

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

1st - 15th February 2025

A New World under Trump
Western Allies Prepare for Shocks

Breaking Boundaries
Gulf Nations Slam Israeli Map

Transformation of Automobile Industry
A journey of resilience and innovation

DONALD TRUMP'S RE-INAUGURATION AND ITS AFTERMATH: A BOLD RETURN TO POWER



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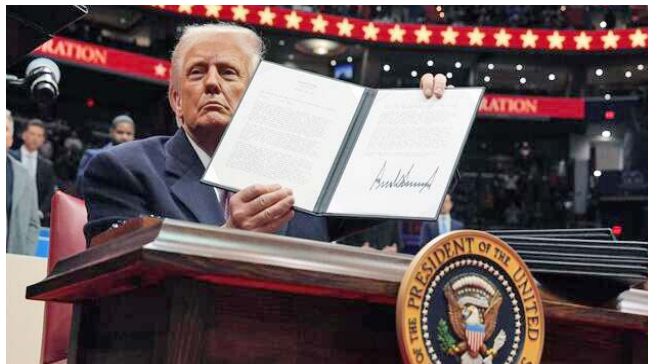
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Web: www.thetruthinternational.com

Price: Rs. 435

Publisher:

Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

Printer:

Masha Allah Printers

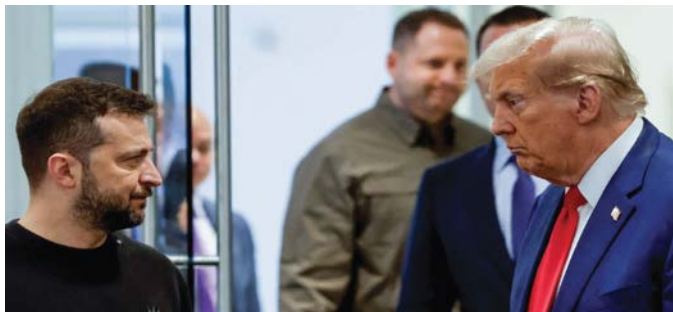
Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq
Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

Design & Layout:

Abdul Qadir

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Trump's Return: A Reversal of Biden's Policies and a Hardline Approach to Russia



By Kanwal Munir

Donald Trump returned to the White House on January 20, 2025, pledging to reverse the policies of his predecessor, President Joe Biden. Donald Trump began his second term in office with a series of high-impact executive orders, signaling a sharp break from the policies of the Biden administration. Trump's executive actions on that first day focused on reversing key domestic and international policies that had defined the previous administration's agenda. These included sweeping changes in immigration, climate change, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and trade, with the president emphasizing that these actions were meant to undo the so-called "disruptive and radical" executive orders from the previous administration.

The 80 executive actions revoked by Trump, according to his own remarks, were among the most significant policy changes in Biden's tenure, particularly those aimed at dealing with climate change, immigration reform, and refugee programs. However, some of these actions are expected to be challenged in courts, and many may remain symbolic due to their controversial nature.

A Reversal of Key Domestic Policies

In his inaugural speech and subsequent actions, Trump made it clear that one of his top priorities would be to dismantle President Biden's efforts to expand social programs and move toward a more progressive government structure. His executive orders included several key directives meant to undo policies that had been championed by the previous administration, particularly in areas like immigration, diversity, and the federal workforce.

Immigration and Border Control

One of Trump's primary promises during his campaign was to secure the U.S.-Mexico border and clamp down on immigration. On his first day back in office, Trump fulfilled his pledge by ordering the deployment of additional troops to the southern border. He also signed an executive order halting the entry of refugees who had previously been cleared for resettlement. This move reflected his commitment to prioritizing national security over humanitarian concerns.

In a bold move, Trump announced plans for a large-scale deportation effort, targeting millions of undocumented immigrants. He justified this by calling it an "invasion" of the country, a term he frequently used during his previous term. Experts have expressed concern over the practicality and costs associated with such an operation, acknowledging that it could take years to implement.

Environmental and Energy Policy Reversals

Trump's policies on climate change and energy production were also a key focus of his executive orders. One of his first acts as president was to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, a global pact aimed at reducing carbon emissions. This decision was in line with his previous stance on climate change, which he described as a "hoax."

Trump also sought to boost domestic energy production by reviving drilling and mining operations on public lands, a move that has long been championed by his supporters in the oil and gas

industry. His administration rolled back many of the environmental regulations imposed by Biden, which Trump described as "disruptive" and "radical."

Tariffs and Trade Policy

Another significant area of focus for Trump was trade policy. On his first day back in office, he ordered an investigation into trade practices, particularly those of China, Canada, and Mexico. This directive included examining the persistent trade deficits with these countries and addressing what Trump has called "unfair currency practices." This was part of his broader plan to reassert American economic interests on the global stage, particularly in the wake of the ongoing trade war with China.

Additionally, Trump's orders targeted what he perceived as foreign threats to U.S. economic security. He instructed federal agencies to conduct a review of national security risks posed by international trade practices, including the importation of goods from adversarial nations.

Gender and Diversity Initiatives

One of the more controversial aspects of Trump's executive orders was his decision to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion (D.E.I.) initiatives across the federal government. He directed agencies to eliminate programs designed to address systemic racism and inequality, which were championed by the Biden administration. Trump also signed an order that defined gender in binary terms, recognizing only male and female sexes and removing protections for transgender individuals in federal prisons.

These actions were seen by many as a deliberate effort to undo the progress made under the previous administration regarding civil rights and inclusivity.

Military and National Security

Trump's orders also focused on the military, with a clear emphasis on national security. He announced plans to overhaul the military by eliminating "radical woke ideologies" and restoring what he referred to as the "patriotic" ideals of the U.S. armed

forces. This move came as part of his broader effort to restore what he viewed as traditional American values.

Additionally, Trump directed the U.S. military to build a missile defense shield over the country, an ambitious and costly project that has raised concerns about its feasibility.

Social Media and National Security

In addition to his focus on domestic policies, Trump's executive actions also extended to the realm of technology and national security. One of the key directives was a review of the social media platform TikTok, which has been under scrutiny for



national security concerns due to its ownership by Chinese company ByteDance. Trump ordered a consultation with federal agencies to assess the risks posed by TikTok and other foreign-owned platforms, with a goal of finding a resolution that would protect national security while preserving a platform used by millions of Americans.

This is part of a broader effort by Trump to combat what he perceives as foreign influence over U.S. technology companies and digital platforms. The concerns over TikTok are not new; previous attempts to ban the app were stymied by courts, but Trump's second-term approach suggests that he will continue to focus on limiting the influence of foreign powers in the U.S. digital space.

Refugee Admissions and Border Troops

In a further escalation of his immigration policy, Trump ordered the suspension of refugee admissions, halting flights for individuals who had already been approved for resettlement. This order came in tandem with the deployment of an additional 1,500 troops to the U.S.-Mexico border to address what Trump described as an ongoing crisis.

The suspension of refugee admissions, particularly those who had been waiting for resettlement in the U.S. after escaping war and persecution, represents a major reversal of the Biden administration's policies. Biden had sought to expand the U.S. refugee program, helping individuals from

countries like Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine. Under Trump's orders, however, all scheduled refugee travel was canceled, throwing the future of many vulnerable individuals into uncertainty.

Public Reaction and Legal Challenges

Trump's executive orders have faced significant backlash, particularly regarding the suspension of refugee admissions. Democratic leaders, including Senator Jeanne Shaheen, criticized the move as a violation of American values, with refugee advocacy groups condemning it for undermining the U.S.'s tradition of offering sanctuary. Many of Trump's orders are expected to face legal

challenges, especially those on birthright citizenship and refugee admissions, which critics argue may violate constitutional and international law. These legal battles could delay or alter the impact of his decisions.

Trump's Stance on Russia and Ukraine

President Donald Trump warned Russia of additional sanctions unless it agrees to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine. This marked one of his strongest comments since returning to office, signaling a firm stance on Russia's actions. However, the Kremlin dismissed Trump's remarks as "nothing new," emphasizing its openness to "mutually respectful" dialogue with the U.S.



Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov downplayed Trump's sanctions warning, noting that Russia was already familiar with such rhetoric. He reiterated Moscow's readiness for equal dialogue with Washington, despite not being swayed by sanctions threats.

Speculation is rising over a possible phone conversation between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, amid escalating tensions and battlefield developments. Trump urged Putin on social media to negotiate now to avoid further sanctions, contrasting with the Biden administration's continued support for Ukraine's territorial efforts.

Despite facing sanctions, the Kremlin downplays their impact, emphasizing

economic challenges are not unique to Russia. Peskov affirmed Russia has the resources to sustain its military operations in Ukraine, highlighting the Kremlin's focus on advancing its objectives despite external pressures. Russia has also strengthened ties with China, India, and other nations, mitigating some economic fallout from Western sanctions.

Trump's Sanctions Threats and Their Implications

Trump's warning of increased sanctions against Russia if it does not agree to a peace deal is the latest development in a long-running debate over how to handle the war in

Ukraine. During his first term, Trump frequently criticized U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts and advocated for an "America First" approach, which included scaling back military engagements abroad and prioritizing domestic issues.

In his recent remarks, Trump framed sanctions as a tool of leverage to encourage negotiations and bring an end to the war. His administration's use of sanctions was often framed as a way to pressure adversaries, including Russia, into compliance with U.S. foreign policy objectives. However, critics argue that relying on sanctions alone may not be sufficient to achieve a lasting peace in Ukraine, especially as Russia has shown resilience in the face of economic pressures.

Trump's more conciliatory approach to Russia, compared to President Biden's firm support for Ukraine, also raises questions about the future direction of U.S. foreign policy. While Biden has committed to supporting Ukraine with military aid and diplomatic pressure, Trump's willingness to engage in direct negotiations with Putin signals a potential shift toward a more isolationist and transactional foreign policy approach.

The Escalating Conflict in Ukraine

The situation in Ukraine remains dire, with Russian forces making significant advances in the east and south. Both sides have escalated aerial strikes, with Ukraine launching attacks on Russian territory, signaling a widening conflict. Despite military operations, there is still potential for diplomacy, with both the U.S. and Russia expressing interest in negotiations. Trump's calls for talks, backed by economic pressure, contrast with Biden's support for Ukraine's territorial integrity. While talks between Trump and Putin could offer a breakthrough, significant obstacles remain, including entrenched positions from both sides and divided international support.

Conclusion

President Donald Trump has signaled a decisive break from the policies of his predecessor, President Joe Biden. Through a series of executive orders, Trump has set in motion a wide-ranging shift in U.S. domestic and foreign policies, focusing on immigration, trade, military readiness, and environmental regulations. At the same time, his comments on Russia and the Ukraine war suggest that he is prepared to use economic leverage to secure a peace deal, even as the conflict escalates.

The coming months will reveal how Trump's actions will shape the future of U.S. politics and its role on the global stage. His bold moves have already sparked significant debate, both domestically and internationally, and will likely continue to do so as his presidency unfolds. Whether these executive orders will have the intended effects or be challenged in court remains to be seen, but they certainly mark a dramatic shift in the trajectory of U.S. governance.

Donald Trump's Re-Inauguration and Its Aftermath: A Bold Return to Power



By Romana Afsheen

On January 20, 2025, the United States swore in President Donald Trump for a second term, marking the start of a fresh, contentious chapter in American politics. During his inaugural ceremony, Trump reiterated many of the themes that had shaped his first term, including the tightening of immigration policies. Within hours of taking office, President Trump issued an executive order that immediately captured national attention and ignited widespread debate.

This executive order, which aimed to end birthright citizenship—a principle enshrined in the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution—was a bold and controversial move. For over a century, birthright citizenship has been a foundational aspect of U.S. law, granting automatic citizenship to anyone born on American soil, regardless of their parents' immigration status. However, President Trump sought to undermine this principle, calling it a loophole that facilitated illegal immigration.

The order proposed denying citizenship to children born in the U.S. whose parents are not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, sparking immediate backlash from immigration advocates, legal experts,

and various states. The legal battle surrounding this executive order reached a crucial turning point just two days after its signing, when a U.S. District Judge in Seattle, John Coughenour, issued a ruling that temporarily blocked the enforcement of the order, citing constitutional concerns.

In this article, we will trace the timeline of events leading up to the issuance of the executive order, the ensuing legal challenges, and the broader implications for U.S. immigration policy and constitutional interpretation. From the moment of Trump's inauguration to the court's ruling, this case has sparked a fierce debate on the future of citizenship in the United States.

The Inaugural Ceremony and Immediate Executive Action

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 46th President of the United States on January 20, 2025, was marked by a stark contrast of emotions—while some celebrated his victory, others prepared for the battles that lay ahead. As expected, immigration reform was a central theme in Trump's address. He continued to characterize the current immigration system as

broken, emphasizing his administration's commitment to addressing what he described as the "uncontrolled influx of illegal immigrants."

One of the first actions taken by the newly inaugurated president was the signing of an executive order aimed at curtailing the practice of granting automatic citizenship to children born in the U.S. to parents who are in the country illegally. The order came as part of a broader initiative to reform immigration, a key promise that Trump had made throughout his campaign.

Trump's move to challenge birthright citizenship was not unexpected. He had voiced his desire to end the practice during his previous campaign in 2016, but he had not followed through with concrete steps while in office. However, with his second term secured, Trump sought to make a bold statement early in his presidency by signing the executive order, signaling his intent to overhaul the U.S. immigration system.

The Executive Order's Contents

The executive order signed by President Trump on January 20, 2025, aimed at ending birthright citizenship for children

born to parents who are not U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. Specifically, the order sought to redefine the legal status of children born on American soil, eliminating their automatic right to U.S. citizenship if neither parent was a U.S. citizen or legal resident. This would have affected tens of thousands of children born each year to immigrant parents who were in the U.S. temporarily or illegally.

The order contended that the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause was being misinterpreted, arguing that it only applied to children born to parents who were "subject to the jurisdiction" of the U.S., a term the administration claimed did not include undocumented immigrants or those in the country on temporary visas.

This move was framed by the Trump administration as a necessary measure to address the growing problem of illegal immigration. The president's legal team argued that by granting automatic citizenship to children of illegal immigrants, the U.S. was incentivizing further illegal immigration, as these children would eventually qualify for government benefits and access to citizenship themselves.

The order also had significant implications for immigrant communities, as it sought to strip U.S. citizenship from individuals who had been born in the U.S. but whose parents were not legally authorized to be in the country. The legal and social ramifications were vast, as millions of people who were born and raised in the U.S. could find themselves disenfranchised and facing difficulties in securing education, healthcare, and employment.

The Legal Challenges and Public Backlash

Immediately following the announcement of the executive order, legal challenges were filed in multiple federal courts. The order was widely criticized for its potential to violate the Constitution and for the far-reaching consequences it would have on children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. Several states, led by Washington and California, filed lawsuits arguing that the order violated the 14th Amendment's guarantee of citizenship to all persons born on U.S. soil.

Immigrant advocacy groups, civil rights

organizations, and legal experts quickly expressed their opposition to the executive order. They pointed out that birthright citizenship had been a fundamental principle of American law for over a century, reinforced by the landmark 1898 U.S. Supreme Court case *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*, which upheld the right to citizenship for children born in the U.S. to non-citizen parents. Many critics argued that Trump's executive order was an attempt to bypass the Constitution and erode the rights of millions of American citizens, particularly in immigrant communities.

In addition to the legal challenges, the executive order sparked a national debate about the meaning of citizenship and the role of immigrants in American society. Many argued that birthright citizenship was a cornerstone of American identity, one that was designed to ensure equality for all people born on U.S. soil, regardless of their parents' immigration status.

Judge Blocks the Executive Order: A Temporary Restraining Order

On January 22, 2025, just two days after the executive order was signed, U.S. District Judge John Coughenour issued a temporary restraining order, halting the enforcement of the order. Judge Coughenour, appointed by President Ronald Reagan in 1981, ruled that the executive order was "likely unconstitutional" and ordered that it could not be implemented while the legal challenges proceeded through the courts.

The judge's ruling was a significant blow to the Trump administration. In his opinion, Judge Coughenour emphasized that the U.S. Constitution, particularly the 14th Amendment, was clear in its language and intent. The Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment, which grants citizenship to all persons born in the U.S., was not subject to executive reinterpretation, he argued. The decision also expressed skepticism about the president's ability to unilaterally change a constitutional principle through executive action.

The ruling was celebrated by immigrant advocacy groups, who saw it as a reaffirmation of the principle of birthright citizenship. Groups such as the American Civil

Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) hailed the decision, calling it a victory for the Constitution and for the rights of immigrant families.

In response, the Trump administration vowed to appeal the decision. White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders stated that the president's legal team was confident that the executive order would ultimately be upheld by higher courts. Despite the setback, the administration maintained that the executive order was a necessary step to curb illegal immigration and reform the U.S. immigration system.

The Constitutional Debate: The 14th Amendment and Birthright Citizenship

At the heart of the legal battle lies a complex interpretation of the 14th Amendment, which was ratified in 1868 in the aftermath of the Civil War to grant citizenship to formerly enslaved people. The Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment states:

"All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside."

The language of the amendment has been relatively unambiguous for over a century: anyone born on U.S. soil is a U.S. citizen, with very few exceptions (such as children born to foreign diplomats). However, President Trump's executive order sought to challenge this interpretation, particularly the phrase "subject to the jurisdiction thereof." The Trump administration argued that the phrase could be interpreted to exclude children born to non-citizen immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally or temporarily.

This reinterpretation of the 14th Amendment's language has been contentious. Critics of the executive order argue that it disregards established legal precedents, most notably the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), which affirmed that the children of non-citizen immigrants were entitled to citizenship under the 14th Amendment. The ruling in *Wong Kim Ark*

has been the cornerstone of birthright citizenship law for over a century, making it unlikely that the Trump administration could successfully argue for its reversal through executive action.

The Role of the Supreme Court and Legal Precedents

As the case proceeds through the courts, it is expected that the U.S. Supreme Court will ultimately have to weigh in on the constitutionality of Trump's executive order. While the high court's conservative majority has been a point of concern for critics, legal experts have pointed out that any decision to overturn birthright citizenship would require a substantial legal justification—one that many argue does not exist in this case.

