

Fortnightly

The Truth International

Islamabad - Karachi

1st - 15th March 2025

Pak-Azeri Partnership
A Legacy of Unity

The Syrian File
Lessons for anti establishment narratives

BRICS Bank
Pakistan approves membership

TRUMP SNUBS UKRAINE'S PRESIDENT IN A BID TO BROKER PEACE DEAL ASAP



Editorial

Climate Change and Lack of Global Action Amid Record-Breaking Heat – Page 04

Foreign Affairs

Trump snubs Ukraine's President in a bid to broker peace deal ASAP By Javed Mahmood – Page 05



Zelenskyy at the Helm: Ukraine's Global Diplomacy in Focus By Saad Khan Jadoon – Page 10



Pak-Azeri Partnership: A Legacy of Unity By Hina Kashif – Page 13



The Syrian File: Lessons for anti-establishment narratives in the developing states By Naqi Akbar – Page 17



Editor:

Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Circulation & Marketing /Advertisement:

Aghaz Ullah Raj

Contact: 0340-9850810

Email: admin@tti.org.pk

Letter to Editor:

Feel free to mail us at: editor@tti.org.pk

Postal Address:

Fortnightly "The Truth International"

Head Office:

205-D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex,
Agha Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Contact: +92 51 2820180-1

Karachi Office:

Shop No. 08, Mezzanine Salalah Apartments,
Dawood Pota Road, Karachi Cantt.

Contact: +92 21 35221000-1

Email: info@tti.org.pk

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

DISCLAIMER: The articles published in this magazine collected from various writers, and sources are disseminated for information only. Therefore, the publisher shall not be responsible for any mistake/error.

France's Hijab Ban in Sports: Secularism or Systemic Exclusion?
By Romana Afsheen – Page 19



Economy

Pakistan is formally joining the New Development Bank of the BRICS bloc By Javed Mahmood – Page 22



Prime Minister's Vision for Economic Growth: Prioritizing Key Sectors and Ensuring Reforms – Page 26



The Rise of Tech Startups in Pakistan and Their Contribution to the Economy By Saad Khan Jadoon – Page 28



Health

Halving global road fatalities within a decade is a very ambitious goal By Harry Javed – Page 31



Climate Change

The Struggle for Water in Pakistan: A Looming Crisis By Saad Jadoon – Page 34



Sports

Pakistan's Champions Trophy 2025 Debacle: A Host Nation's Nightmare By Romana Afsheen – Page 37



Pakistan Returns to the Global Stage by Hosting ICC Tournament After 29 Years By Saad Jadoon – Page 41

Dunes of Cholistan: The Ultimate Rally By Hina Kashif – Page 44



Climate Change and Lack of Global Action Amid Record-Breaking Heat



The past year was officially the hottest on record, with January 2025 also marking the warmest start to a year ever documented. Despite these alarming climate trends, nations—particularly major polluters—have shown little urgency in updating their climate action plans.

According to UN Climate Chief Simon Stiell, these plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, represent “the most important policy document of this century.” However, by the February 10 deadline, only 12 countries had submitted their NDCs, falling far short of expectations.

Major Polluters Lagging Behind

Among the G20 economies, only the United States, United Kingdom, and Brazil—which is set to host COP30, this year’s UN climate summit—have submitted updated commitments. However, past US pledges have lost credibility after former President Donald Trump withdrew the country from the Paris Agreement, dismissing climate change as “a hoax” and prioritizing fossil fuel expansion.

Other key polluters have also missed the deadline:

- China, the world’s largest carbon emitter and a major investor in renewable energy is expected to release its NDCs later in 2025.

- The European Union plans to unveil its collective climate targets ahead of COP30.
- India, another major polluter, has yet to submit its plan. Reports indicate that its updated NDCs may reflect frustration over the climate finance discussions at COP29, signaling that the BJP-led government may continue advocating for the “phasing down” rather than “phasing out” of fossil fuels, despite their devastating impact on the environment.

Can Global Climate Goals Still Be Met?

Decisions made by these leading polluters will be critical. Under the Paris Agreement, global emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050—targets that seem increasingly unattainable given the current slow pace of action.

For countries like Pakistan, which contribute little to global emissions yet suffer disproportionately from climate change, finalizing their climate policies and demands from major polluters is equally important. These submissions are due by September, ahead of the UN’s consolidated NDCs report before COP30.

