sectors can bring innovation, flexibility, and additional resources to the ECE landscape. However, these partnerships should be governed by clear guidelines and monitored to maintain equity and

quality. Civil society organizations and local community groups should also be empowered to take ownership of early childhood education in their areas, ensuring that solutions are locally rooted and sustainable.

The future of early childhood education in Pakistan lies in a collective commitment to investing in young children, training and supporting educators, engaging families, and building systems that are inclusive, resilient, and responsive to the needs of all learners. Only then can the country realize the full potential of its youngest citizens and build a more equitable and prosperous future.

ECE is not merely a preparatory phase for school, it is a cornerstone for human capital development. If Pakistan wants to reduce inequality, improve learning outcomes, and build a productive future workforce, it must start by investing in its youngest citizens. The evidence is clear: quality early childhood education transforms lives. The challenge is no longer about understanding its importance but about mobilizing the will and resources to make it a reality for every child, regardless of their background.





# The Transformation of Taxila: A Vision for the Future



By Hina Kashif

**T**axila, a city that once thrived as a center of learning, culture, and civilization, is now at the heart of an ambitious transformation. Under the leadership of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the city is poised to reemerge as a globally recognized hub of heritage and tourism. This effort is about preserving history and building a sustainable future that celebrates the city's past while positioning it for international acclaim. The plans to revitalize Taxila encompass everything from restoring ancient landmarks to introducing modern infrastructure that supports tourism and environmental sustainability.

In this article, we will explore the rich history of Taxila, assess the current state of the city, and delve into the prospects that this revitalization initiative promises.

## A Glimpse into the Rich History of Taxila

Taxila, located in modern-day Pakistan, is one of the most important archaeological sites in South Asia. It was the capital of the Gandhara region, an ancient kingdom that flourished

between the 6th century BCE and the 5th century CE. The city's significance transcends its strategic location along the ancient trade routes between India, Central Asia, and the Middle East. It is renowned for its contributions to art, religion, philosophy, and education.

The city's most notable historical period came during the rule of the Mauryan Empire, particularly under Emperor Ashoka, who made significant contributions to the spread of Buddhism. Taxila became a vital center for Buddhist scholarship, attracting students from across the ancient world. It was home to one of the earliest universities in history, where scholars studied subjects ranging from medicine and astronomy to philosophy and logic.

The ruins of Taxila today bear testament to its glorious past. The city is home to several archaeological sites, including the ancient city of Sirkap, the Buddhist monastic complex of Jaulian, and the famous Dharmarajika Stupa. These sites, along with many others, have earned Taxila recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, underscoring its global significance as a center of ancient civilization.

## The Current State of Taxila

Despite its immense historical value, the modern city of Taxila has faced challenges over the years. The region has struggled with urbanization, environmental degradation, and the preservation of its ancient heritage. Today, Taxila is a city that sits at the crossroads of past and present, where ancient ruins coexist with modern developments. However, the infrastructure and amenities required to support both its historical legacy and modern growth have been lacking.

In recent years, Taxila's potential as a tourist destination has been underexploited, with limited facilities and promotional efforts to attract international visitors. Additionally, the urban sprawl surrounding the city has encroached upon important archaeological sites, threatening their preservation.

Recognizing these challenges, the Punjab government, led by Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, has embarked on a strategic initiative to revive Taxila and ensure that its rich

cultural heritage is protected for future generations. This effort involves a multi-phase development plan that aims to upgrade the city's infrastructure, enhance its tourism offerings, and safeguard its historical monuments.

## The Vision for Taxila's Future

The transformation of Taxila is guided by a clear vision—to establish the city as a globally recognized center of culture, history, and tourism. This vision involves a two-phase development plan that will not only upgrade the city but also elevate it to the status of an international tourist destination.



### Phase 1:

The first phase of the development plan focuses on modernizing the infrastructure of Taxila to improve the quality of life for its residents and enhance the experience for visitors. Key aspects of this phase include:

- 1. Revival of the Taxila Arts & Crafts Village:** One of the first major initiatives to be completed is the revival of the Taxila Arts & Crafts Village. This village will showcase the traditional crafts of the region, such as pottery, weaving, and wood carving, offering visitors a chance to experience the cultural heritage of the region firsthand. The project is expected to be completed within the next 15 days, marking an important milestone in the revitalization process.
- 2. Development of a Tourism Policy:** A world-class tourism policy is being

developed to create a framework for promoting Taxila as an international tourist destination. The policy will focus on enhancing visitor experiences, providing better amenities, and ensuring the preservation of the city's historical sites.