In particular, the Wong Kim Ark decision is likely to be a significant factor in the court's deliberations. The case involved a man named Wong Kim Ark, born in San Francisco in 1873 to Chinese immigrant parents. The Supreme Court ruled that he was entitled to U.S. citizenship, emphasizing that the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause applied to all persons born on American soil, regardless of their parents' immigration status.

Legal scholars contend that overturning Wong Kim Ark would have profound consequences not only for birthright citizenship but also for the broader interpretation of the 14th Amendment and its protections for civil rights. Such a decision would require the court to acknowledge a departure from over a century of legal precedent.

The National Impact: Immigration, Politics, and Public Sentiment

The Trump administration's push to end birthright citizenship through an executive order is not just a legal or constitutional issue—it is also a deeply political one. The issue has far-reaching implications, particularly in the context of the ongoing national debate over immigration, the role of immigrants in American society, and the political dynamics surrounding citizenship.

Political Polarization and the Immigration Debate

Immigration has been one of the most divisive issues in American politics for several decades. Trump's strong stance on tightening immigration laws, including the controversial separation of families at the border and attempts to build a border wall, has solidified his base among certain voters but alienated others. The proposal to end birthright citizenship adds a new chapter to the immigration debate, heightening the divide between pro-immigration advocates and those who support stricter policies.

For pro-immigration groups, the executive order to end birthright citizenship represents a direct attack on a fundamental right. The birthright citizenship principle, they argue, is not just a legal norm but a

measure to ensure the integrity of the nation's immigration system and reduce incentives for illegal immigration.

The debate over birthright citizenship also touches on broader issues of national identity and the value placed on legal immigration. While proponents of stricter immigration laws argue that birthright citizenship undermines the country's immigration system, advocates for immigrant rights point out that the U.S. has long prided itself as a nation of immigrants and that birthright citizenship helps to maintain the country's inclusive nature.

Public Reactions and Protests

The legal challenges to Trump's executive order were not limited to the courts. Across



core part of the American identity. It reflects the idea that anyone born on American soil, regardless of their parentage or immigration status, is entitled to the protections and rights of U.S. citizenship. Critics also contend that overturning birthright citizenship would harm American families, creating an underclass of individuals who, despite being born in the U.S., would be denied citizenship and the benefits that come with it.

Opponents of birthright citizenship, however, argue that the current system encourages illegal immigration and overburdens the social welfare system. Trump's supporters claim that children born to undocumented immigrants should not automatically receive the privileges of citizenship, particularly when their parents are not legally authorized to be in the country. In their view, the executive order is a necessary

measure to ensure the integrity of the nation, public protests erupted in response to the announcement of the executive order. From coast to coast, people gathered in front of courthouses, government buildings, and immigration offices to voice their opposition. The protests were organized by a range of organizations, including immigrant rights groups, labor unions, and civil rights organizations. These protests sought to pressure the courts and the Trump administration to abandon the executive order and uphold birthright citizenship.

At the same time, Trump's supporters also rallied behind his decision. Many of these supporters felt that the president was taking necessary steps to defend the integrity of U.S. borders and protect American citizens from the influx of illegal immigrants. For them, the executive order was seen as a common-sense move to ensure that the

U.S. would not continue to offer automatic citizenship to children born to undocumented immigrants. These individuals took to social media and participated in demonstrations, calling for stricter immigration policies and an end to what they saw as the misuse of birthright citizenship.

The division between these two groups highlights the broader polarization of U.S. politics, where issues related to immigration are at the forefront of national discourse. The political and social divide over birthright citizenship mirrors the polarization seen in previous immigration debates, such as the fight over DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and the broader battle over border security.

The Legal Process Moving Forward

With Judge Coughenour's temporary restraining order in place, the legal battle over Trump's executive order will continue in the courts. While the Seattle judge's ruling is only a temporary setback for the Trump administration, the case is likely to make its way to higher courts, including the U.S. Court of Appeals and possibly the U.S. Supreme Court. Legal experts suggest that this case could ultimately reshape the interpretation of the 14th Amendment's Citizenship Clause and set a precedent for future debates over birthright citizenship.

In the meantime, the legal challenges will continue to unfold, with advocacy groups and state governments pushing back against the executive order at every step. Many of these groups have vowed to stay vigilant, ensuring that any attempt to end birthright citizenship is met with resistance. On the other side, the Trump administration remains resolute in its belief that the current immigration system is broken and that birthright citizenship is a key issue that needs to be addressed.

The legal landscape surrounding birthright citizenship will likely be shaped by the shifting composition of the judiciary, particularly with respect to the U.S. Supreme Court. President Trump's judicial appointments over the past four years have solidified a conservative majority on the Supreme Court, which could play a pivotal role in determining the fate of birthright

citizenship. While it remains uncertain whether the Court will ultimately agree with Trump's position, the potential for a landmark ruling on the issue is undeniable.

The International Perspective on Birthright Citizenship

While the battle over birthright citizenship is unfolding in the U.S., it is also important to consider the international context of this debate. The principle of birthright citizenship is relatively rare worldwide, with most countries not granting automatic citizenship to children born within their borders unless at least one parent is a citizen or legal resident. Countries such as the U.S., Canada, and a few others maintain birthright citizenship policies, but many nations have stricter criteria for granting citizenship.

For many immigrants, particularly those from countries that do not have birthright citizenship, the United States' policy has been a symbol of opportunity and inclusion. If the Trump administration's executive order is upheld, it could have ripple effects globally, potentially influencing immigration policies in other countries and challenging the notion that birthright citizenship is a universal principle of modern democracies.

Additionally, the international community will be watching closely to see how this case develops, particularly in terms of the potential implications for the treatment of undocumented immigrants. Countries around the world have varying degrees of immigration enforcement, and some nations may view the U.S. legal battle over birthright citizenship as a reflection of shifting attitudes toward immigration and national sovereignty.

Implications for American Families

Perhaps the most profound impact of the executive order would be felt by American families, particularly those who have children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. If the executive order is ultimately upheld, these families could find themselves in a precarious situation, with children who were born and raised in the U.S. being denied the citizenship and rights

they have long assumed they were entitled to.

This could create a generation of individuals who, despite being born on U.S. soil, would face significant barriers to education, healthcare, and employment. These children could find themselves caught in a legal limbo, with their citizenship status in question despite their birth in the United States.

The emotional and psychological toll on these families would be immense, as they would be forced to navigate a legal system that treats their children as non-citizens. Many immigrant families already live in fear of deportation, and the possibility of their children being stripped of their U.S. citizenship would only exacerbate these concerns.

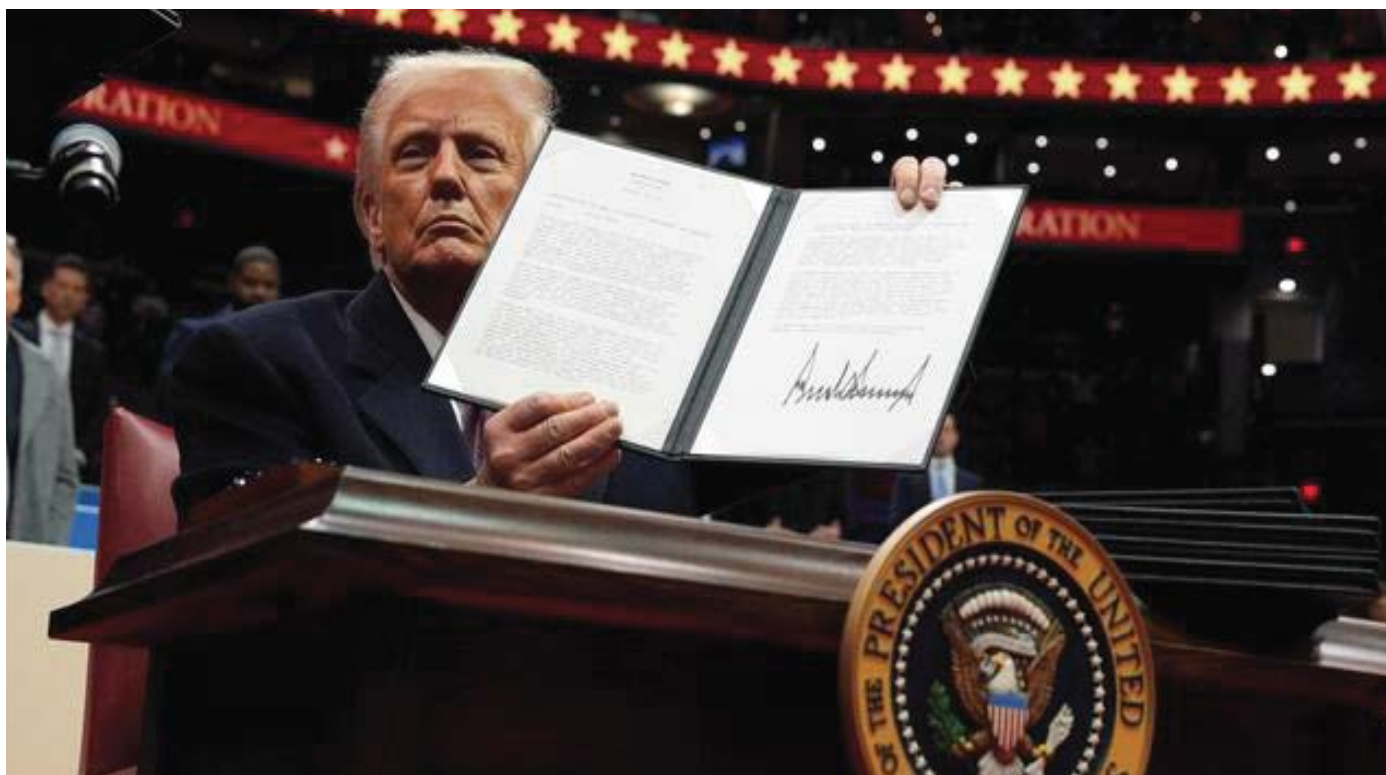
The executive order also raises questions about the long-term consequences for the U.S. workforce and economy. Immigrants play a crucial role in many sectors of the U.S. economy, from agriculture to technology to healthcare. By limiting access to citizenship for the children of undocumented immigrants, the country could face challenges in integrating a large portion of its population into the broader social and economic fabric.

Conclusion: A Battle for the Future of Citizenship

As the legal battle over President Trump's executive order on birthright citizenship unfolds, it is clear that the stakes are high. This case is about more than just the rights of children born on U.S. soil—it is about the very definition of citizenship and the future of immigration policy in the United States. The outcome of this case will have far-reaching implications for immigrant families, the American legal system, and the nation's social fabric as a whole.

The legal and political dynamics surrounding birthright citizenship are likely to evolve over the coming months, with courts, lawmakers, and the public weighing in on this contentious issue. Whether or not the executive order is upheld, the debate over birthright citizenship is likely to remain a central issue in American politics for years to come.

Certainly, a new world under Trump: Western allies prepare for shocks



By Naqi Akbar

Within 48 hours of taking oath and office, the 47th president-elect of the United States, Donald Trump, has sent enough shockwaves around the world to make the key decision-makers in major Western capitals think about how to respond to the new scenarios spelled out by the new man in the White House.

If the inauguration speech was restricted to the traditional back alley of the United States and the Central American states, the successive executive orders slapping 25 percent tariffs on long-time allied states like Canada and the EU, subject to yet another prescription of tariff regimes, can potentially create bad blood between the United States and its own camp.

To begin with, EU has been allied with the United States under the umbrella of shared geo-strategic vision and the NATO arrangement. In the front door negotiations with rogue nation states like the Islamic Republic of Iran; it has been the EU states, their presidents, and the foreign ministers who have made a beeline of phone calls

with Iranian executives whenever there have been tense moments between Iran, the United States and Israel.

Nation states like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, which have been the British colonial baggage adopted under the post-colonial arrangement; where the United States has been an ascending power, have been part of the "Five Eyes" arrangement; an Intelligence gathering system; which has been active since the end of the WW2, has been enhanced overtime, especially after the 9/11 incidents and lastly has been a center of controversy in the eyes of the participant countries civil rights activists.

Taking the last Trump term in office between 2017 to 2021 into account; it has been the Abraham Accord implementation that has been the center focus of that administration. Towards that end, the crippling sanctions on Iran have been part of the strategy to break the back of the opponents of the Accord. The tenure did not create any tangible ground work for the

further implementation of the same.

The Hamas October 7, 2023 shock campaign which took the Abraham Accords camp by surprise was an upsetting development for the both the Republicans and the Democrats. Apparently, it might look that they acted differently; but the fact of matter is that both the political factions regard the Jewish state as the cornerstone of their geo strategic calculations.

Keeping in view that worldview, Trump tried to act smart in order to soften the Middle Eastern hearts and minds by overseeing the hostage deal and ceasefire in Gaza, just a few days before the formal inauguration. That ceasefire looks good, but few analysts might see between the lines that resistance has been dented on the conceptual plane.

The fifteen-month campaign made the resistance lose many icons in the process; inclusive of the masterminds of the spectacular campaign against IDF; Yahya Sinwar and many others in the ranks of

both Hezbollah and Hamas. The inclusion of the US administration as a guarantor has one hidden motive too.

The few elements in the resistance, tired of leadership losses as well as material devastation during the 15 months, might be tempted to go for what can be safely termed Camp David II. The basis of Camp David I was the same loss of material and indecisive results of many wars. Camp David might have spread far and wide, but the fall of staunch supporters of IDF in the nationalist Pahlavi government in 1979 and its replacement by an ultra-radical Islamic regime upset the geo political calculations of many analysts.

Even then the Fahd Plan of 1982, and the Oslo Agreement of 1993 were all initiatives in the same direction. Taking note of the scenario now, the swap must have created a dent within the Hamas coalition, whether to launch another episode of Al Aqsa Storm or settle for whatever 'proverbial crumbs' the West led by the United States is going to offer to the Palestinians.

The Americans have another sigh of relief in the form of the dent created in the center of resistance to Abraham Accords; Iran; the resurgence of the Reform camp as a Trojan for the eventual evolutionary fall or

dissolution of the Islamic Republic. Zarif though on the impeachment trail within the Iranian political circles; has been able to install a subservient President of the Republic who has the potential similar to Boris Yeltsin to undo the goals of the 1979 movement; which he has been instrumental ever since he took the 'ominous office' to quote the radicals within the Iranian establishment.

So, as things stand, the Abraham Accord has the potential to upset the current Middle East configuration. That disturbance has the potential to unleash yet another round of conflict still, if the radical camp still decides for calling the shots.

With the Western and Middle Eastern horizons explained; new scenarios can be contemplated. The America First frenzy might not dent the western alliances instantly, but will certainly weaken their alliances, if not for the singular military purposes, but for pure economic interests.

The proposed implementation of tariffs on allied states like the EU and Canada in other words means that the United States despite being a proponent of a free trade regime under the auspices of WTO is sacrificing that for a more nationalist world view. There is ample chance that the states

like Canada and the EU knock at the dispute resolution mechanism with the WTO to in effect start a trade war with the United States. If a Canadian product is subject to a discriminatory tariff wall in the domestic United States market, it means lesser revenue and possibility of a revenue shrinking. Likewise, the combined and individual EU market zones will also suffer. The ultimate suffering will be with the United States, as there will certainly be an erosion of goodwill with its allies.

Going forward; the analysis is the crux of just a few days into the new world under Trump, the 'shock and awe' of the executive orders coming out of the Oval Office will continue to rock for a few weeks more until the world either settles with new realities or decides to challenge them. Trump administration is a reality for the next four years and a hard one to fathom and digest; unfortunately.

NOTE: The Writer Muhammad Naqi Akbar has a diversified exposure spread over 34 years with the central bank, business policy advocacy infrastructures, and print media. He has been lately contributing to select periodicals and other publications. He can be reached at naqikbr@gmail.com.



"Breaking Boundaries: Gulf Nations Slam Israeli Map as Threat to Regional Peace"

Gulf Countries Strongly Condemn Israeli Map Claiming Territorial Rights Over Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.



By Hina Kashif

On January 8, 2025, Gulf countries, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia, condemned the publication of a map by official Israeli social media accounts. The map, which asserted that parts of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria fall within Israeli territory, has been a source of significant controversy. The publication of this map was seen as a violation of international law, a direct threat to peace efforts in the Middle East, and a blatant challenge to the sovereignty of the Arab nations in question. The condemnation from these countries underscores the escalating tensions in the region and the broader geopolitical dynamics surrounding Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories.

The Israeli Map and Its Controversy

The map, which was published on Israel's official social media platforms, boldly

claimed that significant portions of Palestinian territories, along with parts of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, belong to Israel. This provocative image not only stirred anger among the Arab states but also raised concerns among the international community about the legitimacy of Israel's territorial claims.

This move came amid ongoing violence in Gaza, where Israel's military operations have led to thousands of civilian casualties and widespread destruction. The publication of the map, which falsely portrays Arab lands as part of Israel's historical claims, was seen as part of Israel's broader strategy of territorial expansion and undermining international efforts for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The map reignited tensions within the Arab world, which has long rejected Israeli claims over Palestinian territories and the broader region. Over the decades, Israel has maintained a stronghold over territories

that many argue were never rightfully part of its historical borders, and its expansionist policies have been a key source of instability in the region.

Qatar's Response: A Violation of International Law

Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was one of the first to voice strong opposition to the publication of the map. In a formal statement, the ministry denounced the Israeli map as "a flagrant violation of international legitimacy resolutions and the provisions of international law." Qatar emphasized that this act goes against a multitude of United Nations resolutions that have consistently called for Israel's withdrawal from occupied territories, including the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

The Qatari government pointed out that the

timing of this publication, amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza, further exacerbates the situation. The war in Gaza has already caused immense human suffering, and the publication of a map that lays claim to even more Arab land only adds fuel to the fire. Qatar urged the international community to take immediate action and fulfill its legal and moral responsibilities to halt Israel's aggressive policies. Specifically, Qatar called for global pressure on Israel to comply with international law and abandon its territorial ambitions in the Arab world.

sovereignty that form the backbone of the international order.