Trump snubs Ukraine's President in a bid to broker peace deal ASAP



By Javed Mahmood

U.S. President Donald Trump criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, calling him “a dictator without elections” and urging him to act quickly to secure peace, warning that Ukraine risks losing its sovereignty. Trump is putting pressure on the Ukrainian President in a bid to end the Russian-Ukraine war as soon as possible.

Trump's remarks came after Zelensky pushed back against the former president's earlier suggestion that Ukraine bore responsibility for Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. Zelensky accused Trump of being influenced by Russian disinformation.

“A dictator without elections, Zelensky better move fast, or he is not going to have a country left,” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

In response, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha stated that Ukraine would not bow to pressure. “We will defend our right to exist,” Sybiha posted on X. Zelensky's five-year presidential term was initially set to end in 2024. However, martial law, imposed in February 2022 following Russia's invasion, has made holding

presidential and parliamentary elections impossible.

Russia currently occupies approximately 20% of Ukrainian territory and continues its gradual offensive in the eastern regions. Moscow claims its “special military operation” was launched in response to an existential threat posed by Ukraine's ambitions to join NATO. However, Kyiv and its Western allies view the invasion as a blatant act of imperialist aggression.

Zelensky, who met with Trump's former Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg in Kyiv on Wednesday, expressed his hope that Trump's team would gain a clearer understanding of Ukraine's realities. This followed Trump's statement that Ukraine “should never have started” the conflict with Russia.

The Ukrainian president dismissed Trump's claim that his approval rating in Ukraine was as low as 4%, labeling it as another piece of Russian disinformation. Zelensky insisted that any attempt to undermine his leadership would fail.

“We have evidence that these figures are being discussed between America and Russia. Unfortunately, President

Trump appears to be living in this disinformation space,” Zelensky said in an interview with Ukrainian television.

Since the beginning of his term, Trump has significantly shifted U.S. policy on Ukraine and Russia. In one of his early moves, he ended efforts to isolate Russia over its invasion of Ukraine by initiating a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin and facilitating talks between senior U.S. and Russian officials.

US is close to brokering Ukraine peace deal: Witkoff

US President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, has stated that the United States is “very close” to brokering a peace agreement between Ukraine and Russia, modeled after the Istanbul Protocol Agreement, to end the ongoing war. Speaking to CNN, Witkoff emphasized that the war should never have happened and that a resolution must now be reached regardless of who initiated it.

“The war didn't need to happen. It was

provoked. That doesn't necessarily mean the Russians provoked it," Witkoff said.

He pointed to Ukraine's NATO aspirations as a key factor in escalating tensions.

"There were all kinds of conversations back then about Ukraine joining NATO. The president has spoken about this. That didn't need to happen. It became a threat to the Russians," he added.

Witkoff highlighted past negotiations that nearly led to a resolution, referencing the Istanbul Protocol Agreement.



"There were very, very cogent and substantive negotiations framed in what's called the Istanbul Protocol Agreement. We came very, very close to signing something, and I think we'll be using that framework as a guidepost to finalize a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia. That will be an amazing day."

On Trump's role in the negotiations, Witkoff stressed the urgency of ending the war.

"We've had close to 1.5 million deaths, and finally, we have a leader determined to end the carnage," he said.

US-Ukraine Tensions at the UN

Meanwhile, tensions between Washington and Kyiv are escalating over a UN resolu-

tion on Russia's withdrawal from Ukraine.

According to US and European diplomats, the US has pressured Ukraine to withdraw its European-backed UN resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces. Instead, Washington has proposed an alternative resolution that omits any direct mention of Russia's invasion.

Ukraine, however, has refused to pull its draft resolution, and the UN General Assembly is set to vote on it Monday, marking the third anniversary of the war. Two European diplomats confirmed that the 193-nation assembly will then likely vote on the US-backed draft as well.

Trump blames Zelensky for war

US President Donald Trump has indicated that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy may be responsible for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, stating he could have avoided the war. Trump also suggested he would "probably" meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin this month.

In a news conference held at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, Trump reacted to reports that Ukraine had been excluded from talks aimed at ending the conflict. He dismissed complaints from Kyiv, saying, "You've been there for three years. You should have ended it... You should have never started it. You could have made a deal. I could have made a deal for Ukraine."

Trump also expressed confidence in his ability to broker a deal, saying he was "much more confident" about reaching an agreement after recent talks between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Saudi Arabia. He added, "Russia wants to do something, they want to stop the savage barbarism."