- 3. Environmental Protection and Urban Management:** To address the environmental challenges in the region, the government has completed a comprehensive mapping of industries, factories, and brick kilns in and around Taxila. This mapping will form the basis of an environmental protection plan aimed at reducing pollution and safeguarding the natural beauty of the area.

### Phase 2: Developing Taxila as an International Tourist City

#### Key Aspects of the Revitalization Plan

#### 1. Preserving Taxila's Heritage

The preservation of Taxila's ancient ruins and archaeological sites is the cornerstone of the revitalization plan. One of the immediate priorities is to implement measures that protect the city's heritage from further damage caused by urban encroachment. This includes introducing stricter zoning laws to prevent construction near sensitive sites and regulating industrial activities in the region.

Additionally, a comprehensive management plan for the conservation of Taxila's historical monuments is being developed. This will involve detailed assessments of the condition of key archaeological sites, such as the famous Sirkap ruins, Jaulian

Monastery, and Dharmarajika Stupa. The goal is to create a sustainable preservation strategy that ensures the long-term survival of these sites while enabling future generations to appreciate their historical value.

#### 2. Revamping Tourism Infrastructure

To unlock Taxila's potential as a global tourist destination, the development plan emphasizes the need for significant improvements to the city's tourism infrastructure. Upgrades to transportation networks, including better roads and public transit options, are critical to making the city more accessible to tourists. Improvements to the international airport and the creation of dedicated transportation hubs for visitors are also part of the plan.

Moreover, the construction of modern hotels, restaurants, and shopping areas will cater to the needs of international tourists while preserving the region's cultural identity. The creation of new visitor centers will provide information and guidance to tourists, helping them navigate the rich history of the city.

The government is also working on developing a world-class tourism policy that will focus on attracting international visitors, promoting responsible tourism, and ensuring that the growth of the tourism industry does not come at the expense of Taxila's heritage.

#### 3. Revitalizing Cultural and Educational Initiatives

Part of the broader vision for Taxila's future involves positioning the city as a center for cultural and educational exchange. Taxila's legacy as a center of learning during the Gandhara period remains one of its most distinctive features, and the revitalization plan seeks to build upon this history.

The creation of cultural institutions, such as museums and art galleries, will further highlight Taxila's role as a hub of art, culture, and education. Additionally, international partnerships with universities and research institutions will be encouraged to promote academic exchanges and collaborative research on the city's archaeological and historical significance.

The government is also exploring the possibility of establishing a world-class



research center focused on the study of Gandhara civilization, further cementing Taxila's role as a global leader in cultural heritage.

#### 4. Environmental Sustainability

A key component of the revitalization plan is ensuring that Taxila's development is environmentally sustainable. Given the region's vulnerability to environmental degradation, efforts will be made to address issues such as pollution, waste management, and deforestation. The government has already undertaken a mapping project to assess the environmental impact of local industries, and stricter regulations will be enforced to minimize the ecological footprint of urban expansion.

Incorporating green spaces and eco-friendly practices in tourism development will also be a priority. The government plans to promote sustainable tourism that benefits both the local community and the environment while preserving the natural beauty of the region.

## Historical Places of Pakistan: A Rich Heritage Beyond Taxila

Taxila is undoubtedly one of Pakistan's most significant archaeological treasures, but it is

far from the only site that reflects the country's rich historical and cultural legacy. From the ancient cities of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa in the Indus Valley to the majestic ruins of Lahore Fort, Pakistan is home to a wealth of historical landmarks that represent the diverse cultures, empires, and civilizations that have shaped the region.

### 1. Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (Indus Valley Civilization)

The ancient cities of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, located in Sindh and Punjab respectively, are among the most significant archaeological sites in the world. These cities, dating back to around 2500 BCE, are part of the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the oldest and most advanced urban cultures in history. The well-planned streets, sophisticated drainage systems, and intricately designed pottery found at these sites offer invaluable insights into early urbanization and craftsmanship.

### 2. Lahore Fort and Shalimar Gardens

The Lahore Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is an architectural marvel that reflects the grandeur of Mughal architecture. Located in the heart of Lahore, this fort was the seat of Mughal emperors for centuries and boasts a rich

history, including the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan. Nearby, the Shalimar Gardens are another testament to Mughal-era splendor, with their stunning layout, fountains, and terraced levels that reflect the beauty and sophistication of Mughal design.

### 3. Badshahi Mosque

The Badshahi Mosque in Lahore is one of the largest and most beautiful mosques in the world. Built in 1673, it exemplifies Mughal architecture at its finest, with intricate carvings, expansive courtyards, and striking red sandstone walls. The mosque stands as a symbol of Islamic heritage in South Asia and is a major tourist attraction.