The UAE's response was particularly forceful in rejecting any attempts to alter the legal status of Palestinian territories. The ministry emphasized that such provocative actions undermine the credibility of the peace process and impede regional efforts to achieve stability. The UAE has long been an advocate of the two-state solution, which envisions the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. The publication of the map, the

Saudi Arabia's Strong Reactions: Israeli Intentions to Entrench Occupation

Saudi Arabia also condemned the Israeli map in the strongest terms. The Saudi Foreign Ministry issued a statement emphasizing that the publication of the map highlights Israel's intent to solidify its occupation of Palestinian territories and further entrench its control over lands that do not belong to it. Saudi Arabia's statement underscored the extreme nature of the claims made by Israel, warning that such actions only serve to increase regional instability. Saudi Arabia noted that these territorial claims were not just a violation of Palestinian rights, but also an infringement on the sovereignty of neighboring Arab nations, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The kingdom reminded the international community that Israel's persistent violations of international laws and norms must be addressed if peace in the region is to be achieved.

Saudi Arabia, like Qatar and the UAE, called for a global response to Israel's actions, urging the international community to hold Israel accountable. The Saudi government emphasized the importance of respecting the sovereignty of states and the established borders of nations in order to prevent further escalation of regional crises. Saudi Arabia also reiterated its support for Palestinian self-determination and its longstanding position on the need for a just and comprehensive peace agreement based on a two-state solution.

In addition, Saudi Arabia called for a cessation of Israeli violations against Arab countries, urging the international community to put pressure on Israel to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all nations in the region.

Broader Arab and International Condemnation

The publication of the map has not only drawn condemnation from the Gulf countries but also from several other Arab nations, including Palestine and Jordan. Palestinian officials expressed outrage over



The Qatari government also highlighted the significant danger the Israeli actions pose to any future peace prospects in the region. It argued that such claims not only diminish the chances of a two-state solution but also embolden Israel to continue its violations of Palestinian rights. By publishing a map that disregards the territorial integrity of several Arab nations, Israel sends a message that it has no intention of seeking a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian issue.

UAE's Rejection: Expanding the Occupation

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) also issued a statement condemning Israel's actions. The UAE Foreign Ministry described the publication of the map as "a deliberate effort to expand the occupation," categorizing it as a blatant violation of international law and the principles of

ministry argued, represents a clear effort by Israel to undermine this solution and derail the peace process.

The UAE government also expressed concerns that such actions could lead to further escalation in the region. The map's claims could stoke anger and resentment among Palestinians and the broader Arab world, leading to heightened tensions and possibly even violence. The ministry called on the international community to support all regional and international efforts to advance the peace process and to take a firm stand against Israel's illegal practices that threaten the viability of a two-state solution. Furthermore, the UAE reiterated its support for Palestinian rights and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital. By opposing Israel's expansionist policies, the UAE hoped to reaffirm its commitment to the principles of justice and self-determination for the Palestinian people.

the map, stating that it was another attempt by Israel to erase Palestinian identity and sovereignty. Palestinian leaders called for the international community to take swift action to end Israel's occupation and ensure the rights of Palestinians are protected.

Jordan, which shares a border with Israel and has long been a key player in Middle Eastern diplomacy, also condemned the map. The Jordanian government warned that Israel's territorial claims undermine the peace process and exacerbate regional tensions. Jordan emphasized that Israel's actions violate both international law and Jordan's own sovereignty, given the historical context of the West Bank and Jerusalem as part of Jordan's responsibility before the 1967 war. Other Arab countries, including Egypt and Lebanon, voiced their concerns about the implications of the Israeli map. They echoed the sentiments of the Gulf nations, stressing the importance of international accountability and urging Israel to respect the borders and sovereignty of neighboring Arab states.

A History of Israeli Expansionism

The publication of this map is just the latest chapter in Israel's long history of territorial

expansion. Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has faced ongoing conflict with its Arab neighbors, many of whom have rejected its right to exist as a Jewish state. Israel has occupied parts of Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine since the 1967 war, despite widespread international condemnation and numerous United Nations resolutions calling for an Israeli withdrawal from these territories.

Over the decades, Israel has continued to expand its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas that the international community considers to be Palestinian territories. Israel's resistance to peace talks and its refusal to grant Palestinians full sovereignty have been key points of contention in the peace process. The two-state solution, which envisions an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, has been the cornerstone of international diplomacy for decades. However, Israel's policies, including its recent territorial claims, suggest that it may not be committed to this solution.

The Path Forward: International Pressure and Accountability

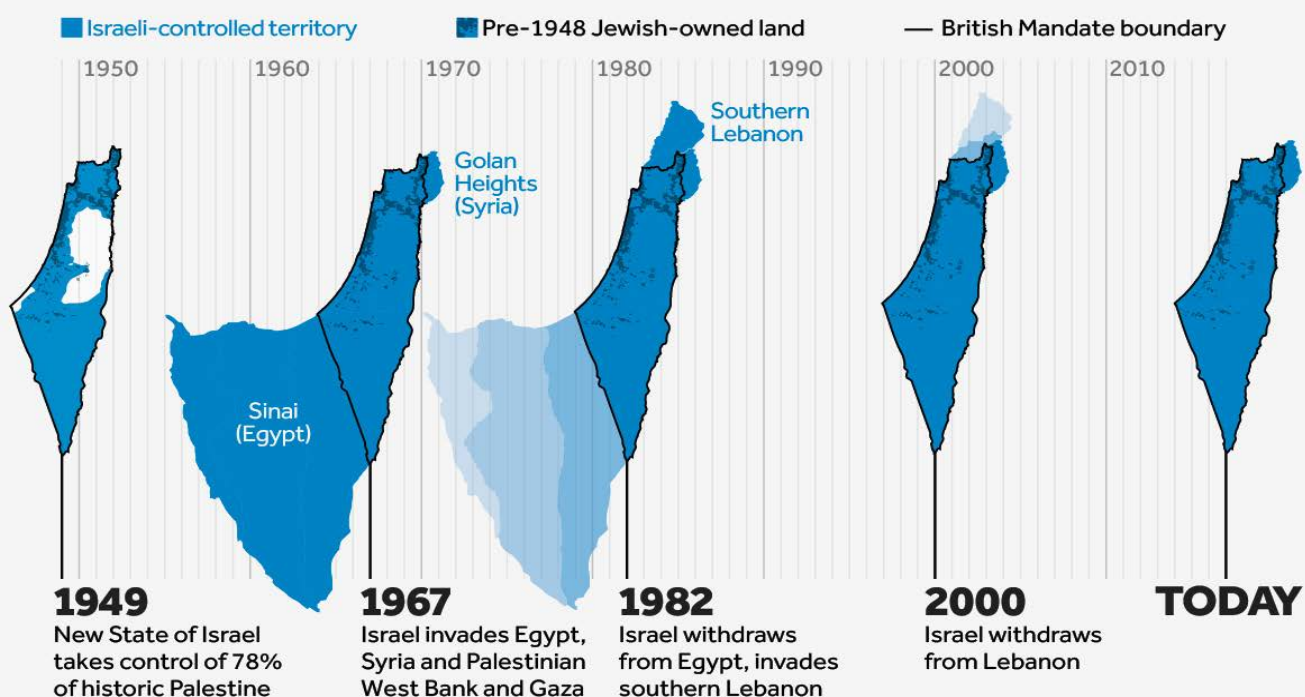
In the wake of the publication of the map,

the Gulf countries and other Arab nations have called for the international community to act decisively. The situation in the Middle East remains volatile, and the potential for further violence and instability is high. A clear message must be sent to Israel that its expansionist policies and violations of international law will not be tolerated.

For peace to prevail in the region, the international community must hold Israel accountable for its actions. This includes enforcing existing United Nations resolutions, promoting dialogue between Israel and Palestine, and ensuring the establishment of a Palestinian state. The continued support for a two-state solution remains crucial to any long-term resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The publication of the Israeli map is a reminder of the deeply entrenched conflicts in the Middle East and the long-standing issues surrounding Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands. The international community must take a strong stand against actions that undermine peace and stability, reaffirming the principles of international law, territorial integrity, and self-determination for all peoples.

ISRAEL'S HISTORY OF MILITARY EXPANSIONISM



The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: How the Trump Era Will Shape Its Future



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The Russia-Ukraine war, now in its third year since Russia's invasion in February 2022, has escalated into one of the most devastating conflicts in Europe since World War II. The war has led to a significant loss of life, displacement of millions, and widespread destruction. As of January 2025, the conflict continues with heavy fighting in Ukraine's eastern and southern regions, with both sides entrenched in a war of attrition. International support for Ukraine, particularly from the West, has remained a constant, though there is growing concern over the protracted nature of the conflict and its wider implications for global security.

The Latest Developments in the War

The war has evolved from an initial push by Russian forces to capture key Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, to a grinding conflict

marked by intense artillery battles, trench warfare, and the frequent use of drones and missiles. Ukraine's forces, with the help of Western military aid, have managed to recapture significant portions of territory, especially in the southern and eastern regions of the country. Notable gains include the retaking of the city of Kherson in late 2022, and more recently, Ukraine has been focusing on pushing Russian forces out of the Donbas region.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive, launched in the summer of 2023, made slow but steady progress, liberating key towns along the frontlines. However, Russia's use of defensive fortifications and its ongoing air and missile strikes have made it difficult for Ukrainian forces to achieve decisive breakthroughs. Both sides continue to suffer heavy casualties, with estimates of tens of thousands of soldiers killed and injured on both sides, in addition to civilian deaths.

Russia has also intensified its use of airstrikes on critical Ukrainian infrastructure, targeting power grids, water supplies,

and transportation networks in an attempt to cripple Ukraine's ability to resist. In response, Ukraine has relied heavily on air defense systems, including advanced missile interceptors provided by the West, which have helped mitigate the effects of Russia's air campaign.

Diplomatic efforts to end the war have made little progress. Russia has insisted that its territorial claims over Crimea and parts of the Donbas region are non-negotiable, while Ukraine has maintained that any peace talks would require the full restoration of its territorial integrity, including Crimea. This deadlock has made meaningful negotiations elusive.

Trump's Return to Power and Its Potential Impact on the War

The inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States on January 20, 2025, has introduced a new dynamic in the global approach to the

Russia-Ukraine war. Trump's return to the White House is particularly significant given his previous stance on foreign policy during his first term, where he often prioritized "America First" and sought to distance the United States from prolonged international conflicts. His focus on national sovereignty, military disengagement from foreign entanglements, and skepticism about foreign aid to countries like Ukraine could bring a shift in U.S. policy towards the war.

During his campaign for president, Trump repeatedly asserted that, if elected, he would end the Russia-Ukraine conflict swiftly. While he did not outline specific tactics, his rhetoric suggested a desire for a negotiated settlement that would be favorable to the U.S. and its interests. Many analysts have speculated that Trump might pursue a more pragmatic approach, potentially seeking a compromise that would involve Ukraine making concessions to Russia, in line with his history of advocating for negotiated peace deals.

One of the most notable figures in Trump's cabinet is U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who was sworn in on January 21, 2025. Rubio has already made it clear that ending the war in Ukraine will be a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy under the new administration. In a statement on Tuesday, Rubio emphasized the importance of peace and stability on the global stage, underscoring that the U.S. would prioritize efforts to bring an end to the conflict.

Rubio, a former senator and known China hawk, outlined a vision for a more pragmatic approach to the war. According to Rubio, both Russia and Ukraine would need to make concessions to reach a peaceful resolution. This would likely mean that Ukraine would have to abandon its goal of regaining all the territories lost to Russia over the past decade, including Crimea. Rubio's position reflects a more diplomatic and less confrontational stance than the approach taken by President Biden, whose administration has supplied Ukraine with billions of dollars in military aid.

In an interview on NBC's Today show, Rubio explained that achieving peace would not be simple, as both sides would have to make significant compromises. "The only way conflicts like this end is not

in public pronouncements," Rubio stated. "They end in hard, vibrant diplomacy that the U.S. seeks to engage in, in the hopes of bringing an end to this conflict that's sustainable." This diplomatic outlook suggests that under Trump, the U.S. may push for a negotiated settlement rather than continuing to supply Ukraine with weapons indefinitely.

Russia's Response to Trump's Inauguration

In the wake of Trump's inauguration, Russian President Vladimir Putin extended congratulations and expressed openness to dialogue on key international issues, including the Ukraine conflict. Putin emphasized the need for a long-term peace in Ukraine, highlighting the importance of



respecting the legitimate interests of all people in the region. He also indicated Russia's readiness to discuss nuclear arms control and broader security matters with the new U.S. administration.

This response from Russia reflects cautious optimism regarding the potential for improved U.S.-Russia relations under Trump's leadership. The Kremlin has expressed a desire to restore direct contacts with the United States, which had been severed during the previous administration. However, Russian officials remain wary, acknowledging that Trump's unpredictable style could lead to unforeseen outcomes.

Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy

The Trump administration's emphasis on ending the Russia-Ukraine war through diplomacy marks a significant shift from the previous U.S. approach, which focused heavily on military support for Ukraine. Rubio's statements suggest that the U.S. may encourage Ukraine to make territorial concessions to Russia, including potentially recognizing Russia's control over Crimea. This stance aligns with Trump's broader foreign policy philosophy, which prioritizes national interests and seeks to avoid prolonged military engagements abroad.

However, this approach raises concerns among some analysts and policymakers. Critics argue that pressuring Ukraine to

concede territory to Russia could undermine its sovereignty and embolden further Russian aggression. The stakes for Ukraine are incredibly high, as it faces an existential threat from Russia's expansionist ambitions. Any attempt to negotiate away Ukrainian territories, particularly Crimea, could be seen as a betrayal of Ukrainian sovereignty and an unacceptable concession to Russia.

The challenge for the Trump administration will be to balance its diplomatic efforts with the need to support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. While diplomacy is essential, it must be coupled with a clear commitment to upholding

international law and the rights of nations to self-determination. The international community will be closely watching how the U.S. navigates this complex geopolitical landscape and whether it can broker a peace agreement that ensures a sustainable and just resolution to the conflict.

The U.S. Role in Ukraine's Future

Trump's foreign policy, as articulated by Rubio, centers on the idea of "peace through strength," which involves the United States asserting its global leadership while simultaneously avoiding unnecessary military engagements. Trump has long

that respects Russia's territorial gains while ensuring Ukraine's sovereignty in some form.

The Israel-Palestine Conflict: Latest Developments

As of January 2025, the Israel-Palestine conflict remains a focal point of international attention, with developments continuing to evolve. In the West Bank, Israel launched a significant military operation in Jenin, which resulted in the deaths of at least nine Palestinians and over 40 injuries. This military action followed a fragile ceasefire in Gaza, which lasted for

against the International Criminal Court (ICC). On the other hand, former President Biden, who had been in office earlier in the period, called for restraint, balancing military support for Israel with an emphasis on protecting civilian lives. While the U.S. has continued to support Israel militarily, the shift in leadership has led to a more robust and unwavering stance on Israel's security concerns, with less focus on mediation for a two-state solution.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza continues to be dire, with significant damage to infrastructure, limited access to basic services, and the displacement of thousands of civilians. While international aid efforts have provided some relief, the situation remains highly unstable. In the West Bank, violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians has escalated, further complicating efforts for peace. Despite these tensions, the international community continues to push for a two-state solution, with countries like India and Australia reaffirming their support for a political resolution that addresses Palestinian rights and aspirations.

Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war remains a critical issue for global security, and the return of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2025 introduces a new chapter in U.S. foreign policy. While Trump has expressed a desire to end the conflict swiftly, the path to peace remains uncertain. Marco Rubio's appointment as Secretary of State suggests that the U.S. will push for a negotiated settlement that requires both Ukraine and Russia to make significant concessions. How this policy will evolve in the coming years remains to be seen, as both sides continue to fight for dominance on the battlefield.

Simultaneously, the Israel-Palestine conflict shows no signs of abating, with rising violence in Gaza and continued international divisions. The outcome of both conflicts will shape not only the region but also the broader geopolitical landscape for years to come. The next few years, under Trump's leadership, will likely be defined by diplomatic challenges, strategic alliances, and the quest for peace in a deeply divided world.



been skeptical of foreign aid, and this philosophy might influence the U.S.'s stance on further military assistance to Ukraine. This stance could result in significant policy shifts, with a potential reduction in arms shipments to Ukraine or more pressure on Kyiv to make compromises with Russia.

While the Trump administration's stance on Ukraine remains unclear, it is possible that Trump will prioritize bringing the war to a close in a manner that aligns with his broader goals of reducing U.S. involvement in foreign conflicts. However, the exact outcome will depend on the nature of negotiations and whether both Russia and Ukraine are willing to accept a settlement

three days after an intense period of violence in October 2023, when Hamas carried out a large-scale attack on Israel. The ceasefire allowed nearly 900 trucks of humanitarian aid to enter Gaza, where civilians returned to find their homes and businesses severely damaged. Despite this, many Palestinians in Gaza remain hesitant to return due to the destruction.

Meanwhile, international reactions to the conflict have been mixed. In the United States, President Donald Trump, who returned to office in 2025, has expressed skepticism about the durability of the Gaza ceasefire. His administration lifted sanctions on Israeli settlers and reinstated an executive order allowing sanctions

A Comprehensive Overview of the Israel-Hamas Ceasefire and Hostage Release Agreement



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

On the evening of Wednesday, January 15, 2025, Israel and Hamas reached a landmark ceasefire and hostage release agreement after 15 months of violent conflict. This development has raised hopes for peace in Gaza and the wider Middle East. The ceasefire, set to begin on Sunday, January 19, 2025, includes provisions for the release of hostages on both sides and the eventual return of displaced Palestinians. Despite the positive announcement, reports indicate continued fighting in Gaza, with at least 20 Palestinians killed since the deal was revealed. The international community has largely welcomed the agreement, but many remain cautious, questioning whether the deal can hold and lead to lasting peace.