When asked about the possibility of supporting Russia's call for elections in Ukraine as part of a peace deal, Trump claimed—without evidence—that Zelenskyy had a low approval rating of just 4 percent and pointed out that elections had been suspended under martial law. However, a December poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology found that 52 percent of Ukrainians trusted Zelenskyy, though this was a decrease from earlier in the year.

Trump further commented, "When you want a seat at the table... Wouldn't the people of Ukraine have to say like, 'It's been a long time since we've had an election?'" He added that his stance reflected the views of other countries as well.

Zelenskyy, in response to Trump's remarks, emphasized that Ukraine must be included in any decision-making regarding the war. He stressed, "No decision can be made without Ukraine on how to end the war in Ukraine," during a visit to Turkey.

In Riyadh, US and Russian officials, including Rubio and Lavrov, agreed to form high-level teams to work on a path to end the conflict as soon as possible. US National Security Advisor Mike Waltz also noted that discussions would likely involve territorial issues and post-conflict security guarantees.

As concerns grow that Trump may offer significant concessions to Moscow to reach a deal, European leaders are divided on how to respond. UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has expressed willingness to send peacekeeping troops to Ukraine, while French President Emmanuel Macron indicated he might consider sending troops to areas outside conflict zones. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz dismissed talks of post-war security forces as "highly inappropriate," and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said his country would not send troops to Ukraine.

France is set to host European leaders for a second round of talks on the issue after an emergency summit on Monday failed to achieve a unified position.

During his news conference, Trump expressed support for the idea of European peacekeepers, but made it clear that US troops would not be involved. “If they want to do that, that’s great, I’m all for it,” Trump said.

Trump’s frustration with Zelensky is multifold

A senior White House official has stated that President Donald Trump’s increasingly sharp criticism of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reflects growing frustration within the administration over what they see as Zelenskyy obstructing efforts to find a resolution to the Russia-Ukraine war.

The remarks, made by National Security Adviser Mike Waltz on Thursday, followed Trump’s comments labeling Zelenskyy a “dictator” and warning that he must “move fast” to negotiate an end to the war or risk losing his country entirely. Zelenskyy, in turn, accused Trump on Wednesday of being trapped in a “Russian-made disinformation space.”

“His frustration with President Zelenskyy is multifold,” Waltz said, explaining Trump’s harsh rhetoric. “There needs to be a deep appreciation for what the American people and taxpayers, and what President Trump himself, have done in his first term and since. Some of the rhetoric coming out of Kyiv, frankly, and the insults directed at President Trump are unacceptable.”

The exchange comes as the Russia-Ukraine war approaches its third anniversary and amid a significant shift in U.S. policy toward both nations under the Trump administration. Trump has been pushing for a peace deal while publicly blaming Zelenskyy for enabling the war to begin in the first place.

Waltz also highlighted Trump’s frustration with Zelensky’s rejection of a recent U.S. proposal, spearheaded by Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, which would grant the U.S. access to Ukraine’s critical mineral resources in exchange for continued American support during and after the war. The

deal was also presented during a meeting between Vice President JD Vance and Zelenskyy in Munich, but Zelenskyy instructed his ministers to decline the agreement, citing inadequate security guarantees for Ukraine and a deal structure that heavily favored U.S. interests.

“Rather than engage in constructive conversations about what the deal should look like, we got a lot of rhetoric in the media that was incredibly unfortunate,” Waltz said of Ukraine’s decision to reject the proposal.

Trump, earlier this week, suggested that Ukraine bore responsibility for starting the conflict. When asked whether Trump held Russian President Vladimir Putin or Zelenskyy more accountable for the ongoing war, Waltz offered a measured response. “His goal here is to bring this war to an end, period,” Waltz said. “There has been ongoing fighting on both sides. It’s World War I-style trench warfare.”



‘Tone Down, US criticism is unacceptable’

Ukraine’s criticism of the United States is “unacceptable,” National Security Adviser Mike Waltz said Thursday, urging Kyiv to moderate its rhetoric and swiftly agree to a minerals deal proposed by the White House.

“We’re getting all this pushback... they need to tone it down, take a hard look, and sign that deal,” Waltz told Fox News

shortly before Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was scheduled to meet Trump’s special envoy, Keith Kellogg, in Kyiv.