### 4. The Tomb of Ranjit Singh

Located in Lahore, the tomb of Ranjit Singh, the founder of the Sikh Empire, is another historical landmark of great significance. This tomb complex, with its intricate marble work and serene surroundings, honors the legacy of a ruler who played a pivotal role in the region's history.

### 5. The Buddhist Monasteries of Swat

Swat, often referred to as the "Switzerland of Pakistan," is home to ancient Buddhist





monasteries, including Udegram, Butkara, and the Buddhist archaeological sites of the region. These ruins, dating back to the 2nd century BCE, offer a window into the spread of Buddhism across the region and highlight Swat's historical significance as a Buddhist cultural center.

## Environmental Sustainability and Protection

A critical aspect of Taxila's revitalization is the integration of environmental sustainability into the development process. The Punjab government recognizes the importance of balancing growth with environmental protection to ensure that Taxila's natural resources and historical landmarks

are preserved for future generations.

One of the major challenges faced by Taxila is the encroachment of industries and urban sprawl on the region's archaeological sites. To address this, a comprehensive environmental protection plan is being developed, focusing on the regulation of industries and the prevention of pollution. The plan includes measures to limit the expansion of brick kilns and factories in the area, as well as efforts to improve waste management and promote green practices among local businesses.

Additionally, the government is exploring ways to incorporate sustainable tourism practices, ensuring that the growth of the tourism industry does not lead to the degradation of Taxila's natural and cultural

resources. This includes initiatives such as eco-friendly accommodations, waste reduction programs, and the promotion of responsible tourism.

## A Promising Future for Taxila

The revitalization of Taxila represents a bold and visionary step toward transforming the city into a world-class destination that honors its ancient heritage while embracing the future. The two-phase development plan, which focuses on upgrading the city's infrastructure and enhancing its tourism offerings, has the potential to transform Taxila into an international center for culture, heritage, and education.

By prioritizing the preservation of its archaeological sites, investing in sustainable development, and creating a robust tourism framework, the government is ensuring that Taxila's rich history is safeguarded while opening the door to a brighter future. As the city's transformation continues, Taxila will undoubtedly become a beacon of cultural heritage, attracting visitors and scholars from around the world.

With the successful implementation of the development plan, Taxila is on track to reclaim its position as one of the most important cultural and historical centers in South Asia, offering a unique opportunity to connect with the past while looking toward a prosperous future.





# Pakistan's Cricket Transformation: A Fresh Start or a Costly Mistake?

By Saad Jadoon

Pakistan's cricketing history is filled with moments of brilliance, unforgettable matches, and legendary players. However, it has also been plagued by inconsistency, internal conflicts, and abrupt team changes. The recent exclusion of several top players from the national team has triggered widespread discussions among cricket fans and experts. While some view this as a necessary move towards restructuring and improving the team, others argue that it may weaken Pakistan's competitive standing in international cricket. The decision to remove seasoned players has created a ripple effect, changing the team's dynamics, leadership structure, and approach to the game. As Pakistan embarks on a new cricketing era, it is essential to analyze the reasons behind these changes, their immediate impact, and what the future holds for Pakistan cricket.

## The Decision to Drop Top Players: A Necessary Reset?

The exclusion of experienced players from the Pakistan squad was not a hasty decision but rather a strategic move influenced by various factors. One of the key reasons was the declining form of certain senior players, who struggled to perform consistently in international fixtures. Cricket, particularly in the modern era, demands top-level fitness, adaptability, and mental resilience. Some senior cricketers failed to meet these expectations, leading to concerns over their ability to contribute effectively to the team's success. Furthermore, age and fitness concerns played a major role in this decision. In the fast-paced world of T20 and ODI cricket, players must maintain high levels of fitness and athleticism. Unfortunately, some of Pakistan's senior players struggled to keep up with the physical demands of the game, resulting in slower fielding, reduced agility, and lower endurance levels.

Another major reason was the growing emphasis on discipline and professionalism within the team. Reports suggested that some senior players were not adhering to the team's code of conduct, creating a challenging environment for younger players and management. Issues such as disagreements with coaching staff, lack of commitment during training sessions, and failure to adhere to team strategies led to their removal. This step was aimed at fostering a more disciplined and focused team culture, where young players can thrive under a structured system. Lastly, Pakistan's selection committee has been keen on investing in young talent, believing that long-term success requires a fresh batch of players who can adapt to modern cricket. The country has a vast pool of young, talented cricketers waiting for opportunities. By bringing in new faces, the team management aims to build a future-proof squad capable of competing at the highest level for years to come.