Details of the Ceasefire Agreement

Timeline and Phases of the Ceasefire

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas outlines a comprehensive

three-phase process, with the first phase scheduled to begin on Sunday, January 19, 2025. The key elements of this initial phase are designed to bring an end to the 15-month-long war and begin a path toward stability. Here's a breakdown of the key aspects of the first phase:

1. **Immediate Ceasefire:** The fighting between Israeli forces and Hamas will cease, halting 15 months of intense conflict. This truce is seen as a critical first step in bringing relief to the people of Gaza and reducing the escalating humanitarian crisis in the region.
2. **Israeli Withdrawal:** The agreement includes the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from the populated areas of Gaza. This marks a significant shift in Israeli military strategy and aims to de-escalate tensions in the region, providing a window for both sides to work towards a lasting peace.
3. **Hostage Exchange:** One of the most significant aspects of the agreement is the exchange of hostages. Hamas will release individuals it has detained, including Israeli and foreign nationals,

in return for Palestinians held in Israeli prisons. This exchange is expected to be a major step toward rebuilding trust between the two parties.

Though these measures represent a promising start, the full scope of the agreement and its future phases are still unclear. The subsequent phases of the deal remain subject to continued negotiations between Israel and Hamas. While the six-week ceasefire is seen as a step in the right direction, the international community and experts alike are closely monitoring the situation to see if the agreement can be sustained and expanded into a long-term peace process.

The Hostage Exchange and Prisoner Swap

A critical element of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire agreement is the exchange of hostages, which holds immense significance for both sides. This exchange is seen not only as a humanitarian gesture but also as a crucial step toward de-escalating the conflict and rebuilding trust after more than a year of violence.

Release of Hostages

As part of the ceasefire, Hamas has agreed to release the 251 Israeli hostages it captured during the attack on October 7, 2023. These hostages, who have endured over a year of captivity in Gaza, include both Israeli nationals and foreign nationals. Their release is seen as a powerful symbol of hope and a rare moment of progress after months of fighting. Families who have been living in uncertainty will finally be able to reunite with their loved ones, marking a significant emotional moment for both the hostages and their families.

Palestinian Prisoners

In exchange for the release of Israeli hostages, Israel will free a number of Palestinian prisoners currently detained in Israeli prisons. While the exact number of prisoners to be released and the list of names have not been publicly disclosed, this aspect of the deal has generated both hope and concern. For Palestinians, the release of prisoners is a long-awaited victory, particularly for families who have been separated from their loved ones for years. However, the ambiguity surrounding the number and identities of those prisoners has left some questioning the fairness and transparency of the process.

Humanitarian Impact

The hostage exchange is seen as a pivotal moment in the conflict. It provides both sides with a reason for cautious optimism, signaling that even amidst such an entrenched war, there are opportunities for de-escalation. For the families of hostages, this swap represents a glimmer of hope in what has otherwise been an emotionally and physically exhausting period. Similarly, for the international community, this act serves as a reminder of the importance of dialogue and negotiation even in the most challenging of circumstances.

The emotional toll on the families of both the hostages and the prisoners cannot be overstated. After more than a year of relentless violence, the exchange offers an opportunity for healing and the possibility of a lasting peace, though the road ahead remains fraught with challenges. Ultimately, the hostage exchange is an important, albeit fragile, step toward restoring some semblance of stability to the region.

Return of Displaced Palestinians

One of the significant provisions of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal is the return of Palestinians who have been displaced due to the ongoing conflict, which has caused widespread destruction in Gaza. Since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023, thousands of Palestinians have been forced to flee their homes as Israeli airstrikes and ground operations have ravaged residential areas.

Rebuilding Gaza

The ceasefire agreement includes a provision for the return of many displaced Palestinians to their homes. This is seen as a crucial step in restoring a sense of normalcy to families who have endured the trauma of displacement and loss. The agreement aims to facilitate the safe and orderly return of displaced persons, particularly to areas that have been severely impacted by airstrikes. Many of these individuals have sought refuge in overcrowded camps or have been living in precarious conditions in neighboring countries. The return to their homes would allow them to rebuild their lives, but the feasibility of this provision depends on a variety of factors, including security and infrastructure readiness. The physical and emotional toll on these individuals is profound, as they have lived in uncertainty and fear for over a year.

Long-Term Reconstruction

While the return of displaced persons is a pressing priority, the long-term reconstruction of Gaza is an even more daunting task. The region has faced relentless airstrikes and ground operations, leaving behind extensive damage to homes, schools, hospitals, and essential infrastructure. Rebuilding Gaza will require substantial financial investment and international support. The scale of the destruction means that reconstruction efforts could take years and necessitate coordinated efforts from international aid organizations, governments, and humanitarian groups.

Moreover, the rebuilding process will not only focus on physical infrastructure but also on restoring essential services, such as healthcare, education, and sanitation. As Gaza moves from the immediate post-con-

flict phase to long-term recovery, the international community's role in providing funding and technical expertise will be crucial in ensuring that the region can rebuild and recover from the devastating impacts of the war.

Humanitarian Aid and Medical Support

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas also addresses the urgent need for humanitarian aid, a critical element given the severe conditions in Gaza following over a year of conflict.

Humanitarian Access

One of the key provisions of the deal is the establishment of "unhindered and uninterrupted" access for international humanitarian agencies to enter Gaza. This is vital for providing much-needed relief to Palestinian civilians, who have endured severe shortages of food, water, and medical supplies. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emphasized the need for swift, comprehensive humanitarian assistance to mitigate the devastating effects of the conflict on Gaza's civilian population. These agencies will be able to operate freely, ensuring that aid reaches those in need without delay.

Medical Assistance

Another significant provision of the ceasefire is facilitating the movement of wounded individuals out of Gaza for medical treatment. With hospitals in Gaza overwhelmed and lacking resources, this provision is crucial to ensuring that civilians who have suffered injuries during the conflict receive the care they desperately need. The ability to travel for medical treatment had been severely restricted due to blockades and ongoing airstrikes, leaving many without access to adequate health-care.

International Aid Commitments

Egypt has committed to facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid through the Rafah crossing, which borders Gaza. This vital corridor will allow the delivery of medical supplies, food, and other essential resources to Gaza's civilians, further alleviating the hardships they have faced.

throughout the conflict.

Global Reactions to the Ceasefire

U.S. Involvement and Mediation

The United States has played a pivotal role in brokering the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. Former U.S. President Joe Biden confirmed that as part of the hostage exchange, American citizens held by Hamas would be released. In his statement, Biden underscored that the ceasefire would stop the ongoing fighting, increase the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza, and reunite families who have been separated for more than a year. His leadership was instrumental in bringing both parties to the negotiating table and facilitating the terms of the deal.

Bipartisan Support in the U.S.

Remarkably, the ceasefire deal has garnered bipartisan support in the U.S., with both Democratic and Republican leaders praising the agreement. President Donald Trump, who has often been at odds with the Biden administration, claimed credit for helping broker the deal, calling it “historic.” Trump emphasized that the cooperation between the Biden and Trump camps represented an “unprecedented” level of unity in the Middle East peace process. Senior U.S. officials also highlighted that this rare moment of bipartisan cooperation was a significant step toward achieving a peaceful resolution in the region.

International Reactions to the Ceasefire

United Nations' Support

The international community has widely welcomed the ceasefire deal, with the United Nations being one of the foremost supporters. UN Secretary-General Volker Türk hailed the agreement as a “ray of hope” for the millions affected by the conflict. He stressed that the ceasefire must be fully implemented to ensure peace and security in the region. The UN has vowed to provide sustained humanitarian relief to the civilians of Gaza, ensuring that aid reaches those most in need, particularly in light of the severe humanitarian crisis that has unfolded over the past year.

European Leaders' Reactions

European leaders have also expressed their support for the deal. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the ceasefire “long overdue” after months of devastating violence. He urged for a “huge surge” in humanitarian aid to Gaza to alleviate the suffering of civilians. Starmer also emphasized that the deal should serve as the foundation for a longer-term resolution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, advocating for a two-state solution that would ensure lasting peace and security for both Israel and Palestine.



Egypt's Crucial Role

Egypt has been an instrumental player in facilitating the ceasefire negotiations, acting as a key mediator between Israel and Hamas. The Egyptian government's involvement has been crucial in reaching a consensus and ensuring the agreement's success. Beyond diplomacy, Egypt has pledged to deliver significant amounts of humanitarian aid to Gaza. This aid will be coordinated through international agencies, with the Rafah crossing being the primary route for supplies entering the region. As a neighboring country and one of the principal diplomatic powers in the Middle East, Egypt's role remains vital in ensuring the continued flow of essential resources to Gaza's beleaguered civilians.

Challenges to Implementation

Despite the promising developments in the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, several challenges loom over its successful implementation. These challenges include ongoing violence, the complexities surrounding the hostage exchange, and the need for strong political will and cooperation from both sides.

Ongoing Violence

One of the most pressing issues is the

continued violence even after the ceasefire announcement. Despite the agreement, reports from Gaza indicate that Israeli airstrikes persisted, with the Palestinian Civil Defence reporting at least 20 fatalities from attacks that occurred post-ceasefire announcement. In one particularly devastating strike, a residential block in Gaza City's Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood was targeted, killing 12 people and injuring 20 others. This ongoing violence not only undermines the ceasefire but also raises concerns about the feasibility of lasting peace.

Hostage Exchange Logistics

Another hurdle in the agreement's implementation is the complicated logistics surrounding the hostage exchange. Both

sides hold individuals whose release is of strategic importance to their political and military objectives. As of now, the precise details of how the exchange will unfold remain unclear. The process is expected to be delicate, with significant negotiations required to ensure the safe and timely release of hostages from both sides.

• Political Will and Cooperation

Ultimately, the success of the ceasefire agreement hinges on the political will and cooperation of both Israel and Hamas. While the ceasefire has been officially announced, the durability of the agreement depends on both parties honouring their commitments and adhering to the terms of the deal. Any deviation from these terms could jeopardize the fragile peace and reignite violence.

Broader Implications for Regional Stability

Impact on Middle East Dynamics

The ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas holds significant potential for regional stability, providing an important opportunity to de-escalate tensions in the broader Middle East. If the truce proves successful and sustainable, it could

influence broader geopolitical negotiations, including those related to the Iranian nuclear deal and shifting regional alliances. A lasting ceasefire could also serve as a foundation for building trust, which might pave the way for future diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving other complex issues in the region.

The Role of International Diplomacy

This agreement highlights the vital role of international diplomacy in resolving long-standing conflicts. The cooperation between the U.S. and Qatar, along with Egypt's involvement, demonstrates the increasing influence of regional powers in shaping outcomes in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. This collaboration between global and regional stakeholders has created a crucial diplomatic space for dialogue and negotiation, showcasing the importance of multilateral efforts in addressing global crises.

The Path Toward a Two-State Solution

The ceasefire may offer a critical window for advancing broader peace initiatives, including the long-discussed two-state solution. While the truce itself is a positive step, achieving a lasting peace will require

significant efforts from both Israel and Hamas. Continued international pressure, diplomatic engagement, and mediation will be essential in supporting the path toward a sustainable solution. The two-state solution remains a key aspiration for many stakeholders, though it will necessitate overcoming deeply entrenched political, territorial, and security challenges.

Conclusion

The ceasefire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas represents a significant turning point in the ongoing conflict, offering a glimmer of hope after 15 months of intense warfare. The agreement includes provisions for humanitarian aid, prisoner exchanges, and the return of displaced Palestinians, laying the groundwork for a potential path to peace. However, the success of the deal is contingent on careful and effective implementation, as well as the continued commitment of all parties involved. The challenges remain substantial, with violence persisting and the complexities of hostage exchanges and displaced persons still unresolved. The international community's support will be critical in ensuring the stability of the region and helping pave the way for a more peaceful future.



Japanese King of Crimes admits to selling nuclear material to Iran

By Harry Choudhry

A Japanese crime boss has pleaded guilty to conspiring to sell nuclear material from Myanmar to Iran along with drug trafficking and weapons offenses, authorities in the United States have said. Takeshi Ebisawa, 60, a member of the yakuza, entered a guilty plea to six counts in federal court in Manhattan on Wednesday, the US Department of Justice said in a statement. He is set to be sentenced on April 9. According to prosecutors, Ebisawa in 2020 told an undercover agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and a DEA source that he had acquired a large quantity of thorium and uranium that he wished to sell.

In response to Ebisawa's repeated inquiries, the undercover agent agreed to help Ebisawa broker the sale of the nuclear materials to an associate who was posing as an Iranian general, prosecutors said. Ebisawa then offered to supply the undercover associate with plutonium that would be even "better" and more "powerful" than uranium for making nuclear weapons, according to prosecutors. A powdery yellow substance that Ebisawa's co-conspirators showed to undercover agents was later determined in a laboratory analysis to contain detectable quantities of uranium, thorium, and plutonium, the Justice Department said.

Ebisawa also conspired to broker the purchase of US-made surface-to-air missiles and heavy-duty weaponry to arm multiple ethnic armed groups in Myanmar, and to accept large quantities of heroin and methamphetamine as partial payment for the arms, according to prosecutors. US officials said they conducted Ebisawa's arrest and prosecution in cooperation with law enforcement partners in Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand.

"Today's plea should serve as a stark reminder to those who imperil our national security by trafficking weapons-grade plutonium and other dangerous materials on behalf of organized criminal syndicates



that the Department of Justice will hold you accountable to the fullest extent of the law," said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G Olsen of the Justice Department's National Security Division.

Ebisawa, who was previously charged in 2022 with international drug trafficking and firearms offences, faces possible life imprisonment for the most serious of the charges.

What is the nuclear program of Iran?

The Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is a landmark accord reached between Iran and several world powers, including the United States, in July 2015. Under its terms, Iran agreed to dismantle much of its nuclear program and

open its facilities to more extensive international inspections in exchange for billions of dollars worth of sanctions relief.

Proponents of the deal said that it would help prevent a revival of Iran's nuclear weapons program and thereby reduce the prospects for conflict between Iran and its regional rivals, including Israel and Saudi Arabia. However, the deal has been in jeopardy since President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from it in 2018. In retaliation for the U.S. departure and for deadly attacks on prominent Iranians in 2020, including one by the United States, Iran has resumed its nuclear activities. UN inspectors reported in early 2023 that Iran had enriched trace amounts of uranium to nearly weapons-grade levels, sparking international alarm.

President Joe Biden said that the United States would return to the JCPOA if Iran came back into compliance, but after more than two years of stop-and-go talks, the countries are nowhere near a compromise, and as of late 2023, provisions of the agreement have started to expire.

The JCPOA, which went into effect in January 2016, imposes restrictions on Iran's civilian nuclear enrichment program. At the heart of negotiations with Iran were the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and Germany—collectively known as the P5+1. The European Union (EU) also took part. Some Middle Eastern

moves to become a nuclear weapons state risked thrusting the region into a new crisis. One concern was that Israel would take preemptive military action against suspected nuclear facilities in Iran, as it had in Iraq and Syria, perhaps triggering reprisals by Lebanon-based Hezbollah or disruptions to the transport of oil in the Persian Gulf. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has since signaled a willingness to obtain a nuclear weapon if Iran successfully detonates one.

Iran had previously agreed to forgo the development of nuclear weapons as a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, which has been in force since 1970. However, after the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1979, Iranian leaders

Does it prevent Iran from getting nuclear weapons?

Many experts say that if all parties adhered to their pledges, the deal almost certainly could have achieved that goal for longer than a decade. Many of the JCPOA's restrictions on Iran's nuclear program have expiration dates. For example, after ten years (from January 2016), centrifuge restrictions would be lifted, and after fifteen years, so too would limits on the amount of low-enriched uranium Iran can possess. Some of the deal's opponents faulted these so-called sunset provisions, saying they would only delay Iran building a bomb while sanctions relief would allow it to underwrite terrorism in the region.

What did Iran agree to?

Nuclear restrictions. Iran agreed not to produce either the highly enriched uranium or the plutonium that could be used in a nuclear weapon. It also took steps to ensure that its Fordow, Natanz, and Arak facilities pursued only civilian work, including medical and industrial research.

The accord limited the numbers and types of centrifuges Iran can operate, the level of its enrichment, as well as the size of its stockpile of enriched uranium. (Mined uranium has less than 1 percent of the uranium-235 isotope used in fission reactions, and centrifuges increase that isotope's concentration. Uranium enriched to 5 percent is used in nuclear power plants, and at 20 percent it can be used in research reactors or for medical purposes. High-enriched uranium, at some 90 percent, is used in nuclear weapons.)

Monitoring and verification. Iran agreed to eventually implement a protocol that would allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, unfettered access to its nuclear facilities and potentially to undeclared sites. Inspections are intended to guard against the possibility that Iran develops nuclear arms in secret, as it has allegedly attempted before. The IAEA has issued quarterly reports to its board of governors and the UN Security Council on Iran's implementation of its nuclear commitments.



powers, such as Saudi Arabia, said they should have been consulted or included in the talks because they would be most affected by a nuclear-armed Iran. Israel explicitly opposed the agreement, calling it too lenient.

What were the goals?

The P5+1 wanted to unwind Iran's nuclear program to the point that if Tehran decided to pursue a nuclear weapon, it would take at least one year, giving world powers time to respond. Heading into the JCPOA negotiations, U.S. intelligence officials estimated that, in the absence of an agreement, Iran could produce enough nuclear material for a weapon in a few months. Negotiating nations feared that Iran's

secretly pursued this technology. (In 2007, U.S. intelligence analysts concluded that Iran halted its work on nuclear weapons in 2003 but continued to acquire nuclear technology and expertise.)

Before the JCPOA, the P5+1 had been negotiating with Iran for years, offering its government various incentives to halt uranium enrichment. After the 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani, who was viewed as a reformer, the parties came to a preliminary agreement to guide negotiations for a comprehensive deal. For its part, Iran sought the JCPOA for relief from international sanctions, which starved its economy [PDF] of more than \$100 billion in revenues in 2012–14 alone.

A body known as the Joint Commission, which includes representatives of all the negotiating parties, monitors implementation of the agreement and resolves any disputes that arise. A majority vote by its members can gain IAEA inspectors access to suspicious, undeclared sites. The body also oversees the transfer of nuclear-related or dual-use materials.