Waltz referred to a proposed agreement that would grant the U.S. access to Ukraine’s vast natural resources. President Donald Trump has emphasized the need for a return on American aid sent to Kyiv as the country battles a Russian invasion. However, Zelensky rejected the deal over the weekend, citing the absence of security guarantees three years into the conflict. Waltz defended the agreement, calling it “the best security guarantee they could ever hope for, much more than another pallet of ammunition,” arguing that U.S. investment in Ukraine would provide long-term benefits.

The U.S. president has caused unease in Kyiv and among European allies by initiating direct talks with Moscow, which some fear could pressure Ukraine into

concessions to Russia. Kyiv was notably excluded from recent discussions in Riyadh between Moscow and Washington, sidelining both Ukraine and Europe.

Since Zelensky’s rejection of the minerals deal, tensions between the once-close allies have escalated. Trump has labeled Zelensky a “dictator,” while Zelensky accused Trump of operating under a “Russian disinformation” narrative. The exchange has marked a sharp rift in their relationship.

“There’s a lot of frustration here,” Waltz said during the Fox interview. When asked if the dispute could be resolved, he responded, “I think so... To say that we’re going to change the nature of our aid going forward shouldn’t offend anyone.”

Waltz also denied claims that Ukraine has been excluded from Trump’s negotiations with Russia, insisting that there has been “plenty of engagement and dialogue” with Kyiv and European allies. “This is a common-sense plan. They may not like it, but we’re going to drive it forward, and everybody will stop squawking when the fighting ends,” he added.

He emphasized that Washington and Moscow share a mutual interest in ending the conflict. “We’re going to move forward full speed ahead to drive this war to an end, and then we can talk about broader geo-strategic relationships,” Waltz said.

referred to Zelensky as a “dictator” and warned him to act quickly or risk losing Ukraine.

In his first month in office, Trump has pushed for a swift resolution to the war, unsettling Washington’s European allies by excluding both Ukraine and European nations from initial discussions with Russia. Vice President JD Vance said on Thursday he believed an end to the conflict was near, asserting that negotiations with Russia were essential to stopping the war. Meanwhile, Trump’s envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, said upon arriving in Kyiv on Wednesday that he came to listen.

During their meeting on Thursday, Zelensky and Kellogg exchanged handshakes and friendly gestures. Zelensky smiled and said, “It’s good to see you, how are you? ... thank you for coming.” However, no details about the outcome of

SECURITY GUARANTEES

European leaders have responded to Trump’s shifting stance on Ukraine by pledging to increase defense spending. Some are even considering a U.S.-backed European peacekeeping force for Ukraine. While the Kremlin has expressed concern over the proposal, Zelensky and NATO have welcomed the idea.

“It is vital that ... Russia will never again try to take one more square kilometer of Ukrainian land,” NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said, emphasizing that robust security guarantees would be essential to achieving this goal.

China has voiced its support for U.S. President Donald Trump’s efforts to broker a deal with Russia to end the war in Ukraine, during a G20 meeting in South Africa. Meanwhile, U.S. allies have rallied behind Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in response to escalating tensions.

“China supports all efforts conducive to peace in Ukraine, including the recent consensus reached between the United States and Russia,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said during the meeting in Johannesburg on Thursday, according to a statement from his ministry.

Wang added that China is “willing to continue playing a constructive role in the political resolution of the crisis.” However, he did not repeat his earlier call at the Munich Security Conference for all stakeholders in the Russia-Ukraine conflict to participate in peace talks.

Trump, less than a month into his presidency, has dramatically shifted U.S. policy on the war by initiating direct communication with Russian President Vladimir Putin and holding talks between senior U.S. and Russian officials—moves that have excluded Ukraine. On Wednesday, Trump further inflamed tensions by labeling Zelenskyy a “dictator,” prompting strong support for the Ukrainian leader from G20 nations like Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

The Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it had agreed to further discussions with Russia to resolve the nearly three-year conflict. This followed a



Trump’s Envoy meets Zelensky

U.S. President Donald Trump’s envoy for the Ukraine conflict met with President Zelensky in Kyiv, but there was no immediate indication of progress in resolving the unprecedented wartime rift between the two formerly strong allies.

Earlier, Zelensky had adopted a conciliatory tone after accusing Trump of repeating Russian disinformation. This came in response to Trump’s controversial claim that Ukraine was responsible for starting the three-year war with Russia. Trump also

their discussions were immediately released. Trump is simultaneously seeking to rebuild ties with Russia and invest in Ukraine’s critical mineral resources, which are essential to the global energy transition. However, Ukraine has rejected an initial U.S. proposal because it lacked concrete security guarantees.