## Pakistan's Performance Post-Overhaul: A Mixed Bag

Since the exclusion of top players, Pakistan's performance in international cricket has seen both promising moments and growing pains. The Test team, for instance, has struggled to find stability in the batting department. The absence of experienced batters has been felt, particularly in challenging overseas conditions. While young players have displayed potential, their lack of exposure to high-pressure situations has resulted in inconsistency. The team's bowling attack, however, continues to perform admirably, thanks to Pakistan's tradition of producing world-class fast bowlers. The ODI team has witnessed a shift in approach, with young players bringing an aggressive mindset to the crease. While this has resulted in some remarkable wins, there have also been instances where inexperience has cost Pakistan crucial matches. The lack of seasoned finishers and middle-order stability remains a concern that needs urgent attention.

In T20 cricket, the younger squad has shown resilience and adaptability. The shorter format suits their attacking style, and many of these players have gained valuable experience through domestic leagues. Pakistan's recent performances in bilateral series and international tournaments suggest that while the transition phase is ongoing, the team has the potential to compete against top cricketing nations. However, the road ahead remains challenging, as young players will need to develop consistency, game awareness, and the ability to handle pressure in high-stakes encounters.

## Emerging Stars: The Future of Pakistan Cricket

With the removal of senior players, several young cricketers

have stepped up to fill the void. Abdullah Shafique has been particularly impressive in Test cricket, demonstrating a solid technique and temperament suited for the longer format. Saim Ayub has caught the attention of fans with his fearless batting in T20s, often providing explosive starts at the top of the order. Aamer Jamal, a fiery fast bowler, has shown the potential to become Pakistan's next pace sensation, adding depth to the bowling attack. Irfan Niazi, an emerging all-rounder, has brought balance to the squad with his ability to contribute with both bat and ball. These players represent the future of Pakistan cricket, and their development will be crucial in determining how successful this transition period is.

## Challenges of the Rebuilding Process

Despite the promise of young talent, Pakistan faces significant challenges in this rebuilding phase. The most pressing issue is the leadership void left by the absence of experienced players. Captaincy requires not just tactical acumen but also the ability to inspire and guide a young squad. Without seasoned mentors in the team, young leaders must learn quickly and adapt to the pressures of international cricket. Inconsistency is another major concern. New players often take time to settle into their roles, and Pakistan's fluctuating performances highlight this struggle. There have been instances where the team has dominated strong opponents, only to falter in crucial moments due to inexperience. Patience from fans and management will be essential as these players gain more exposure and mature in their roles.

The immense pressure of expectations also weighs heavily on the team. Pakistan's cricket-loving nation demands immediate results, and failures often lead to harsh criticism. Young players must develop the mental toughness needed to handle such scrutiny while focusing on long-term growth. Additionally, the selection committee must strike a balance between youth and experience. While investing in fresh talent is necessary, completely sidelining seasoned campaigners may not be the most effective approach. The team needs a blend of youthful energy and veteran guidance to navigate the challenges of international cricket successfully.

## Pakistan's History of Transitions: Successes, Struggles, and Lessons Learned

Another example of a significant transition in Pakistan cricket was after the 1999 World Cup, where a mix of aging stars and emerging talent failed to deliver in the final against Australia. Following that period, the team saw a gradual phasing out of players like Saeed Anwar, Ijaz Ahmed, and Moin Khan, making way for younger cricketers such as Yousuf Khan, Shoaib Malik, and later Mohammad Hafeez. However, this transition was not without its difficulties. The early 2000s were marked by inconsistent performances, frequent captaincy changes, and a lack of stability in both the batting and bowling departments. While the raw talent was there, the absence of strong leadership initially hurt Pakistan's ability to perform consistently on the international stage. It took several years before a solid core developed, eventually leading to better performances, including Pakistan's ICC T20 World Cup victory in 2009 and their strong showing in the 2011 ODI World Cup.

Similarly, in 2010, Pakistan faced one of its most turbulent transitions after the infamous spot-fixing scandal, which led to the banning of key players like Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif, and Mohammad Amir. This sudden loss of experienced players, particularly in the bowling department, left Pakistan struggling to maintain its competitive edge in international cricket. However, despite this massive setback, Pakistan's resilience shone through as new leaders emerged. Misbah-ul-Haq took charge during one of Pakistan's darkest periods and provided the stability that the team desperately needed. Under his leadership, Pakistan gradually rebuilt itself and even reached the No. 1 Test ranking in 2016—a testament to the power of strong leadership during times of transition. However, this rebuilding process took several years, and it was only through patience and strategic planning that Pakistan was able to recover from this challenging phase.