What did the other signatories agree to?

Sanctions relief. The EU, United Nations, and United States all committed to lifting their nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. However, many other U.S. sanctions on Iran, some dating back to the 1979 hostage crisis, remained in effect. They cover matters such as Iran's ballistic missile program, support for terrorist groups, and human rights abuses. Though the United States committed to lifting its sanctions on oil exports, it kept restrictions on financial transactions, which have deterred international trade with Iran.

Weapons embargo. The parties agreed to lift an existing UN ban [PDF] on Iran's transfer of conventional weapons and ballistic missiles after five years if the IAEA certified that Iran only engaged in civilian nuclear activity.

How is the Iran deal enforced?

If any signatory suspects Iran is violating the deal, the UN Security Council can vote on whether to continue sanctions relief. This "snapback" mechanism remains in effect for ten years, after which the UN sanctions are set to be permanently removed. In April 2020, the United States announced its intention to snap back sanctions. The other P5 members objected to the move, saying the United States could not unilaterally implement the mechanism because it left the nuclear deal in 2018.

Did Iran comply initially?

The agreement got off to a fairly smooth start. The IAEA certified in early 2016 that Iran had met its preliminary pledges; and the United States, EU, and United Nations responded by repealing or suspending their sanctions. Most significantly, U.S. President Barack Obama's administration dropped secondary sanctions on the oil sector, which allowed Iran to ramp up its oil exports to nearly the level it reached prior to sanctions. The United States and many European nations also unfroze about \$100 billion worth of frozen Iranian assets.

However, the deal has been near collapse

since President Trump withdrew the United States from it in 2018 and reinstated devastating banking and oil sanctions. Trump said the agreement failed to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its proxy warfare in the region, and he claimed that the sunset provisions would enable Iran to pursue nuclear weapons in the future.

U.S. Relations With Iran

Iran accused the United States of reneging on its commitments and faulted Europe for submitting to U.S. unilateralism. In a bid to keep the agreement alive, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom launched a barter system known as INSTEX to facilitate transactions with Iran outside of the U.S. banking system. INSTEX was used only once before France and Germany announced its dissolution in 2023, citing Iranian obstruction.

Following the U.S. withdrawal, several countries—U.S. allies among them—continued to import Iranian oil under waivers granted by the Trump administration, and Iran continued to abide by its commitments. But a year later, the United States ended the waivers to halt Iran's oil exports completely.



What is Iran's current nuclear activity?

In response to the other parties' actions, which Tehran claimed amounted to breaches of the deal, Iran started exceeding agreed-upon limits to its stockpile of low-enriched uranium in 2019, and began enriching uranium to higher concentrations (though still far short of the purity required for weapons). It also began developing new centrifuges to accelerate uranium enrichment; resuming heavy water production at its Arak facility; and enriching uranium at Fordow, which rendered the isotopes produced there unusable for medical purposes.

In 2020, Iran took more steps away from its nuclear pledges, following a series of attacks on its interests. In January, after the United States' targeted killing of top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, Iran announced that it would no longer limit its uranium enrichment. In October, it began constructing a centrifuge production center at Natanz to replace one that was destroyed months earlier in an attack it blamed on Israel. And in November, in response to the assassination of a prominent nuclear scientist, which it also attributed to Israel, Iran's parliament passed a law that led to a substantial boost in uranium enrichment at Fordow.

Tehran has increasingly limited the IAEA's ability to inspect its facilities since Washington withdrew from the nuclear deal, though it pledged in March 2023 to boost cooperation with the agency. The commitment came months after IAEA inspectors

detected uranium particles enriched to 83.7 percent at Fordow, prompting international concern.

How has the deal affected Iran's economy?

Prior to the JCPOA, Iran's economy suffered years of recession, currency depreciation, and inflation, largely because of sanctions on its energy sector. With the sanctions lifted, inflation slowed, exchange rates stabilized, and exports—especially of oil, agricultural goods, and luxury items—skyrocketed as Iran regained trading partners, particularly in the EU. After the JCPOA took effect, Iran began exporting more than 2.1 million barrels per day (approaching pre-2012 levels, when the oil sanctions were originally put in place). However, these improvements did not translate to a significant increase in the average Iranian household's budget.

The end of sanctions waivers on oil exports and the restoration of U.S. sanctions in 2018 cut deeply into a vital source of national revenue: that year, oil and petroleum products accounted for 80 percent [PDF] of Iran's exports. By 2020, exports of Iranian crude had fallen as low as one hundred thousand barrels per day. Since then, sales to China have helped boost crude exports, which averaged 1.1–1.2 million barrels per day by the end of 2022. Additionally, in October of that year, the United States imposed sanctions on eighteen major Iranian banks, causing the Iranian rial to fall further against the U.S. dollar.

Meanwhile, the wide range of U.S. sanctions unrelated to the nuclear program have added to the damage. Multinational firms fear being punished by the United States for transacting with sanctioned Iranian entities associated with, for example, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which holds sway over many industries. With sanctions deterring international trade, black markets have boomed, enriching the IRGC at the expense of the regular economy.

What is the outlook for the agreement?

JCPOA signatories have struggled to revive the essentially defunct deal. The countries began talks to bring Washington and Tehran back into the agreement in April 2021, but negotiations have since been off and on, complicated by developments such as Iran's election of conservative cleric Ebrahim Raisi as president, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the 2023 Israel-Hamas war. Iran's apparent involvement in the two conflicts even earned it additional sanctions. Just as certain UN-mandated provisions of the JCPOA were set to expire in October 2023, the Biden administration imposed new sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile and drone programs, and the EU refused to terminate the sanctions on its end. Moreover, Washington and Tehran still disagree on several issues related to rejoining the agreement, including the IRGC's designation as a terrorist organization, and U.S. officials say further nuclear advances by Iran could make returning to the original deal impossible.



The political fate of Imran Khan after the court sentenced him to 14 Years in Prison



By Romana Afsheen

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan once hailed as a reformist leader and a symbol of change, now faces another chapter of political adversity. On Friday (17th Jan 2025), a Pakistani accountability court sentenced Khan to 14 years in prison on corruption charges, alongside a seven-year sentence for his wife, Bushra Bibi. The ruling is the latest in a series of legal challenges and political setbacks for the former cricket star-turned-politician, who has been in custody since 2023.

The verdict accuses the couple of misusing public office and benefiting from corrupt practices during Khan's tenure as Prime Minister. Specifically, the court found that the pair accepted a gift of land from real estate tycoon Malik Riaz in exchange for facilitating money laundering operations. Prosecutors allege that the laundered funds, amounting to 190 million British

pounds (\$240 million), were initially returned to Pakistan by British authorities in 2022 and were misappropriated instead of being deposited into the national exchequer.

Khan has consistently denied these allegations, framing them as part of a politically motivated campaign to hinder his return to power. His legal team has vowed to appeal the verdict in higher courts, with defense lawyer Faisal Chaudhry asserting that the case lacks merit and represents an abuse of judicial power.

A Blow to PTI Amidst Negotiations

The ruling comes at a crucial juncture for Khan's political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), which has been locked in negotiations with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government. The two sides have been discussing

contentious issues, including the release of detained PTI leaders and allegations of electoral fraud in the 2024 elections.

On Thursday, a day before the court's decision, senior PTI leader Omar Ayub Khan presented a charter of demands to National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq. PTI's demands included the release of "political prisoners," a probe into alleged rigging during the 2024 elections, and investigations into the events of May 9 and November 26, 2023, which saw nationwide protests and violent clashes between PTI supporters and law enforcement.

The conviction of PTI's founder, however, threatens to derail these talks. Analysts warn that the ruling may reignite political unrest, with Khan's supporters accusing the government of weaponizing the judiciary to suppress dissent.



“This is a bogus case, and we will approach an appeals court against this decision,” declared Omar Ayub Khan outside the parliament following the verdict. Meanwhile, PTI lawmakers and supporters gathered in Islamabad, chanting slogans demanding Khan’s release.

Allegations and Evidence

The government has described the case as a landmark effort to hold public officials accountable. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar stated on Thursday that “irrefutable evidence” implicates Khan and his wife in the corruption scandal. According to Tarar, the former premier concealed details of the laundered funds from his cabinet and used the proceeds to build a lavish estate in Lahore.

Tarar dismissed PTI’s claims of judicial overreach, asserting that the prosecution’s case is backed by substantial documentary evidence. “This is about justice, not politics,” he said.

Despite these claims, critics argue that the timing of the ruling raises questions about its impartiality. Political observers note that Khan’s increasing popularity and PTI’s strong performance in the February 2024 elections have made him a significant threat to the ruling coalition, prompting attempts to curtail his influence through legal means.

A Tumultuous Political Career

Imran Khan’s rise and fall in Pakistan’s political landscape has been anything but ordinary. Elected Prime Minister in 2018 on promises of rooting out corruption and reforming governance, Khan initially enjoyed strong backing from the country’s powerful military. However, his relationship with the establishment soured over time, culminating in his removal from office through a no-confidence vote in April 2022.

Since his ouster, Khan has faced an onslaught of legal challenges, including convictions for corruption, inciting mutiny, and revealing state secrets. His supporters argue that these cases are part of a broader campaign by the establishment to stifle dissent and consolidate power.

The most significant turning point came on May 9, 2023, when Khan was briefly detained in the Al-Qadir Trust case – the same corruption case in which he was convicted last week. His arrest sparked nationwide protests, during which PTI supporters targeted military installations and government buildings. The subsequent crackdown led to mass arrests, with over 100 PTI members tried under military laws.

Implications for Pakistan’s Political Landscape

The conviction of Imran Khan casts a shadow over Pakistan’s fragile political landscape. While his imprisonment may temporarily weaken PTI, it could also galvanize his support base, as many of his followers view him as a victim of political persecution.

Aasiya Riaz, Joint Director of the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT), emphasized the need for dialogue to prevent further instability. “Talks aimed at meaningful outcomes, for the sake of the country, must proceed,” she said, warning that a prolonged deadlock could exacerbate Pakistan’s economic and security challenges.

With PTI continuing its protests and the government doubling down on its stance, the possibility of reconciliation remains uncertain. Analysts suggest that both sides may eventually be forced back to the negotiating table, but only after significant political maneuvering.

British MPs Question Pakistan’s Judiciary After Imran Khan’s Controversial Sentence

The recent sentencing of former Prime Minister Imran Khan to 14 years in prison on corruption charges has sparked significant controversy, drawing criticism from international observers, including British Members of Parliament (MPs). Rights groups and political analysts have also labeled the case as politically motivated, raising concerns about Pakistan’s judiciary and its role in the country’s political

landscape.

A court in Rawalpindi sentenced Khan to 14 years in prison on charges of laundering over \$300 million in a deal involving the Al-Qadir Trust, a non-profit educational institute founded by Khan and his wife, Bushra Bibi. Bushra Bibi also received a seven-year sentence. The sentencing has intensified debates about the judiciary’s impartiality in Pakistan, especially as Khan has been embroiled in numerous legal battles since his ouster in April 2022.

Reacting to the verdict, Khan denounced the judiciary on social media, stating, “The Pakistani judiciary has further eroded its credibility. Such mockery has never been witnessed in the history of the judiciary.” He vowed to continue his struggle against what he described as “tyranny,” even if it meant enduring a prolonged prison term.

British MPs from both the Labour and Conservative parties have voiced apprehensions about the state of democracy and judicial independence in Pakistan. Lord Daniel Hannan, a Conservative peer, criticized Pakistan’s judiciary, stating, “The rule of law no longer applies. The courts are becoming instruments of the people in power.” Labour MP Kim Johnson echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing that the inconsistent legal proceedings against Khan further cast doubt on the fairness of the judicial process.

Johnson urged the British government to engage with Pakistani authorities to promote adherence to democratic principles. “Justice must be seen to be fair, impartial, and free from political influence,” she asserted.

Khan, regarded as one of Pakistan’s most popular political figures, has spent over a year in custody. A United Nations report recently concluded that his detention was arbitrary and violated international law. Human rights organizations and political analysts argue that the cases against Khan are part of a broader strategy to suppress dissent and weaken his political influence.

The Role of the Military and Political Dynamics

Analysts believe Pakistan’s powerful military, often described as the country’s



'kingmaker,' plays a central role in Khan's legal troubles. Ayesha Siddiqa, a London-based author and expert on Pakistan's military, described the sentencing as a pressure tactic. "The establishment's deal is that he comes out and stays quiet until the next election," she said.

Khan himself has claimed he was offered a three-year exile abroad and house arrest as alternatives to imprisonment, but he has refused such deals. "I will live and die in Pakistan," he declared. "I will fight for my country's freedom until my last breath, and I expect my nation to do the same."

Trump's Impact on Imran Khan's Case and Future

Donald Trump's re-election as President of the United States could have significant implications for Imran Khan's legal and political future. During Trump's previous tenure, the U.S. maintained a pragmatic relationship with Khan, which centered primarily on mutual interests such as counterterrorism and regional security. Trump's foreign policy, often characterized by a more transactional approach, may offer Khan an opportunity to gain international support or leverage, especially given his contentious relationship with the current Pakistani government.

For Khan, Trump's re-election could provide a degree of diplomatic respite. Trump has often been sympathetic to populist leaders who challenge establishment forces, and this dynamic might work in Khan's favor. If the United States under Trump takes a more hands-off approach to Pakistan's domestic politics, it could reduce international pressure on the Pakistani government to act decisively in prosecuting Khan. Trump's administration might also be less inclined to support the international scrutiny of Khan's legal battles, which would align with Khan's claims of politically motivated persecution.

Additionally, Khan's supporters could seek to use Trump's stance on political autonomy to argue that the Pakistani judiciary's actions are being influenced by domestic political pressures, and not purely by legal considerations. With Trump's influence on global political discourse, this narrative could gain traction among international

observers sympathetic to Khan's position.

However, Khan's legal team will also have to navigate the complexities of U.S.-Pakistan relations. While Trump's foreign policy may not prioritize human rights or judicial transparency in Pakistan, it remains to be seen how the Pakistani government under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif would respond to any external political pressure, particularly from the United States. The alignment or divergence of Pakistan's foreign policy with the U.S. under Trump could further complicate the already tense relationship between the government and Khan's supporters.

highlighting international scrutiny of the issue

The political landscape in Pakistan is volatile, with Khan's imprisonment only adding to the uncertainty. Despite his legal challenges, Khan remains a central figure in Pakistan's opposition politics. His party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), continues to rally support, emphasizing the political nature of the charges against their leader. As Pakistan prepares for future elections, the presence of a strong PTI, bolstered by Khan's influence, could push the country toward a more unpredictable political future.



Shifting Alliances and Political Fallout

The sentencing has drawn parallels to similar political maneuvers in Pakistan's history, where leaders like Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari faced exile and legal challenges before returning to power. However, analysts believe that Khan's defiance sets him apart, as he continues to rally his supporters despite immense pressure.

The U.S. government and British officials have also expressed concerns over Pakistan's judicial system, especially in light of military court convictions of Khan's supporters. Richard Grenell, a U.S. envoy under the Trump administration, has openly criticized the Pakistani government's treatment of Khan, further

In the context of this domestic turbulence, the re-election of Donald Trump might serve as a wildcard in shaping how Pakistan's political factions maneuver. While Trump's approach to Pakistan was transactional, his return to power could bring about shifts in the global order that might influence how Pakistani political forces interact. For Imran Khan, maintaining a strong international presence and cultivating foreign support, particularly from influential figures like Trump, could be critical in ensuring his long-term relevance in Pakistan's political scene.

Trump's stance on global governance, which often prioritizes national sovereignty over international pressure, could embolden Khan's supporters to frame the legal actions against him as part of a broader international conspiracy to suppress



populist movements. Khan's followers may also use Trump's political victories to rally domestic support, framing his struggle as a fight against a global elite and an entrenched political establishment. This narrative, if adopted by the PTI and its allies, could resonate with large sections of Pakistan's electorate who view Khan as a leader fighting for the rights of ordinary citizens against political elites.

PTI's Stance and Legal Strategy

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Khan's political party, has vowed to challenge the Al-Qadir Trust case verdict in higher courts. Khan's sister, Aleema Khan, reiterated his resolve, stating that her brother refuses to negotiate or accept deals. She criticized the judiciary's double standards, pointing out the leniency granted to figures like Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari in similar cases.

Legal experts within the PTI argue that the case lacks credibility and is riddled with political motivations. Khan's legal adviser, Faisal Fareed Chaudhry, noted, "The court's verdict is a political decision disguised as legal proceedings."

Govt's to find out a mid-way to meet PTI demand instead of forming a Judicial Commission: Tarar

Information Minister Attaullah Tarar has stated that the government is considering a "middle ground" by forming a committee instead of establishing a judicial commission, as demanded by the former ruling party. Tarar said, "It is not necessary to constitute a commission... we were deliberating on a middle ground to take things forward."

Earlier, incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan called off negotiations with the government, citing its failure to establish a judicial commission within the agreed-upon seven-day timeframe.

Outside Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan told the media that Imran Khan expressed frustration over the delay, stating that the government's inaction left no justification for continuing the talks.

"The founder of PTI has categorically announced that no further rounds of negotiations will take place," Gohar said, adding, "The government made promises but failed to deliver, which is why Imran Khan decided to end the negotiations."

Negotiations between the PML-N-led government and PTI began in late December to ease political tensions, but after three sessions, little progress has been made on critical issues. During the third session on

January 16, PTI presented a charter of demands, calling for the formation of two judicial commissions—mutually agreed upon by both parties within seven days—and the release of "political prisoners." The commissions were intended to investigate the May 9, 2023 riots and the November 26 crackdown on PTI supporters in Islamabad.

Commenting on PTI's decision to withdraw from talks, Tarar accused the party of acting with "malicious intent and haste." He noted that the government had been holding "extensive discussions" on PTI's demands and emphasized that the party should have waited for an official response. "PTI was bound to wait for the government's reply till the deadline. Now, the onus is on them," he remarked.