White House National Security Adviser Mike Waltz urged Ukraine to ease its criticism of the United States and move forward with the minerals deal. “They need to tone it down and take a hard look and sign that deal,” Waltz told Fox News.

4.5-hour meeting in Saudi Arabia. Russia described the talks as “useful” but reinforced its demands, including its opposition to NATO granting membership to Ukraine.

As the diplomatic rift widened, Zelenskyy accused Trump of being influenced by a “Russian disinformation bubble,” while Trump dismissed Zelenskyy as a “modestly successful comedian” and blamed him for initiating the war with Russia in February 2022.

Saudi Arabia hosts US-Russian officials meeting

Senior officials from the United States and Russia convened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Tuesday to discuss bilateral relations, potential solutions for ending the war in Ukraine, and the groundwork for a possible summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Footage from the meeting showed U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Adviser Mike Waltz, and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff seated across from Russian Foreign Minister Sergei

Lavrov and top Putin adviser Yuri Ushakov.

Before the talks, Russian Direct Investment Fund CEO Kirill Dmitriev was also seen as part of the Russian delegation. Dmitriev, who has previously engaged in backchannel communications with U.S. officials during both of Trump’s presidential terms, described the current U.S. administration as “swift, efficient, and very successful” in an interview.

Following the meeting, Dmitriev expressed optimism, stating that progress in U.S.-Russia negotiations could be seen within two to three months. “We have presented a series of proposals, which our counterparts are now considering. I believe there could be movement toward progress shortly,” he stated.

Reports indicate that Moscow’s key objectives in these talks include easing Western sanctions, though Dmitriev insisted that sanctions relief was not part of the official agenda. The Kremlin previously stated that discussions would focus on restoring “full-scale” U.S.-Russia relations, with Ushakov confirming that negotiations on Ukraine would also be addressed.

Despite the dialogue, both Washington and

Moscow have downplayed expectations for a breakthrough. Trump has pushed for a swift resolution to the Ukraine conflict, while Russia views his diplomatic outreach as an opportunity to secure concessions. However, Lavrov ruled out any territorial compromises from Russia as part of cease-fire negotiations.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy confirmed that Kyiv was not invited to the discussions in Saudi Arabia. He emphasized in a social media post that any potential peace agreement must include “robust and reliable” security guarantees for Ukraine.

European leaders, meanwhile, have voiced concerns that Trump’s negotiations with Russia could bypass both Kyiv and the European Union. A group of EU leaders held an emergency meeting in Paris on Monday to strategize their response to Washington’s direct engagement with the Kremlin. In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun acknowledged the diplomatic efforts, stating that China welcomes “all initiatives aimed at achieving peace in Ukraine.” However, he stressed that “all relevant stakeholders should be included in the discussions.”



Zelenskyy at the Helm: Ukraine's Global Diplomacy in Focus

By Saad Khan Jadoon

The war in Ukraine, which began with Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, has undoubtedly reshaped global geopolitics, brought together unlikely allies, and underscored the challenges of leadership in times of crisis. Throughout this time, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's relationship with key international leaders, particularly U.S. President Donald Trump, has been the subject of intense scrutiny. Zelenskyy's remarks about Trump, as well as their past meetings, are not just politically charged but have implications for the future of U.S.-Ukraine relations, NATO alliances, and the ongoing efforts to end the war.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Diplomatic Engagements

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been busy with a series of critical meetings with global leaders, cementing Ukraine's diplomatic efforts to garner international support for its fight against Russian aggression. His engagement with leaders from the European Union, United States, and other global powers and his statements about U.S. President Donald Trump have been central to the international conversation about Ukraine's future.

Amid the ongoing war with Russia, President Zelenskyy's role as a diplomatic figure has expanded beyond military strategy. He has taken the opportunity in meetings with world leaders to underscore Ukraine's urgent need for assistance, military aid, and long-term security guarantees. These discussions also spotlight Zelenskyy's views on his interactions with U.S. President Biden and the broader U.S. response to the war.

Phone Call with French President Emmanuel Macron

Zelenskyy shared on X, "I just had a long conversation with the President of France



@EmmanuelMacron following his meeting with other European leaders to discuss the global situation, the state of affairs in Europe, and security guarantees for Ukraine."