Another key transition came after the 2015 ICC World Cup, where Pakistan failed to make a significant impact due to an aging squad that struggled to keep pace with modern cricket. Following this disappointment, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) initiated another phase of rebuilding, bringing in younger players such as Babar Azam, Hasan Ali, and Shadab Khan. While the initial results were mixed, this transition proved to be a turning point, leading to Pakistan's triumphant ICC Champions Trophy win in 2017, where they stunned India in the final. This era saw Pakistan focusing on improving its fielding, fitness, and overall team dynamics—something that had been missing in previous transitions. However, despite the success in shorter formats, Pakistan continued to struggle with consistency in Test and ODI cricket due to frequent changes in team selection and a lack of long-term planning.

These past transitions highlight that Pakistan cricket has historically undergone drastic changes, often forced by circumstances rather than strategic planning. While some transitions led to golden periods, others resulted in years of instability before the team found its rhythm again. The current overhaul follows a similar pattern, and whether it leads to success or another prolonged struggle will depend on how well the new generation is nurtured and supported. Pakistan cricket has always thrived on unpredictability, but if history has taught anything, it is that proper management, patience, and a balance of experience and youth are crucial for any successful transition. The challenge now is whether Pakistan can learn from past mistakes and ensure that this new phase of cricket brings long-term stability rather than another cycle of uncertainty.

## Lessons from Other Teams' Transitions

Pakistan is not the first team to undergo a major transition. Several top cricketing nations have successfully rebuilt their squads over the years. India, for example, faced a similar situation after the retirements of legends like Sachin Tendulkar and MS Dhoni. By investing in a structured domestic system and grooming young players like Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, India was able to maintain its competitive edge. Australia, too, went through a rough patch after the departure of Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke but rebuilt successfully with a new generation of cricketers. England's



transformation after their 2015 World Cup failure is another example of how strategic planning and patience can lead to long-term success. Pakistan must learn from these teams, focusing on consistency, player development, and a long-term vision.

## How the PSL Can Help Pakistan Cricket's Transition

The Pakistan Super League (PSL) has emerged as a crucial platform for identifying and nurturing young talent, and it can play a significant role in easing the current transition phase of the national team. One of the biggest challenges Pakistan faces in rebuilding is the lack of international exposure for its younger players, and the PSL provides an ideal environment for them to compete against world-class cricketers. The high-pressure nature of the league, coupled with the presence of experienced foreign players and coaches, helps young Pakistani cricketers develop the temperament, skills, and confidence required to perform at the highest level. Players like Shadab Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, and Shaheen Afridi all rose to prominence through the PSL before making their mark in international cricket. Additionally, the PSL serves as a testing ground for emerging players, allowing the selectors and management to assess their abilities under competitive conditions before integrating them into the national squad.

Another major advantage of the PSL is the exposure it provides to young Pakistani players in terms of playing with and against international stars. The presence of foreign cricketers in the league offers valuable learning experiences that domestic tournaments cannot provide. Sharing dressing rooms with seasoned professionals, receiving mentorship from world-class coaches, and competing under the pressure of packed stadiums help refine their technical and mental skills. Unlike traditional domestic cricket, the PSL replicates international-level intensity, preparing players for the challenges they will face when representing Pakistan on the global stage. This exposure is particularly important for batsmen, as Pakistani players often struggle against high-quality fast bowlers and spinners in international cricket. By facing foreign bowlers in the PSL, they can adapt their techniques and improve their game in a competitive yet controlled environment.

Moreover, the PSL plays a significant role in addressing one of Pakistan cricket's biggest concerns—captaincy and leadership development. The league has allowed young cricketers to take on leadership roles in their respective franchises, helping them understand team dynamics, decision-making under pressure, and tactical strategies. Players like Babar Azam, Shadab Khan, and Shaheen Afridi have all been allowed to lead PSL franchises, which has helped them gain valuable experience in handling responsibility at a young age. This is crucial for Pakistan's national team, as leadership instability has historically been a major issue. By grooming potential captains through the PSL, Pakistan can ensure a smoother transition when senior players retire or are phased out.

Financially, the PSL also plays a vital role in strengthening Pakistan cricket by generating revenue that can be reinvested into grassroots development, domestic cricket, and player welfare programs. A well-funded cricket system ensures better facilities,

improved coaching, and a stronger domestic structure—all of which contribute to a smoother transition when integrating young players into the national team. Furthermore, the league boosts the overall brand value of Pakistan cricket, making it an attractive destination for foreign coaches and trainers who can help refine the skills of the next generation.