PML-N Senator Irfan Siddiqui, spokesperson for the government's negotiation committee, described PTI's decision as "unfortunate" and urged the party to reconsider.

"The deadline of seven working days ends on January 28," Siddiqui said, calling on PTI to give the government a chance to respond. "When they [PTI] knocked on our door and handed over a questionnaire, they should have waited for our answers," he told journalists outside Parliament House on Thursday.



Pakistan's Economic Outlook for FY 2024-25: Challenges and Prospects for Recovery



By Kanwal Munir

Introduction

The World Bank recently updated its forecast for Pakistan's GDP growth in the fiscal year 2024-25, revising it upward to 2.8% from its earlier projection of 2.3% in June 2024. While this improvement suggests a gradual recovery, the figure still falls short of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) forecast of 3% and the government's ambitious target of 3.6%. The updated projections, published in the World Economic Prospects Report 2025, shed light on Pakistan's efforts to stabilize its economy amid challenging global and regional economic conditions.

Despite the upward revision, Pakistan's growth lags behind its South Asian peers. This article delves into the factors driving Pakistan's economic performance, the regional context, and the path forward to sustain long-term growth.

Pakistan's Economic Growth in a Regional Context

South Asia remains one of the fastest-growing regions globally, driven

by strong economic performances from several countries in the region. According to the World Bank's 2025 report, India leads with a robust GDP growth projection of 6.7%, closely followed by Bhutan at 7.2%. Other nations, including Nepal (5.1%), Maldives (4.7%), Bangladesh (4.1%), and Sri Lanka (3.5%), are also demonstrating steady recovery trajectories, reflecting their focus on effective reforms and growth-oriented policies.

In sharp contrast, Pakistan's projected GDP growth of 2.8% for FY 2024-25 underscores its sluggish economic recovery. Decades of economic mismanagement, political instability, and a mounting external debt burden have hindered the country's ability to compete regionally. Unlike its neighbors, Pakistan has struggled to adopt a cohesive development strategy that prioritizes export-led growth, infrastructure modernization, and foreign direct investment.

This disparity is a stark reminder of the need for urgent reforms to revive Pakistan's economic competitiveness. While regional counterparts are leveraging industrial diversification,

improved governance, and international partnerships, Pakistan remains constrained by structural inefficiencies. To bridge this gap, the government must implement decisive reforms, focusing on sustainable growth strategies, enhanced governance, and robust economic policies that can reposition the country as a strong regional player.

Factors Driving Pakistan's Modest Economic Recovery

Pakistan's slight economic recovery can largely be attributed to a combination of fiscal consolidation, prudent monetary policies, and reduced political uncertainty following the February 2024 general elections.

1. Monetary Policies and Inflation Control

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has played a crucial role in addressing inflation, which had soared to double digits in recent years. For the first time since 2021, inflation has dropped to single digits, with December 2024 recording an annual inflation rate of just 4.1%. This marked decline has

provided much-needed relief to businesses and consumers alike.

To further stimulate economic activity, the SBP has embarked on an aggressive rate-cutting cycle since mid-2024. From a peak policy rate of 22%, the central bank has reduced rates by 900 basis points. Analysts expect another 100-basis point cut in January 2025, marking the sixth consecutive reduction. Lower interest rates are expected to ease borrowing costs, encouraging private sector investment and consumer spending.



2. Fiscal Consolidation and Budgetary Reforms

The Pakistani government has taken a disciplined fiscal approach to reduce its budget deficit and stabilize public debt, as evident in the 2024-25 federal budget unveiled in June 2024. The budget emphasizes fiscal consolidation by limiting non-essential expenditures and implementing revenue-enhancing measures, aiming to strengthen the country's financial position. It reflects the government's commitment to adhering to the conditions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan program, which emphasizes fiscal discipline as a precondition for disbursement.

Key allocations in the budget target critical sectors, including agriculture, energy, and

exports, which are essential for driving economic growth and enhancing productivity. By channeling resources into these priority areas, the government seeks to address systemic inefficiencies while reducing its reliance on subsidies. The decision to cut non-developmental spending further underscores its efforts to tackle fiscal imbalances and redirect resources toward growth-oriented initiatives.

3. Foreign Exchange Reserves and Currency Stabilization

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have

shown notable improvement in the fiscal year 2024-25 after facing precariously low levels in 2023. The recovery is attributed to increased export earnings, robust remittance inflows, and financial support from international partners. These factors have not only bolstered reserves but also contributed to stabilizing the Pakistani rupee. A more stable currency has eased import costs, helping to curb inflationary pressures that have long plagued the economy.

This dual focus on fiscal responsibility and currency stabilization reflects the government's broader strategy to create a more resilient economic framework while meeting its IMF commitments and positioning the country for sustainable growth.

Debt Challenges and Structural Issues

While the improvement in Pakistan's macroeconomic indicators offers reasons for cautious optimism, the country continues to grapple with significant challenges, particularly its mounting debt burden and low per capita income growth.

1. Rising Debt Burden

The World Bank has expressed concerns about Pakistan's debt-to-GDP ratio, which remains elevated despite recent stabilization efforts. Interest payments alone account for a significant portion of government expenditures, leaving little fiscal room for development projects.

To address these challenges, the government is heavily reliant on adhering to the IMF loan program and securing additional bilateral and multilateral financing. A recent \$1 billion loan agreement with two Middle Eastern banks, secured at an interest rate of 6-7%, reflects Pakistan's ongoing dependence on external financing to meet its budgetary needs.

2. Weak Per Capita Income Growth

Despite signs of GDP recovery, the World Bank has cautioned that Pakistan's per capita income will remain weak until 2026. This persistent stagnation poses significant concerns, as it limits improvements in living standards and undermines efforts to combat poverty effectively. A low per capita income restricts economic opportunities for the population, exacerbating inequalities and hindering progress toward sustainable development and poverty alleviation in the country.

International Partnerships: A Beacon of Hope

Amid its economic challenges, Pakistan's international partnerships offer a silver lining. Investments in key sectors such as mining, energy, and infrastructure could play a transformative role in bolstering the country's long-term economic prospects.

1. Reko Diq Mining Project

Saudi Arabia's mining fund, Manara Minerals, is set to acquire a 10-20% stake in

Pakistan's Reko Diq copper and gold mining project. Developed by Barrick Gold, the \$9 billion project is expected to produce 400,000 tonnes of copper and 500,000 ounces of gold annually once operational.

Such investments not only promise significant economic benefits for Pakistan but also signal growing investor confidence in the country's resource potential.

2. Energy Investments

To tackle chronic energy shortages, the Pakistani government is prioritizing investments in renewable energy projects. By collaborating with international partners, the country aims to diversify its energy mix, reduce dependency on imported fossil fuels, and address supply deficits. These initiatives are designed to enhance energy self-sufficiency, lower costs, and support sustainable development. Transitioning to renewable energy also aligns with Pakistan's broader goals of improving energy security and mitigating environmental challenges.

The Need for Structural Reforms

While Pakistan has taken some initial steps toward economic recovery, experts emphasize that structural reforms are vital to achieving sustainable, long-term growth. Addressing systemic inefficiencies and creating a robust economic foundation will be crucial for stabilizing the economy and unlocking its potential.

1. Tax Reform and Revenue Mobilization

Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio remains one of the lowest in the region, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive tax reforms. The government must focus on broadening the tax base to include sectors and individuals that currently evade taxation. Eliminating unnecessary exemptions and improving tax compliance through digitization and stricter enforcement mechanisms are critical steps to enhance revenue collection. By increasing its revenue, the government can reduce reliance on external borrowing and allocate more funds to development projects, fostering inclusive economic growth.

2. Export Diversification

Pakistan's export base is heavily reliant on the textile sector, which constitutes a significant share of its earnings. This narrow focus makes the economy vulnerable to external shocks, such as fluctuating global demand and supply chain disruptions. To enhance resilience, the government must promote export diversification by supporting sectors such as information technology, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and engineering goods. Investment in research and development, better market access, and trade agreements can further boost the competitiveness of Pakistani exports in global markets.



3. Governance and Institutional Strengthening

Strong governance and institutional capacity are prerequisites for sustainable development. Transparent decision-making, reduced bureaucratic inefficiencies, and streamlined regulatory processes are critical to fostering investor confidence and improving the ease of doing business. Addressing corruption and ensuring accountability at all levels of government can help create a more predictable and favorable economic environment.

Implementing these reforms is essential to ensuring Pakistan's economic stability, improving investor confidence, and driving sustained growth.

Conclusion: Path Forward for Pakistan's Economy

Pakistan's economic outlook for FY 2024-25 presents a mixed picture. On the one hand, the World Bank's upward revision of GDP growth to 2.8% indicates signs of recovery, supported by lower inflation, improved foreign exchange reserves, and prudent monetary policies. On the other hand, the country continues to face significant challenges, including a high debt burden, low per capita income growth, and structural inefficiencies. To ensure sustainable economic progress,

Pakistan must focus on implementing structural reforms that enhance productivity, improve governance, and attract investment. International partnerships and initiatives like the Reko Diq mining project offer opportunities to accelerate growth, but these must be complemented by domestic efforts to strengthen economic resilience.

As Pakistan navigates its economic recovery, consistent policymaking, political stability, and proactive engagement with international financial institutions will be crucial. By addressing its structural challenges and leveraging its strategic advantages, Pakistan can chart a path toward sustainable development and regional competitiveness.

The Transformation of Pakistan's Automobile Industry: A Journey of Resilience and Innovation

The automobile industry in Pakistan has witnessed a remarkable transformation over the past few decades. From a small, import-dependent sector, it has evolved into a significant contributor to the national economy. This revolution has been driven by various factors, including government policies, technological advancements, and increasing consumer demand. Let's take a closer look at this incredible journey.



By Prince Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

A Glimpse into the Past

The origins of Pakistan's automobile industry date back to the 1950s when the government took the first steps to promote industrialization. The establishment of the first automobile assembly plant in Karachi in 1953, which assembled Bedford trucks, marked the beginning of this journey. Over the years, more assembly plants were set up, including those for General Motors, Mercedes-Benz, and Ford. However, until the 1980s, the industry heavily relied on imports.

In these early days, the focus was primarily on assembling imported kits rather than manufacturing vehicles locally. This approach meant that the industry didn't significantly impact employment or technology transfer. Yet, it laid the foundation for future growth by familiarizing local engineers and technicians with modern automotive technologies.

The Role of Government Policies

The real transformation began in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the government introduced policies to encourage localization. This led to the establishment of local production plants by international automakers such as Toyota, Honda, and Suzuki. The government's push for localization involved setting specific targets for using locally manufactured parts in vehicles.

This policy shift not only reduced the industry's reliance on imports but also fostered the development of a robust local vendor base.

The introduction of the Auto Industry Development Policy (AIDP) further accelerated this process by providing incentives for local manufacturing and setting targets for localization. Companies began

to manufacture components such as batteries, tires, and various plastic parts locally, creating job opportunities and reducing the overall cost of vehicles.

The Growth Spurt

Since the 1980s, the automobile industry in Pakistan has experienced rapid growth. By 2021, the industry produced over 200,000 vehicles and continues to grow at a rate of 10% per year. Today, the industry accounts for 4% of Pakistan's GDP and employs over 1.8 million individuals.

The influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) has been a significant driver of this growth. Companies like Toyota, Honda, and Suzuki have expanded their operations, while new entrants like Kia, Hyundai, and MG have also set up production facilities. The expansion of the automobile industry has had a ripple effect on other sectors of the economy. The demand for

raw materials, such as steel and rubber has increased, benefiting local suppliers. Additionally, the growth of the auto industry has led to the development of related industries, such as auto financing, insurance, and after-sales services.

Embracing Technological Advancements

Technological advancements have played a crucial role in the industry's evolution. The introduction of modern manufacturing techniques, automation, and digital tools has improved production efficiency and product quality. The adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies, such as robotics and computer-aided design (CAD), has streamlined production processes and reduced the time required to develop new models.

The rise of electric vehicles (EVs) represents a paradigm shift in the automobile industry. Recognizing the environmental and economic benefits of EVs, the Pakistani government has introduced incentives to encourage their adoption. Several automakers have already launched EV models in the Pakistani market, and more are expected to follow suit. The shift towards electric mobility is not only reducing the industry's carbon footprint but also reducing the country's dependence on imported fuel.

Consumer Demand and Market Trends

The growing middle class in Pakistan has led to increased demand for automobiles. Consumers now seek vehicles that offer better fuel efficiency, safety features, and advanced technology. This demand has prompted local automakers to introduce new models and upgrade existing ones to meet consumer expectations.

There has been a noticeable shift in consumer preferences towards compact and fuel-efficient cars in recent years. This trend is driven by rising fuel prices and increasing environmental awareness. Automakers have responded by launching smaller, more fuel-efficient models that cater to urban commuters' needs.

Additionally, the demand for hybrid and electric vehicles is rising as consumers seek

eco-friendly alternatives. Safety features have also become a key consideration for buyers. Modern vehicles are equipped with advanced safety technologies, such as anti-lock braking systems (ABS), airbags, and electronic stability control (ESC). These features not only enhance passenger safety but also reduce the risk of accidents. Automakers are continuously innovating to improve vehicle safety and meet global standards.

Overcoming Challenges

Despite the progress, the automobile industry in Pakistan faces several challenges, including regulatory hurdles, supply chain disruptions, and competition from imported vehicles. The industry is subject to various regulations, including emission standards, safety requirements, and import tariffs. Compliance with these regulations



can be costly and time-consuming. Additionally, frequent policy and tax rate changes create uncertainty for investors and manufacturers.

Supply chain disruptions have also impacted the industry. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, leading to shortages of critical components such as semiconductors. These disruptions have highlighted the importance of building resilient supply chains and reducing dependence on foreign suppliers. Localizing the production of key components and diversifying the supply base can mitigate the risk of future disruptions.

Competition from imported vehicles is another challenge for local manufacturers.

Imported cars, particularly used cars, often have a price advantage over locally manufactured vehicles. This competition can erode market share and profitability for domestic automakers. To level the playing field, the government has introduced measures to restrict the import of used cars and encourage local manufacturing.

The Future Outlook

The future of the automobile industry in Pakistan looks promising. The government's commitment to promoting electric vehicles and sustainable mobility is expected to drive growth and innovation.

The increasing adoption of advanced manufacturing technologies will further enhance production efficiency and quality. Additionally, the rising middle class and growing consumer demand for modern,

fuel-efficient, and safe vehicles will continue to drive the industry's expansion.

The transformation of Pakistan's automobile industry is a testament to the country's resilience and adaptability. As the industry continues to evolve, it will play a crucial role in driving economic growth and providing employment opportunities for millions of people. With continued efforts, the industry can achieve even greater heights and become a key player in the global automotive market.

Car Sales Surge by 51% in six months of FY25

Passenger car sales in Pakistan witnessed a robust 51.3% increase, reaching 46,398

units during the first six months of the current fiscal year (H1FY2025) compared to the same period last year. This growth was fueled by rising remittances, declining interest rates, and the optimistic sentiment brought by the new year, bolstering local buyers' confidence.

While the month-on-month sales figures showed a slight decline, the cumulative performance during this period indicates positive momentum for the country's struggling automotive industry.

Sales Trends Across Vehicle Segments

According to the Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association (PAMA), significant growth was also observed in other vehicle categories:

Trucks and Buses: Sales rose by 89.1% to 1,494 units and 76.7% to 304 units, respectively.

Jeeps and Pickups: Sales increased by 61.2%, reaching 14,174 units.

Two- and Three-Wheelers: Sales of motorcycles and rickshaws surged by 28.5% to 696,455 units.

However, the farm tractor industry

remained under pressure, with sales declining by 25.7% to 17,397 units during H1FY2025. Small-scale growers continued to face economic challenges compounded by the effects of climate change, which adversely impacted tractor demand during the first five months of the fiscal year (July–November 2024).

Interestingly, tractor sales showed a notable rebound in December 2024, climbing to 7,030 units. This recovery was driven by corporate interest, as local and international companies entered the agriculture sector to boost exports of agricultural produce.

Market Dynamics and Analyst Insights

Commenting on the auto sector's performance, an automotive analyst said that the growth in car sales reflects the easing of economic pressures. Factors such as a drop in interest rates—from a record 22% to 13%—and a significant influx of workers' remittances, which reached \$3.1 billion in December 2024, have encouraged families receiving foreign income to invest in new vehicles.

The emergence of Chinese automakers has also played a pivotal role in driving growth. Offering feature-rich vehicles at competi-

tive prices, these brands are gaining traction against established foreign competitors in the local market.

"We can expect 2025 to be a much stronger year for vehicle sales compared to 2023 and 2024," said Khan. "While the industry's annual benchmark of 250,000 units may not be reached, we're likely to get close to it."

In the motorcycle segment, Japanese brands remain dominant, supported by their popularity among middle-class families. Despite the entry of over three dozen Chinese electric motorbike brands, fuel-driven Japanese bikes continue to lead the market.

Challenges Ahead

Khan highlighted that while growth in the truck and bus segments is evident, the market is unlikely to experience significant breakthroughs in the next six months. Similarly, the tractor industry's path to full recovery remains uncertain despite recent improvements. With a positive trajectory in the car and two-wheeler markets, the auto sector anticipates better overall performance in 2025, though challenges in specific segments persist.



"Fiscal Strain or Political Strategy? Government Boosts MPs' Fund Release to Rs48.3 billion"

By Hina Kashif

In a move that has raised questions about fiscal discipline, the coalition government has significantly increased the discretionary spending for parliamentarians' schemes, nearly tripling the funds allocated to them this month. The total release of Rs48.3 billion in January is a substantial deviation from the Ministry of Finance's prescribed limits, which has prompted concerns about financial oversight and accountability.

The total fund release of Rs48.3 billion is Rs19 billion more than the ceiling set by the Ministry of Finance for the July-March period of the current fiscal year, which has led to worries about the government's ability to manage public finances responsibly. While the Ministry of Finance had set specific limits for the release of funds under the Sustainable Development Goals Achievement Programme (SAP)—the initiative that oversees parliamentarians' development schemes—the government has bypassed these limits to meet competing demands for funding from coalition parties.