Zelenskyy emphasized that these security guarantees need to be "robust and reliable." He warned that any decision that does not involve solid guarantees, such as a fragile ceasefire, would be a "deception" by Russia and would set the stage for another Russian attack on Ukraine or other European nations.

Macron, who had briefed Zelenskyy on his talks with fellow European leaders, reiterated the importance of ending Russia's aggression. He stressed that peace in Ukraine can only be achieved through strong, lasting security guarantees, and he warned that any ceasefire without such guarantees would be doomed to fail, much like the previous Minsk agreements.

Macron and U.S. President Donald Trump also held a "friendly call" before, where they discussed the situation in Ukraine, an upcoming meeting of European leaders, and talks between U.S. and Russian officials in Saudi Arabia. The White House confirmed the discussion.

Zelenskyy remarked that during his conversation with Macron, they agreed to stay in close contact as crucial decisions are made,

stating, "Ensuring a robust and lasting peace is a must. And that can only be achieved through strong security guarantees."

Macron also emphasized the need for Europeans to strengthen their security and defense investments, both now and in the future. He concluded, "Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians will work together to achieve this. This is the key."

Engagements at the Munich Security Conference

At the Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2025, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held crucial meetings with global leaders and participated in high-profile discussions focused on Ukraine's security, the ongoing war with Russia, and the future of European stability. The MSC, which gathers political, military, and business leaders from around the world, provided a platform for Zelenskyy to engage with international figures, reinforce Ukraine's position in the face of Russian aggression, and appeal for continued support.

One of the major highlights of Zelenskyy's engagements at the MSC was his direct meeting with U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance. In this crucial meeting, Zelenskyy

expressed Ukraine's need for unwavering support from the West, stressing that military aid, including advanced weapons, and diplomatic pressure on Russia were essential in curbing Russian expansionism. Zelenskyy reiterated the importance of not only providing Ukraine with the tools for self-defense but also offering long-term security guarantees that would protect Ukraine from further Russian aggression in the future.

During his meetings with NATO officials, Zelenskyy called for a stronger and more coordinated response to the security threat posed by Russia. He emphasized that Ukraine's NATO membership should be expedited, given that the alliance remains a critical pillar for the country's security and defense needs. Despite the reluctance of some NATO members to fast-track Ukraine's membership, Zelenskyy pushed for a clear roadmap that would align Ukraine with NATO's standards and include it as a strategic partner in the fight against Russian aggression.

At the conference, Zelenskyy also held discussions with European leaders, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron. These talks revolved around strengthening the European Union's response to Russia's actions and ensuring that sanctions against Russia remained stringent. Zelenskyy thanked the European leaders for their continued support but underscored the need for more decisive action and greater unity in Europe's stance toward Russia. He highlighted that the global community's failure to deter Russia's actions would lead to a broader destabilization of the international order.

Key Points from Zelenskyy's Speech

During his speech at the MSC, Zelenskyy made several key points aimed at galvanizing international support for Ukraine's cause. One of the central themes of his address was the call for robust security guarantees for Ukraine post-conflict. He warned that a temporary ceasefire or a fragile peace agreement would only allow Russia to regroup and launch new offensives. Zelenskyy urged that a lasting peace could only be achieved through

strong international security assurances, which would deter further Russian military action and uphold Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Zelenskyy also spoke about the broader implications of the war in Ukraine for global security. He framed the ongoing conflict as not only a fight for Ukraine's sovereignty but also as a battle for the future of Europe. He cautioned that if Russia succeeded in Ukraine, it would set a dangerous precedent for other authoritarian regimes around the world, ultimately threatening global peace and stability.

The Ukrainian President also took the opportunity to address the humanitarian consequences of the war. He highlighted the devastating toll the conflict had taken on civilians, with millions of Ukrainians displaced and countless lives lost. Zelenskyy called for greater support for humanitarian efforts and assistance for the Ukrainian people, stressing that the international community had a moral responsibility to help those affected by the war.

In his closing remarks, Zelenskyy urged the global community to remain united in its support for Ukraine. He called for an increased military aid commitment from NATO countries and asked for a more cohesive and strategic approach to confronting Russian aggression. He also emphasized the need for international cooperation in rebuilding Ukraine once the war ends, with a focus on long-term peace and reconstruction.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's participation in the Munich Security Conference was a significant opportunity to strengthen Ukraine's position on the international stage and call for continued global support. His meetings with key world leaders highlighted Ukraine's urgent security needs, the importance of European unity, and the necessity of long-term guarantees for Ukraine's defense. Zelenskyy's message was clear: the world must act decisively to ensure Ukraine's survival and secure a stable future for Europe. The MSC served as a pivotal moment for Zelenskyy to reinforce his vision of a free and sovereign Ukraine, determined to stand firm against Russian aggression.