Additionally, the PSL can be used as a platform to revive struggling players who have been left out of the national team due to form or fitness issues. In past seasons, we have seen players like Mohammad Amir and Hasan Ali use the league to make strong comebacks to international cricket. The tournament gives out-of-form cricketers a chance to prove themselves, giving selectors a clear picture of who deserves a return to the national squad.

While the PSL has already contributed significantly to Pakistan cricket, its role in the current transition phase is more important than ever. If properly managed, it can serve as the backbone of Pakistan's rebuilding process by continuously producing match-ready players who can step into the international arena with confidence. However, for the PSL to be fully effective in this role, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) must ensure that young talents are provided with adequate opportunities and are not discarded prematurely. Strong scouting networks, investment in player development, and a structured pathway from PSL franchises to the national team will be key in ensuring a successful transition.

Pakistan cricket has always been known for its raw talent, but in the modern game, talent alone is not enough. The PSL offers the perfect system to refine this talent, bridge the gap between domestic and international cricket, and prepare a new generation of cricketers to carry Pakistan forward. If utilized effectively, the PSL will not just be a successful league but also a cornerstone for Pakistan's cricketing future.

## The Path Forward: What Pakistan Must Do

For this transition to yield positive results, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) must take proactive steps. Consistency in selection policies is vital. Constant chopping and changing will disrupt team chemistry and hinder player confidence. Investing in domestic cricket is also essential. Strengthening Pakistan's domestic structure will ensure that young players are well-prepared before making their international debuts. Appointing experienced coaches and mentors who can guide the young squad is another crucial step. Finally, the PCB must set realistic goals and allow this team to grow without unnecessary pressure.

Pakistan cricket is entering a new era, one filled with both opportunities and uncertainties. While the removal of top players was a bold decision, it has paved the way for a younger, more dynamic team. The coming years will determine whether this transition leads to long-term success or further instability. With proper planning, patience, and support, Pakistan has the potential to emerge stronger than ever. As cricket fans, all eyes are on this new-look team, hoping for a future filled with memorable victories and iconic performances.

# Empowering Pakistan's Future: An Exclusive Interview with Rana Mashood, Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Program Part-II



By Saad Jadoon

In this exclusive interview, we sat down with Rana Mashood, the dynamic Chairman of the PMYP, to discuss the program's groundbreaking initiatives, its vision for the future, and the challenges faced in bridging the gap between urban and rural youth. From the success of the Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme to the launch of Pakistan's first Digital Youth Hub, Rana Mashood shares insights into how the government is working to unlock the potential of millions of young Pakistanis.

But this conversation goes beyond policies and programs. Rana Mashood, a seasoned politician and advocate for youth empowerment, opens up about his journey, the importance of merit and integrity in politics, and his vision for a Pakistan where every young person has the opportunity to thrive.

Whether you're a young Pakistani looking for opportunities, a policymaker seeking inspiration, or simply someone interested in the future of this nation, this interview offers a deep dive

into the strategies and stories shaping Pakistan's youth. Join us as we explore how the PMYP is turning challenges into opportunities and paving the way for a brighter tomorrow.

**Rabia Hussain:** Many young people do not want to study or work, and they are left behind due to the lack of facilities in rural areas. How will you fill this gap?

**Rana Mashood:** I think you've met with our opponents and are promoting their propaganda. But the reality is that we are taking practical steps for the youth. Our "4Es" are:

- Education
- Employment
- Engagement
- Environment

These four elements form a complete system.

The Prime Minister's Youth Loan Program, National Innovation Award, Jam Clubs, and Green Youth Movement are all initiatives being introduced

in universities and educational institutions. Currently, these programs are active in 67 public sector universities, and our goal is to expand them to 267 universities (public and private) by next year.

Indeed, universities are mostly located in big cities, but we have also taken special measures for rural areas.

## Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan

1. Countless opportunities are being provided in the agriculture sector.
2. Special concessions are being given to young farmers.

As a result of these measures, 250,000 jobs have been created, most of which are related to the agriculture sector.

## Training Programs with NAVTTTC

1. Over 70% of the participants in these programs are from rural areas.



1. So far, we have sent 800,000 youth abroad to secure dignified employment.
2. Our goal is to provide international employment opportunities to 1.2 million youth.

## International Opportunities and Employment

We have created opportunities for youth in GCC countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE), as well as in China, South Korea, Japan, Spain, Serbia, Bosnia, Europe, America, and Canada.