The Ministry of Planning, headed by the planning minister, authorized this "upfront one-liner" release of nearly Rs19 billion for parliamentarians' schemes, a move that goes beyond the quarterly limits that had previously been agreed upon. These funds are intended for various projects under the SAP, which are primarily aimed at fulfilling development objectives in parliamentarians' constituencies. However, despite several attempts to obtain an official statement from the Ministry of Planning or the Cabinet Secretary, no comments have been provided on the matter.

Documents obtained from the Ministry of Planning show that between January 13 and 17, an additional Rs30.9 billion was released, bringing the total funds allocated for parliamentarians' schemes to Rs48.3 billion by mid-January. This amount marks a significant increase from the Rs17.5 billion that had been allocated by December 2024. According to sources within the



Ministry of Planning, the accelerated fund releases were necessary to meet the demands from the coalition parties, many of which are vying for additional resources to carry out development activities in their respective constituencies.

The Finance Ministry's Budget Release Strategy allows for the release of up to 60% of the total allocated budget for parliamentarians' schemes during the first three quarters (July-March) of the fiscal year. The 60% ceiling for these schemes amounts to Rs29 billion from the Rs50 billion that was originally allocated for parliamentarians' development projects. However, the Planning Ministry exceeded this ceiling when it authorized the release of Rs12.5 billion on January 13, bringing the total to Rs30 billion—just above the prescribed limit.

Following this, the Cabinet Division made a request for "additional funds," which led to the authorization of another Rs18.4 billion on January 17. This move brought the total authorizations for parliamentarians' schemes under the SDGs programme to Rs48.4 billion for the current fiscal year. This represents a substantial breach of the Finance Ministry's instructions and has raised alarms regarding the government's

adherence to budgetary rules and the potential consequences of such financial decisions.

While the government argues that these releases are necessary to fulfill development promises made by coalition parties, critics have pointed out that the accelerated release of funds could have serious ramifications on the country's broader fiscal strategy. The Ministry of Finance had imposed these ceilings on fund releases to ensure that public funds are managed carefully, particularly in light of the fiscal consolidation targets set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF's program aims for primary budget surpluses, which means the government must take strict measures to control spending and ensure financial stability.

The implications of these fund releases are far-reaching. The government had initially proposed an ambitious Rs1.4 trillion for the federal development budget this year. However, due to mounting budgetary shortfalls, this figure was revised down to Rs1.1 trillion to accommodate electricity subsidies and address other financial priorities. As of December, actual development spending had amounted to just Rs148 billion, which is only 13.5% of the annual

budget for development. This demonstrates that despite the government's increased spending in certain areas, it has struggled to meet its original development expenditure targets.

The Political Context: Demands from Coalition Parties

The increase in fund releases is partly the result of competing demands from the ruling coalition parties. Members of these parties have pushed for increased resources to fulfill development schemes in their constituencies, which they argue are essential for securing political support and maintaining their relevance in the political landscape. These demands have been particularly vocal during the first half of the fiscal year, as coalition members seek to deliver tangible benefits to their constituents.

The government's decision to grant these requests has been criticized by some experts, who argue that prioritizing short-term political gains over long-term financial stability could have serious repercussions for the country's economy. Many are questioning whether the accelerated release of funds is a prudent financial strategy or an attempt to shore up political support ahead of upcoming elections.

At the heart of this debate is the question of fiscal discipline. The government's decision to authorize fund releases beyond the Ministry of Finance's prescribed limits is seen by many as a violation of established financial norms. While the government insists that these funds are essential for fulfilling its development promises, critics argue that such decisions undermine efforts to curb inflation, reduce the budget deficit, and maintain fiscal discipline.

The Impact on the Economy

The increased fund releases for parliamentarians' schemes have raised concerns about the broader impact on the country's economic stability. The Pakistani economy is already facing numerous challenges, including high inflation, growing public debt, and a widening fiscal deficit. In this context, many are questioning whether the

government's decision to release funds beyond the prescribed limits is a responsible approach or whether it will exacerbate the country's existing fiscal problems.

One of the primary concerns is that such fund releases may put additional strain on the national budget. With the IMF closely monitoring Pakistan's fiscal performance, any deviation from the agreed fiscal consolidation path could trigger negative consequences, including delays in future financial assistance or even the suspension of the IMF program. Furthermore, the government's ability to meet its debt obligations may be compromised if it continues to allocate funds to discretionary projects without adequate oversight or consideration for long-term financial sustainability.

In addition to the immediate fiscal risks, there are concerns about the potential for corruption and inefficiency in the allocation of these funds. Discretionary spending on parliamentarians' schemes has often been criticized for lacking transparency, with critics alleging that the funds are sometimes misused for political purposes rather than being directed toward meaningful development projects. This raises the question of whether the government is ensuring proper oversight and accountability for the funds being released.

Addressing the Fiscal Deficit

The government's decision to increase fund releases for parliamentarians' schemes comes at a time when Pakistan's fiscal deficit is widening. The fiscal deficit, which refers to the gap between government revenues and expenditures, has been a persistent challenge for the Pakistani economy. The government had hoped to reduce the deficit through measures such as reducing development spending and raising taxes. However, the recent increase in discretionary spending for parliamentarians' schemes undermines these efforts and makes it more difficult to achieve the desired fiscal consolidation targets.

The fiscal deficit is one of the key areas of concern for the IMF, which has placed strict conditions on Pakistan's economic program. These conditions include efforts to reduce the fiscal deficit, implement

structural reforms, and raise revenue through tax reforms. Any deviation from the agreed fiscal targets could jeopardize Pakistan's access to further financial assistance from the IMF and other international lenders, which would have serious consequences for the country's economy.

The Future of Development Spending

Looking ahead, the government will need to strike a delicate balance between fulfilling political demands for development funds and ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. The increase in fund releases for parliamentarians' schemes raises questions about the future direction of development spending in Pakistan. While development projects are crucial for addressing the needs of the population, it is important that these projects are implemented in a way that aligns with the country's broader economic objectives.

In order to ensure that development spending remains on track and is used efficiently, the government must prioritize transparency, accountability, and effective oversight of funds. This means ensuring that funds allocated for parliamentarians' schemes are directed toward projects that have a measurable impact on the community, rather than being used for political purposes. Additionally, the government must work closely with international partners, including the IMF, to develop a sustainable financial strategy that supports both development and fiscal discipline.

Conclusion

The government's decision to significantly increase fund releases for parliamentarians' schemes raises important questions about fiscal discipline, transparency, and the long-term sustainability of Pakistan's economic strategy. While the government may have legitimate reasons for accelerating the release of these funds, critics argue that the move risks undermining fiscal responsibility and could have serious consequences for the country's economy. As the government continues to navigate its economic challenges, it will need to balance political demands with financial sustainability in order to ensure a stable and prosperous future for the country.

The Market for Citizenship and Residency across Borders

Some countries require Residence and Citizenship by many nonfinancial conditions to be met, including physical presence and cultural adaptation (citizenship and language tests) before granting permanent residency, with naturalization possible only after many years of permanent residence. Even if such countries offer initial residence permits for investment, such nonfinancial conditions still need to be met to obtain permanent residency or citizenship.



By Javed Mahmood

The Market for Citizenship and Residency Moving across borders or even shifting investment across borders can be done for many non-taxes and, even more broadly, noneconomic reasons. Explaining migration or investment purely by tax would therefore be a gross oversimplification. However, where a right, such as citizenship or residence, is granted directly in return for a financial consideration in the form of a significant fee or investment requirement. Where the country offering both is not otherwise a magnet for immigration or investment, tax considerations are likely to be a relevant—and in some cases even dominant—consideration. It seems therefore justifiable to analyze such transactions as a market based on financial considerations. The following analysis looks more closely into the costs and benefits in such a market and the rationales behind different schemes. The sellers in this market are countries that have residency or citizenship to offer. Almost every country offers some path to residency and citizenship, but conditions that must be met differ widely.

Some countries require Residence and Citizenship by many nonfinancial conditions to be met, including physical presence and cultural adaptation (citizenship and language tests) before granting permanent residency, with naturalization possible only after many years of permanent residence. Even if such countries offer initial residence permits for investment, such nonfinancial conditions still need to be met to obtain permanent residency or citizenship. These represent hard-to-value adaptation costs. Many RBI or CBI schemes, however, are combined with very weak nonfinancial conditions, with physical presence either unnecessary or reduced to a minimal amount (potentially just days). The transaction is then relatively simple to assess. The price charged is simply the fee paid—or in case of an investment requirement, the opportunity cost from undertaking this rather than a different investment.

The benefits could include the tax savings described above, security, or in the case of citizenship, also the potential simplification of international travel. For RBI, tax consid-

erations are therefore likely dominant. For CBI, the benefits related to travel (and potentially from having access to a safe place) need to be netted off to figure out the pure tax benefit. Even the tax benefit of CBI is likely higher than for RBI, given the much greater certainty it provides. The buyers are individuals who can obtain advantages from residency or citizenship. Focusing on the case of CRBI that are for sale with minimal restrictions, the willingness to pay should be related to the potential tax saving, adjusted for risks. Risks will depend on their situation, including the rules of their home country. Obtaining another citizenship could lead to loss of the current citizenship, although it is likely that many individuals do not report the acquisition of a second citizenship to the home country and the latter has no easy way of obtaining this information. Moving tax residence could trigger exit taxes that reduce the value of tax savings. In many cases, the tax saving is due to evasion rather than genuine relocation, so there is a risk of being caught.

There are also various intermediaries, including advisers to find the optimal scheme for someone's circumstances, and lawyers to help with regulatory and compliance documents. They also act as liaisons with the authorities, coordinating information and facilitating the due processes. Schemes are complex, and even more so if the rules of interaction with the home country are taken into account. Before paying for RBI or CBI, individuals would like to know the exact implications, not just in terms of direct tax saving, but also any indirect effect from having access to different double-taxation agreements from their

We adopt this narrower definition and set the threshold to 12 months to ensure that Malta's program is classified as a CBI since it is widely considered as such. The European Parliament has adopted a similar definition in its latest report on the matter. Among European countries, it designated only the programs of Cyprus and Malta as CBIs, leaving out Austria's and Bulgaria's programs. A similar dilemma between a narrow and a broad definition exists for RBI programs. They can be broadly classified into two categories. One includes the programs often referred to as "golden visas", which provide residency in return

determined by whether physical presence (and other) requirements related to citizenship or residence are weak or strong and whether taxation is low or high. High-tax countries are not an option for individuals seeking to avoid or evade taxes. If such countries have strict rules, they present a destination country option for people wishing to reside in another country, which potentially offers more opportunities. If they have lax rules, then obtaining citizenship facilitates travel or creates a safe harbor in case a move is needed, residence does only the latter and is less secure. For low-tax countries, tax-motivated purchases are more relevant.



new residence, the risks of being caught in case they use the scheme to evade taxes, and the potential costs of undoing in the future an arrangement that may not be worthwhile anymore under changing rules. It is not always possible to neatly classify a program as a CBI or an RBI.

Many intermediaries promote, for example, Austria as a CBI country because the Austrian Citizenship Act provides a path to citizenship based on investment. Others do not consider Austria to be a CBI country because the naturalization process is much longer and more demanding than a typical CBI program. A broad definition would classify any capital-based path to citizenship—including Austria's—as a CBI. A narrower approach would limit the CBI designation to programs providing a direct path to citizenship within a period that is significantly shorter than the time required to obtain citizenship through a regular naturalization process (often five years).

for passive investments, typically in real estate or a national fund. The programs of Greece and Portugal are well-known examples. The second category includes programs targeting active investors who are interested in starting their businesses. Canada's Startup Visa and the United States' E2 Visa fall in this category. We consider these two types of programs as being fundamentally different in the type of investor they target. The emphasis of our work is on the more generic, golden-visa type of program and we therefore only classify those as RBI.

Again, our classification concurs with the most recent European Parliament assessment of residency and citizenship programs. While details will depend on personal circumstances in complex ways, an overview of the main features of countries that might offer RBI or CBI schemes, and how these might allow deducing the rationale behind the schemes. There are four quadrants in the table,

It is important to note that "low-tax" does not necessarily refer to the general tax system, but only to the one applicable to beneficiaries of CRBI, which could potentially be lower, although possibly only temporarily. For people with high global income, a territorial system might be very attractive, while high taxes on local income would not be an impediment. Among those countries, if physical presence requirements are minimal, they are the prime example of a situation facilitating tax evasion. If such requirements are strong, taxes can still be reduced but require real migration. While the principle behind the table should be relatively clear, the difficulty for any empirical analysis is to draw the line between low and high taxes, as well as weak and strong residence requirements, as in practice these are continuous rather than dichotomous variables.

CRBI Data

There is no comprehensive information repository on CRBI programs. This function is performed to varying degrees by intermediaries in the investment migration market, who collect information from available programs and publish it on their websites or in annual reports. We harvested data from several such service providers, including Henley & Partners, Arton Capital, CS Global Partners, Best Citizenships, Investment Migration Insider (IMI), and residencies.io. Additional information has been obtained from reports from official sources such as the OECD and the European Commission, and by international associations such as Transparency International and Global Witness. IMI was our primary data source because it is the most

up-to-date and comprehensive in its coverage. It provides information on the legal basis of each program, delineates paths to residency and citizenship, and classifies programs into different types depending on their characteristics. It also offers access to a subscription-based data center that includes information on the number of applications and/or approvals for several countries. Another good source for data is Henley & Partners, an industry pioneer serving both sides of the market: it provides services to interested individuals and advises governments on designing their programs. It also publishes an annual ranking of CRBI programs based on ten criteria assessing the program's benefits and cost-effectiveness for potential applicants.

Rankings of CBI (but not RBI) programs are also published by Arton Capital, Best Citizenships, and until recently by PWM, a publication of the Financial Times. Building our dataset of currently active programs and their key characteristics from the service providers mentioned above was a difficult task because of the non-uniform availability of data. Three key challenges arose. First, each program's start date (and end date where applicable) was not readily available from a single source. This was particularly true for less successful or abandoned programs. We were able to find the information for most programs (and almost all major ones) by exhaustively searching the websites of service providers, official country websites, international news media outlets, and other sources. Second, many programs have changed over time, and it has not been an easy task to track down previous versions of each program. Though we kept track of changes to the extent possible, unfortunately, some gaps remain. The third issue was the definition of CRBI programs, as discussed above.

Other Data Economic variables were mostly obtained from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. They include GDP, GDP per capita, openness (the sum of exports and imports as a fraction of GDP), net FDI inflows, unemployment, and urbanization (urban population as a fraction of the total). For house prices, we use the house prices index which covers all types of dwellings with base year 2015 and is from the BIS. On governance, we use two measures from the World Bank's World Governance Indicators (WGI) as indicators of institutional quality. Voice and Accountability measure the extent to which a country's citizens can participate in selecting their government and citizens' perceptions of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free media. Control of Corruption captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain. The measures are normalized to range from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong governance) and are available from 1996 onward. Geographic variables include information on whether the country is an island country from the World Atlas and whether it is a landlocked country from the World Population Review. Country size measured by land area (square km) was taken from the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The adoption of CRBI schemes is likely the result of many factors. To take this further, we ran a range of logit regressions to assess determinants more systematically while allowing for multiple variates. The results (Table 4) indicate that there is no strong average marginal effect of predictors on CBI schemes. Equation (1) shows the baseline regression. Notwithstanding, several explanatory variables do have a statistically significant impact on the log-odds ratio (not shown here), including

control of corruption, being a landlocked country, and being a larger economy (log nominal GDP), which appear to reduce the likelihood of having a CBI scheme, and higher debt and being a richer economy (log GDP per capita), which appear to increase the odds of introducing a CBI scheme.

However, several of these effects are not significant at the observed covariate levels shown below, except for corruption control and economy size/per capita income. The same holds with the addition of year effects (equation (2)). To analyze the link with taxation, equation (3) adds in the low-tax dummy. This is not significant, confirming that—even when controlling for a host of other variables—there is no clear link between tax levels and offering such schemes. We find a similar lack of significant effect when including time-varying top marginal PIT rates instead. The following three regressions repeat the analysis for RBIs, which provides more significant findings in terms of average marginal effects, likely helped by the greater number of such schemes. The key finding is that larger (log nominal GDP) richer (log GDP/capita), and more open (trade/GDP) economies are more likely to offer such schemes, as well as economies with lower general government revenue ratios. The different sign in the coefficient on log nominal GDP for CBI and RBI is noteworthy, as it suggests that the choice between them is driven by economic circumstances, with larger economies less likely to adopt CBIs and more likely to adopt RBIs. Interestingly, higher control of corruption seems to be associated with a greater likelihood of introduction of RBIs, *ceteris paribus*, when controlling for year-fixed effects (equation). Other conjunctural and geographic variables remain insignificant.



HMPV virus in China: How a seasonal virus created panic globally



By J. Choudhry

As winter grips the Northern Hemisphere, a seasonal rise in respiratory infections has sparked alarmist coverage in a section of the international media that is focused disproportionately on the Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) virus outbreak in China. The World Health Organization (WHO) and public health experts have cautioned that the increase in such viruses including HMPV cases is typical for the winter season and there is no reason to be alarmed.

Experts have also ruled out the risk of another COVID-like pandemic.

In late December, Chinese authorities reported an increase in HMPV-positive cases among children aged 14 and under as part of their broader and routine update on the respiratory virus season.

When videos of crowded hospitals started doing the rounds on social media, it immediately set off a firestorm of speculation about the potential onset of another global outbreak.

However, respiratory illnesses in China

this season appear less severe and are spreading on a smaller scale than last year, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning asserted in a regular press conference on Friday.

WHO echoed similar assessments, stressing that China's respiratory infection rates remain within the usual seasonal range and pose no extraordinary threat.

"The observed increase in respiratory pathogen detections [in China] is within the range expected for this time of year during the Northern Hemisphere winter," the global health authority said in a statement on Tuesday.