Zelenskyy Phone Call With British Prime Minister

In a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer reiterated the UK's unwavering commitment to ensuring Ukraine follows an irreversible path to NATO membership. A spokeswoman for Starmer's office at Downing Street confirmed that the Prime Minister emphasized the UK's dedication to this goal, in line with agreements made by NATO allies at last year's Washington summit.

This assurance from the UK comes after the Trump administration dampened Ukraine's aspirations of joining the Western military alliance earlier this week.

The call also follows high-stakes talks between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which the US leader revealed that discussions regarding Ukraine's future would soon begin. These developments have raised concerns in Kyiv and among its European allies, who worry that a potential agreement could be reached without Ukraine's direct involvement, especially after President Zelenskyy and Western officials convened at the Munich Security Conference on Friday.

Starmer started his conversation with Zelenskyy by reaffirming the UK's "concrete support for Ukraine for as long as it's needed," according to the Downing Street spokeswoman.

He was clear in stating that "there could be no talks about Ukraine, without Ukraine," underscoring the importance of Ukrainian sovereignty in any future discussions.

The UK Prime Minister also emphasized the need for strong security guarantees, additional lethal aid, and a sovereign future for Ukraine, assuring Zelenskyy that the UK would continue to step up in support.

As the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion approaches, both leaders agreed that this moment would serve as a crucial opportunity to demonstrate continued international unity and robust support for Ukraine.

Zelenskyy's Remarks on the U.S. President

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed U.S. President Donald Trump's remark calling him a "dictator," stating that he was not offended by the comment and reaffirmed his commitment to not becoming one.

Zelenskyy, maintaining a pragmatic approach to diplomacy, said, "There is no place for emotions here. I have taken a pragmatic approach to relationships with the current administration and will continue to do so." He acknowledged that he did not view Trump's comment as a compliment, but also questioned why he should take offense. "Only a true dictator could be insulted by the term 'dictator'," he remarked, highlighting the contrast between his leadership style and authoritarian rule.

The Ukrainian president emphasized that his leadership was legitimate, stating, "I am a legitimately elected president who didn't come to power by force. I was elected with 73% of the vote." Zelenskyy reminded that the Ukrainian parliament, which took office alongside him, was also chosen by the people and not appointed by any outside forces. He reassured that once martial law is lifted, elections will be held again, allowing the people of Ukraine to make their own choices.

Zelenskyy made it clear that he was not seeking to remain in power for "decades" but vowed not to let Russian President Vladimir Putin dictate Ukraine's future. "We will not be dictators. It's simply not that interesting," he said firmly.

In conclusion, Zelenskyy noted that while remarks may fade over time, his primary concern remained the perception of the Ukrainian people, similar to how President Trump focuses on the views of Americans. "As for the words, they will fade away. And maybe something good will be said someday," he added.

While the Biden administration has consistently offered strong support to Ukraine, former President Trump has pushed to renegotiate the terms of US aid, proposing that continued assistance be contingent on Kyiv granting Washington access to its rare

earth mineral reserves. Initially, the US demanded a 50% stake in Ukraine's mineral resources in exchange for ongoing support.

Zelenskyy Willing to Step Down for Peace and NATO Membership Amid Growing Tensions with US

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has stated that he is willing to step down from office if it ensures peace for Ukraine and secures the country's membership in NATO, as tensions with the United States increase under President Donald Trump's administration.



During a press conference in Kyiv, Zelenskyy remarked that Ukraine marked the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion. His comments come amid rising Russian attacks and a shift in Washington's approach, which contrasts with the stance taken by the previous Biden administration.

"If [it means] peace for Ukraine if you truly need me to step down, I am ready," Zelenskyy said. "I can exchange this for NATO [membership], if that condition is met, immediately."

Zelenskyy Announces Progress on Reaching Agreement with US on Rare Minerals Deal

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Sunday that the Trump

administration's controversial proposal to claim \$500 billion in profits from Ukraine's rare earth minerals as compensation for wartime assistance has been withdrawn. Zelenskyy indicated that a more balanced deal was being negotiated.