**Rabia Hussain:** What is the Selection Process for Overseas Employment?

**Rana Mashood:** We are providing free training, and recruitment is being done based on the principle of demand and supply.

### • Ethical Training:

We are providing soft skills and ethical training to youth so they can serve as ambassadors of Pakistan. If they perform well, more doors will open for other Pakistanis. If they act irresponsibly, opportunities for others may close.

We are preparing a guidebook for overseas Pakistani workers, similar to the one created for Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.

### • International Certifications and Legal Visa Process:

For the first time, we are introducing international certifications. Youths will obtain certifications from the country they plan to work in before going there. These exams will be modeled after Cambridge O-Levels but tailored to the laws of each country. The destination country itself will issue the work permit.

**Rabia Hussain:** Do they issue work permits?

**Rana Mashood:** We know that in the past, many people attempted to go abroad through illegal means. Many of them faced accidents during boat journeys. These are individuals who go illegally without following government procedures. Now, no visa will be issued without the Bureau of Immigration. We are tightening border controls to ensure no one enters or leaves Pakistan illegally.

**Rabia Hussain:** Addressing Drug Addiction and Mental Health Issues, Does PMYP Working on This?

**Rana Mashood:** We are seeing an increase in drug addiction and mental health issues among youth.

A major reason for this is despair and uncertainty about the future. When youth are not kept engaged, they turn to the wrong paths. We are taking measures to address these issues. We are engaging youth in education, employment, and positive activities to prevent them from going astray. I was the Education Minister of Punjab, and I know how these networks operate. We will eliminate them from the root.



We are not just talking; we are taking practical actions!

Our efforts are focused on:

- Eliminating the gap between rural and urban youth.
- Creating more international employment opportunities.
- Empowering youth through education, skills, and employment.
- This is not for any political slogan but for the bright future of Pakistan's youth!

**Rabia Hussain:** What is your opinion on dynastic politics in Pakistan?

**Rana Mashood:** Look, this is fifth-generation warfare imposed on Pakistan. When

nothing else worked, the slogan of dynastic politics was raised. My question is: Justin Trudeau's father was also a Prime Minister. Bush Sr. and Bush Jr. were Presidents of the United States. In India, the Gandhi family, and in Japan, political dynasties are not seen as a problem. But when it comes to Pakistan, the noise about dynastic politics is amplified.

If Hamza Shahbaz or Maryam Nawaz are in politics in our party, it is not because they are the children of Nawaz Sharif or Shahbaz Sharif, but because of their struggle and sacrifices. Hamza Shahbaz was jailed in 1999 when he was not even 18 years old. Maryam Nawaz was imprisoned for standing with her father, and when she

was in London, she knew she would be arrested upon returning, yet she came back.

These individuals remain among the people and work for the people, and that is why they receive votes. If the people do not trust them, they will not enter politics.

**Rabia Hussain:** What is the biggest issue you faced? What qualities are essential for a good politician?

**Rana Mashood:** Understanding the problems and pulse of the people is crucial. One must be realistic. When I contested my first election in 2002, I realized that the annual income of the people I represented was less than what we lawyers spent on a single suit. That's when I changed my lifestyle and attire to stay closer to the people.



Simplicity is key. I have always used small cars, and my household expenses are limited. A spirit of service. We spend more than 50% of our earnings on public welfare because politics is worship. Integrity. I openly say that if even an inch of land or a single rupee of corruption is proven against me, I will quit politics.

**Rana Mashood:** A politician should also bring reforms within their party. That's why I established a Research and Planning Unit in my party, which plays a vital role in policymaking. We also launched a magazine called *Horizon*, which has been running for six years and is read by 60,000 people every month. These are the steps we are taking to transform politics into public service.

**Rabia Hussain:** It seems like you were made for politics, but if you weren't a politician, what would you be?

**Rana Mashood:** I would be a lawyer. By the grace of Allah, I was the youngest Secretary of the Lahore High Court Bar in its history, and I gained fame very quickly. I had an overwhelming amount of work, and I can never thank Allah enough. If I weren't in politics, I would have been a successful lawyer. In fact, my family has a unique record. My father was the Secretary of the Lahore High Court Bar, then I became the Secretary, and later my younger brother, Rana Asadullah, also served as Secretary. The Bar trusted us repeatedly.

**Rabia Hussain:** A personal question—have you ever been interested in acting?

**Rana Mashood:** Politics nowadays is a form of acting anyway! I was about to say that—you read my mind! Back in the day, when our elders were in politics, my father's time had an old landline phone, and no one would call after 6 PM. Meetings were rare and only happened in emergencies.