The US and Europe have virus outbreaks, too

While a segment of foreign media has focused heavily on China's HMPV outbreak, similar or even more severe viral outbreaks involving other pathogens in the United States, Europe, and other parts of the world have received relatively less attention.

"Some of the more sensationalistic Western and Indian media are hyping Chinese cases," Josef Gregory Mahoney, a professor of politics and international relations at Shanghai-based East China Normal University, tells TRT World.

"Nevertheless, leading media seems to be taking a more balanced approach," he adds.

For instance, earlier this week, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported first death from the H5N1 bird flu strain in Louisiana. Louisiana health department said the patient was over the age of 65 and had other underlying health conditions. The US is also experiencing a rise in respiratory virus infections, with influenza cases leading the surge, as noted by the CDC last week.

In its weekly respiratory virus update, the CDC stated that it anticipates hospitalisations from respiratory viruses during the fall and winter to reach a peak similar to or lower than last season.

However, officials expect the overall peak in hospitalisations to remain

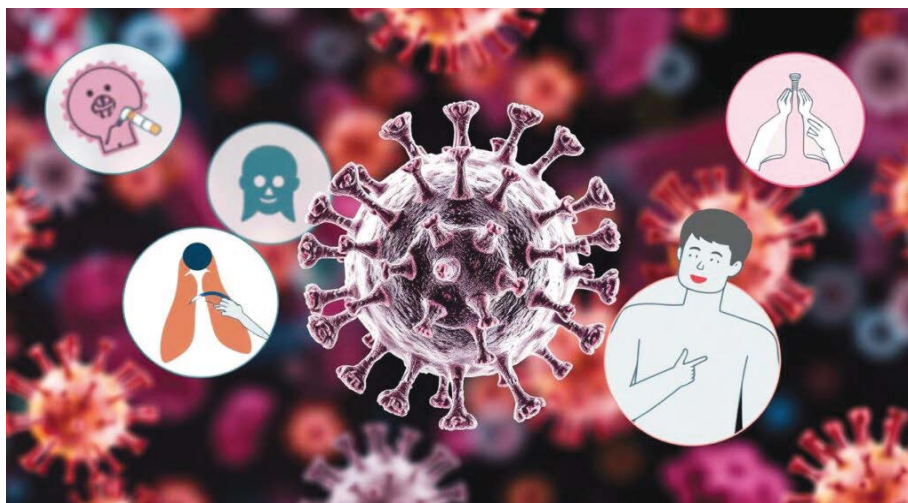
higher than levels seen before the emergence of SARS-CoV-2.

Another virus is surging across the US, according to government data. It is Norovirus, a stomach bug notorious for causing outbreaks in crowded settings. The latest CDC figures reveal that 91 Norovirus outbreaks were reported during the week of December 5, a rise from 69 outbreaks recorded in the final week of November.

Meanwhile, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) in mid-December reported sharp increases in influenza and RSV activity across multiple countries. And on Tuesday, France detected its first case of the new Mpox virus, adding to the region's public health challenges.

Post-COVID media bias

Despite these developments, media narratives have largely downplayed or framed these outbreaks as routine while relatively sensationalising China's situation. This selective focus raises questions about the motivations behind such reporting, especially when global health authorities, including the WHO have stressed that China's respiratory infection rates remain within the usual seasonal range and pose no extraordinary threat.



“Western media rarely hesitates to portray China in the worst light, and this is due to ideological differences and Orientalist clickbait business models,” explains Mahoney.

“However, in this case a number of leading platforms appear to be exercising restraint,” he observes.

The discourse surrounding HMPV highlights how perceptions of infectious disease threats have become distorted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when images of sick people emerge from China. Viruses that are well-known among experts but obscure to the public are

now attracting disproportionate attention.

The concerns about HMPV echo the panic last winter over childhood Pneumonia cases in China caused by the common *Mycoplasma pneumonia* bacterium, which periodically spikes in various countries. Public health experts deemed those fears, including calls for a travel ban, to be similarly exaggerated.

“There’s just this tendency post-COVID to treat every infectious disease event as an emergency, even when it’s not,” said Amesh Adalja, an infectious diseases physician and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.



"Mental Health and Social Media: The Hidden Impact on Today's Youth"



By Hina Urooj

The Impact of Social Media on Children's Mental Health: A Growing Concern

In today's digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat have become central to the daily lives of children and teenagers. These platforms provide a space for connection, self-expression, and the chance to explore identities in once unimaginable ways. For many young people, social media can feel like a safe space to be themselves and connect with others. However, as the use of these platforms grows, so do concerns about their effects on mental health, particularly in children and teenagers.

The Dark Side of Social Media: Vulnerabilities and Mental Health Risks

As children and teens spend more time online, they become increasingly vulnerable to a range of mental health issues. Cyberbullying, for example, has risen in

prominence as one of the most troubling aspects of social media, with many young people reporting online harassment and abuse. Other concerns include decreased self-esteem, as children may compare themselves to the idealized images they see online, and the rise in unhealthy amounts of screen time. With more young people glued to their devices, these issues are thought to correlate with an alarming rise in mental health problems among youth.

Mental health is just as important as physical health, but it often goes unnoticed or unaddressed. Unlike physical illnesses, mental health problems don't always have visible symptoms and can slowly erode a person's overall well-being, affecting their day-to-day life. The factors that impact mental health can be varied, from stress, pressure to fit in, and hormonal changes, to the significant role social media plays in shaping perceptions of self-worth and reality. The current surge in mental health problems among young people is concerning, and while multiple factors may contribute, social media's impact stands out as one of the most significant contributors.

The Alarming Link Between Social Media and Mental Health

Recent studies have drawn a direct connection between social media use and rising mental health disorders in children and adolescents. Time spent on social media has been shown to negatively affect sleep patterns, contributing to insomnia and depressive symptoms. In addition to this, excessive social media use often leads to involvement in online harassment, which further exacerbates the mental health risks. Lower self-esteem is another concerning result of constant online comparisons to peers and influencers.

In light of these findings, researchers are calling for tighter regulations on social media platforms. The emphasis is on the need for social media companies to take greater responsibility for the content they host and to prioritize the mental health of their users. As young people spend more time online, they must be safeguarded from harmful content that can trigger or worsen mental health conditions.

In 2024, more than one in seven adults reported their mental health was at its worst, with many attributing this decline to online pressures and an overload of digital content. Teenage girls, in particular, are most affected, with studies showing they exhibit higher rates of depression compared to their male counterparts. Another concerning statistic reveals that young people aged 16-24 are less likely to seek or receive mental health treatment than other age groups, compounding the issue as mental health disorders continue to rise among youth.

The Impact of Screen Time on Teenagers

One of the most pressing concerns regarding teenagers and their mental health is the amount of time they spend on screens. Whether it's playing video games, watching TV, scrolling through social media, or texting, excessive screen time is linked to significantly lower levels of happiness and well-being. Teenagers who engage in non-screen activities such as sports, reading, or in-person social interactions tend to be far happier and experience fewer mental health issues. The effects of this excessive screen time are becoming evident. According to recent data, one in five children between the ages of 11 and 19 have been victims of cyberbullying, and one in 18 women struggle with body dysmorphia—a mental health disorder driven by extreme dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance, often exacerbated by unrealistic body standards propagated on social media. The instant gratification from receiving likes and comments on posts is a contributing factor to social media addiction, which only further intensifies the pressure young people face to conform to online standards.

The Role of Social Media Companies in Protecting Mental Health

With countless social media apps available at the touch of a button, it's harder than ever for children to disconnect from the pressures and conversations happening online. While these platforms can serve as valuable tools for connection, they also come with significant risks to young users' mental health.

In response to the growing concerns about the impact of social media on youth, experts are calling for stronger safeguards. Social media companies must be held accountable for the content shared on their platforms and take proactive steps to protect young users from harmful influences. Promoting digital well-being and encouraging responsible usage can go a long way in mitigating the negative effects of social media on mental health.

Moving Forward: Prioritizing Mental Health in the Digital Age

The relationship between social media use and mental health is complex, but there is no denying that excessive screen time and online pressures are taking a toll on the



mental health of young people. It's crucial that both parents and society at large acknowledge the potential risks and take steps to protect children from the dangers of online platforms.

We must continue to encourage open conversations about mental health, ensuring that young people feel supported and equipped to navigate the pressures of the digital age. By fostering healthy social media habits, promoting offline activities, and seeking professional help when needed, we can protect the mental well-being of the next generation and help them thrive in a balanced, digital world.

The Gender Divide: Understanding the Impact of Social Media on Boys and Girls

In the age of digital connection, social media plays a significant role in shaping the lives of teenagers. While it offers new ways for young people to communicate, express themselves, and form social connections, its impact on mental health has become a growing concern. What is particularly striking is that social media affects boys and girls in distinct ways, especially when it comes to their mental well-being. Girls, for instance, tend to engage more with social media than boys, and this increased interaction can put them at higher risk for some of its negative effects. To address these issues,

it's crucial to understand the gender-specific experiences of social media use and develop tailored strategies to mitigate risks.

The Gender Divide: How Social Media Affects Boys and Girls Differently

Research indicates that teenage girls use social media more frequently and for longer periods than their male counterparts. This increased usage often leads to deeper engagement with platforms like Instagram,

TikTok, and Snapchat, where appearance-based content and social comparisons are common. Girls are particularly vulnerable to these aspects of social media because of societal pressures around beauty standards, self-image, and the desire for validation through likes, comments, and followers. As a result, girls may experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction, which can be exacerbated by the unrealistic portrayals of beauty and success they see online.

On the other hand, while boys may spend less time on social media, they are not immune to its negative effects. However, the issues they face tend to differ. Boys may be more susceptible to the pressure to maintain a certain image of masculinity, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy or frustration if they don't meet those standards. Moreover, boys might experience less emotional support online compared to girls, as societal expectations often discourage them from expressing vulnerability or seeking help.

Despite these differences, both genders face the dangers of cyberbullying, online harassment, and the pressure to conform to idealized images of life and success. However, it's evident that the specific risks and experiences can vary based on gender. Understanding this divide is key to address-

ing the unique challenges boys and girls face on social media.

The most pressing concern regarding social media is its impact on mental health. Prolonged use of social media has been linked to sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem in teenagers. For girls, the pressure to appear perfect and be constantly "liked" or "followed" can fuel feelings of inadequacy, while boys may struggle with expectations around strength, success, and stoicism.

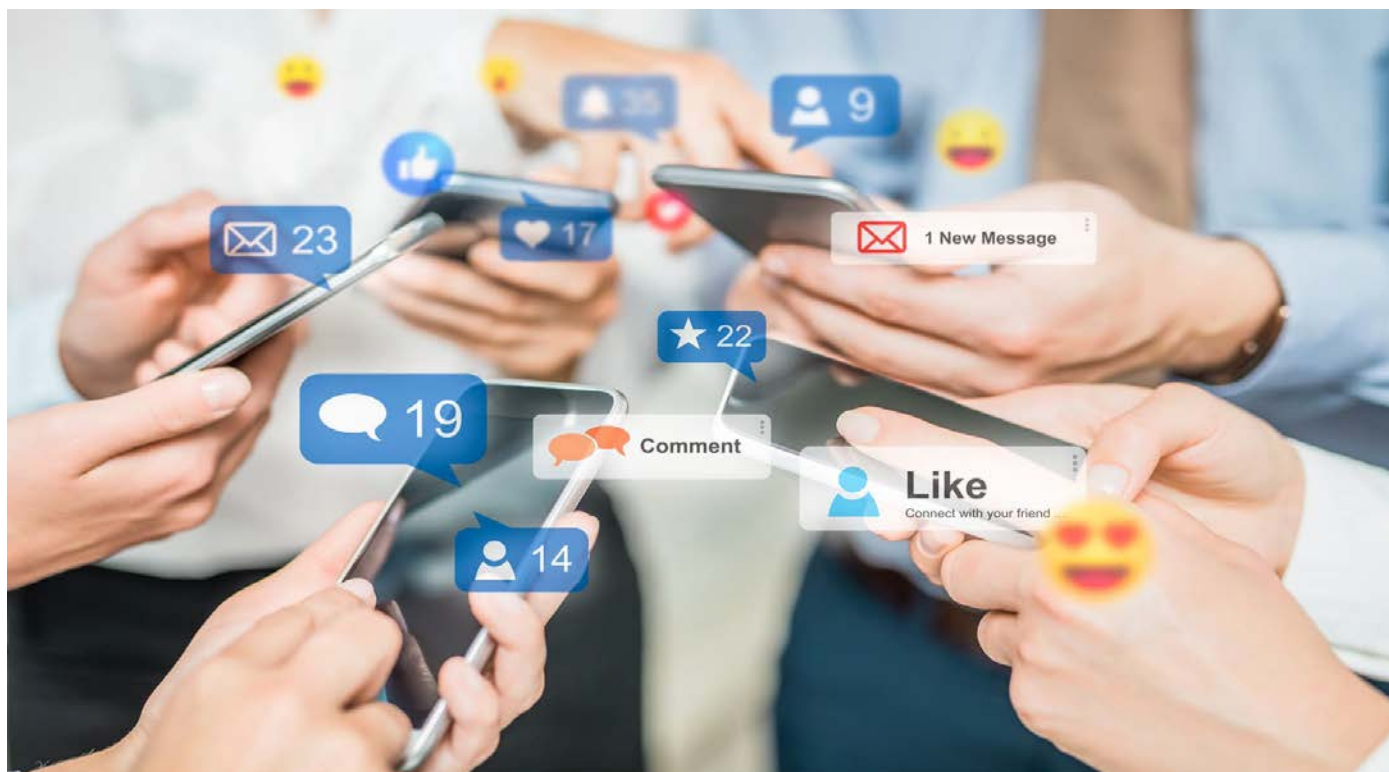
A key aspect of social media that affects girls more significantly is the constant comparison to others. Social media platforms are designed to promote content that gets the most engagement, often showcasing curated, polished versions of people's lives. This can make it easy for teens, particularly girls, to compare their real lives to the seemingly perfect lives of influencers, celebrities, or even peers. Over time, these comparisons can lead to feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression. For boys, social media may amplify issues related to masculinity. Young men may feel compelled to portray an image of physical strength, success, or emotional toughness, which can be emotionally taxing and lead to struggles with their self-worth. Social media may further isolate boys from expressing vulnerability, as they may fear

being judged or ridiculed for not fitting traditional masculine ideals.

Why Gender-Specific Approaches Matter

Given the differences in how boys and girls interact with social media, it is essential that any solutions or interventions take these gendered experiences into account. One-size-fits-all strategies are less likely to be effective in addressing the unique needs of each gender. For example, girls may benefit from programs that promote self-confidence and body positivity, helping them navigate the pressures of appearance-based content. Boys, on the other hand, may need more opportunities to talk about emotional well-being and challenge the harmful stereotypes of masculinity that social media can reinforce.

Moreover, both boys and girls need education on healthy social media habits and the risks of overuse. Encouraging digital literacy, promoting critical thinking about online content, and teaching the importance of taking breaks from screens are crucial for all teens, regardless of gender. Furthermore, parents and educators should play a supportive role in helping teens develop strategies to cope with the pressures of social media and mental health.



Looking Ahead: The Need for Better Policies and Support Systems

As the impact of social media on mental health continues to evolve, it is important to keep the conversation going. More research is needed to fully understand the gendered effects of social media use, and this can inform policies and practices that promote healthier digital environments for young people. Governments, tech companies, and mental health professionals must work together to create safe online spaces and prioritize mental well-being in the design of social media platforms.

Additionally, mental health support systems must be accessible and equipped to address the specific needs of boys and girls. For example, providing mental health resources that are gender-sensitive and promoting online spaces where teens can openly discuss their struggles can be key in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health.

Conclusion: Striking a Balance in the Digital World

Social media has undoubtedly changed the way teens interact with the world, offering new opportunities for connection and self-expression. However, the growing mental health concerns among young people—especially in relation to gender differences—cannot be ignored. Girls, with their higher levels of engagement on social media, face specific pressures that can negatively affect their mental health, while boys are also impacted by the pressure to fit masculine ideals.

To protect the mental well-being of young people, it's essential that we understand these gender-specific experiences and address them through targeted strategies, education, and support. As we continue to navigate the digital age, ongoing conversations and policies focused on mental health will be crucial to ensuring that young people can use social media in a healthy, balanced way that prioritizes their well-being.

What Needs to be Done: A Call for Action

Medical experts have urged policymakers and social media companies to take more decisive action in establishing safety standards that will protect vulnerable children and adolescents. These safeguards are necessary to limit the exposure of young people to harmful content that may manipulate them into spending excessive time on social media platforms, ultimately affecting their mental and emotional well-being. By implementing stronger protections, we can reduce the risk of harmful online experiences that negatively influence the development of young minds.



Leading by Example: The Role of Adults in Youth Development

Parents, guardians, and caregivers play a pivotal role in shaping the development of young people. As role models, adults should lead by example, demonstrating healthy behaviors that young individuals can learn from. One key way adults can protect children is by setting boundaries around screen time and minimizing their own use of electronics and social media. Additionally, it's important to monitor the content young people are exposed to, ensuring that it is appropriate and supportive of their mental health.

Adults must also stay alert for any signs of

distress or changes in behavior. The Surgeon General emphasizes the importance of understanding the challenges children and adolescents face in today's digital world, particularly the pressures of social media. Identifying shifts in behavior early can help prevent more serious mental health crises. It is essential to ask the difficult questions, offer support, and take action before issues escalate into larger mental health concerns.

Don't Wait: Seek Help Before a Crisis Emerges

In today's world, social media is an unavoidable part of growing up. However, society often waits until a young person is

in the midst of a mental health crisis before offering support. This reactive approach can be too late, as the damage caused by prolonged exposure to harmful online content can have long-lasting effects.

It is crucial that we act sooner. By providing support and intervention before a crisis occurs, we can help safeguard the mental and emotional well-being of young people. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health challenges, it's important to seek help without delay. Our team of dedicated professionals is ready to offer guidance, support, and the resources needed to navigate these challenging times. Don't wait for a crisis—reach out today and take the first step toward protecting the mental health of our youth.



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