But now? You have to be available on your mobile phone all the time. People call at 3 AM and ask, "Are you asleep?" Then you go on TV channels, get makeup done, and sit in front of the camera—we've already become half-actors!

If I ever got a chance to act in films, what role would I play? I am a big fan of Western films. I have a complete collection of books by famous Western author Louis L'Amour. If I were an actor, I might have played a role like Clint Eastwood.

**Rabia Hussain:** Which Place is Your Favourite to Visit In Pakistan?

**Rana Mashood:** Extremely beautiful! Every inch of Pakistan is stunning. If you go to the desert, there's a unique peace and simplicity there. Pakistani people, wherever they go, are simple, sincere, and hospitable. Whether you go to the mountains, riversides, or the sea, each place has its own culture and beauty. When I was a student,

we traveled across Pakistan on motorcycles, from Khunjerab to Gwadar.

**Rabia Hussain:** One quality of Imran Khan that you admire?

**Rana Mashood:** I was once an "Imran Tiger"! I used to collect funds for him because I believed he was doing good work. We hoped he would be a different kind of politician, but when I saw the people around him and his decisions, I was disappointed.

Allah gave him a huge opportunity; he could have become a global leader today, but his weaknesses overshadowed him, and Pakistan suffered.

**Rabia Hussain:** Can relations between PTI and PML-N ever improve?

**Rana Mashood:** Dialogue is essential in politics. I am a democratic person and believe in the supremacy of the Constitution. Pakistan and India fought several wars, but eventually, they had to negotiate. Bangladesh now wants to improve relations with Pakistan, so dialogue is the solution to any problem.

Even in murder cases, both parties sit and negotiate, so despite political differences, dialogue is necessary. Politics has divided society, split families, and even turned Muslims against non-Muslims. If someone is in another party, they are corrupt and wrong, but if I am here, I am pure and



flawless. However, major scandals have emerged, but those involved say it doesn't matter, while others... The point is, ultimately, dialogue is the only solution. I rarely appear on talk shows because nothing is achieved there. I have always said that May 9 was an act of national betrayal, repeated on May 26, which was also treason against Pakistan. Attacks on state institutions are unacceptable.

The recent bombings in Bannu were an attack on the state of Pakistan, and no one should be allowed to attack the state. PTI should disassociate itself from those who did this and apologize to the nation. After that, politics is every Pakistani's right. The political platform should be open to everyone, but there is a "red line," and that is Pakistan's defense institutions.

Those who stand at the borders and sacrifice their lives are the reason we are safe today. If what is happening in Bannu were to spread to Islamabad, Punjab, Sindh, or Balochistan, what would happen to the country? We must acknowledge the sacrifices of these martyrs. When their bodies return home, think of what their children go through.

And then, those who go to international forums and call them "usurpers," what

message are they sending? These are the same people who stood with Musharraf and supported his referendum, and when General Bajwa made decisions in their favor, they said, "The Army Chief is the father of the nation." But when times changed, they changed their "father"? This behavior is untrustworthy.

That's why I believe dialogue is the only solution. We are ready for talks because we want stability in Pakistan. In the next elections, the people should be free to vote for whoever they want, and votes should be based on performance, not propaganda.

We made mistakes in the 1990 elections—sometimes Benazir Bhutto was the victim, sometimes Nawaz Sharif. If elections were based on performance, the nation would be in a different place today. After 2008, we didn't learn our lesson. In 2013, votes were based on performance, but what happened in 2018 with the RTS manipulation, the entire Pakistan is paying the price for it today.

As a Pakistani, a lawyer, and a politician, I believe that dialogue is inevitable. But first, they must apologize to the nation.

**Rabia Hussain:** Why is apologizing to the nation necessary?

**Rana Mashood:** Because the attacks on state institutions are unforgivable. Look at what American newspapers and channels say: "Nuclear power Pakistan's military bases attacked," "If a country's army is not secure, how can its nuclear assets be safe?"

This language cannot be that of a Pakistani; it can only be that of our enemies—India, Israel, or lobbies working against Pakistan. We must understand that while we should engage in politics, we must not be disrespectful and must respect state institutions.

### Final Message of Today's Episode by Rana Mashood:

My message is this: Just as you are working for special individuals, I have great respect for you and people like you. Since I oversee the Prime Minister's Youth Program, my message to Pakistani youth is to be sincere with yourselves. Those who are not sincere with themselves cannot be sincere with anyone else.

Take your life seriously, and do not be discouraged by temporary failures. Keep working hard. Every religion teaches us to persevere, work with good intentions, and maintain honesty. If your intentions are pure, no one can stop your path.







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