Previously, Zelenskyy had rejected a U.S. draft agreement regarding the exploitation of Ukraine's valuable minerals, such as lithium, due to the lack of security guarantees and the \$500 billion compensation demand.

"The question of \$500 billion is no longer there," Zelenskyy confirmed during a press conference at a government forum in Kyiv, marking the third anniversary of Russia's invasion.

The Ukrainian president warned that treating aid as a debt would open a "Pandora's box," setting a troubling precedent for Kyiv to repay its international supporters.

"We do not recognize the debt," Zelenskyy stated, emphasizing that this issue would not be part of the final agreement.

As Ukraine continues its struggle, Zelenskyy's diplomatic efforts and his interactions with global leaders, especially President Trump, will be pivotal in shaping the outcome of the war. For now, the world watches as Zelenskyy navigates these critical relationships, striving to secure a future for Ukraine amid an ongoing war that has brought devastation but also a renewed sense of unity among democratic nations.

Pak-Azeri Partnership: A Legacy of Unity



By Hina Kashif

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited Azerbaijan on a two-day visit on February 23, 2025. He landed in the capital, Baku, accompanied by a high-level delegation that included Deputy Prime Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar and other key Cabinet members. This marked the Prime Minister's second visit to Azerbaijan since assuming office in March 2024.

Upon Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's arrival at Baku's airport, he was received by Azerbaijan's senior officials, including the country's Foreign Minister and other dignitaries. Additionally, Pakistan's Ambassador to Azerbaijan and other members of the Pakistani diplomatic mission in Azerbaijan were present to welcome him.

Agreements and (MOUs) focusing primarily on trade and energy

During Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to Azerbaijan, both countries signed several agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) focusing primarily on trade and energy. Sharif arrived in Baku on Sunday for a two-day visit, where he held discussions with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and other senior officials. In a social media post, Sharif described his meeting with

Aliyev as "excellent," noting that the two leaders worked on finalizing a portfolio of investments Azerbaijan plans to make in Pakistan.

In July of the previous year, Aliyev had promised a \$2 billion investment in Pakistan, which Sharif referred to as a "quantum jump" in the trade and investment relations between the two nations. He emphasized that the investment would reflect their strong fraternal ties. This visit marked Sharif's second trip to Azerbaijan since taking office in February 2024. Aliyev is expected to finalize the investment agreements during a planned visit to Pakistan in April. He also mentioned that concrete projects from Pakistan are currently being reviewed, with the goal of finalizing discussions and preparing documents for signing by early April.

SOCAR agreements with Pakistan's oil trading and refining companies

A significant focus of the visit was on energy cooperation. During the trip, Azerbaijan's state-owned oil company, SOCAR, signed multiple MOUs with Pakistan's oil trading and refining companies, including an agreement to complete the Machike-Thallian-Tarujabba White Oil Pipeline Project, which will help transport

oil within Pakistan. Additionally, both countries updated agreements and MOUs related to the delivery of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Azerbaijan to Pakistan. Prior to the visit, Pakistan's Economic Cooperation Committee had approved a three-year extension to the LNG Framework Agreement between SOCAR and Pakistan LNG Limited, which allows Pakistan to procure LNG on an as-needed basis, without making financial commitments upfront.

Further discussions also covered the area of defense cooperation, with Azerbaijan expressing satisfaction over its existing defense acquisitions from Pakistan. Aliyev stated that Azerbaijan was happy with the quality of the defense equipment and affirmed that they would continue to pursue such transactions in the future. This trip further solidified the growing partnership between Pakistan and Azerbaijan across multiple sectors.

Azerbaijan Receives JF-17C (Block-III) Multirole Fighter Jets

On Wednesday, Azerbaijan officially took delivery of its first batch of JF-17C (Block-III) multirole fighter jets, marking a significant milestone in the country's military modernization efforts. The hando-

ver ceremony took place at Heydar Aliyev International Airport in Baku, with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev in attendance. This new acquisition is set to significantly bolster Azerbaijan's air defense capabilities, enhancing its ability to secure its airspace and assert its military strength.

State-of-the-Art Aircraft to Boost Air Defense

The JF-17C (Block-III) is a highly advanced multirole fighter jet, designed to operate in all weather conditions and capable of conducting both day and night missions. These aircraft are the result of a collaborative project between Pakistan's Aeronautical Complex in Kamra and

Strengthening Defense Ties between Pakistan and Azerbaijan

The acquisition of the JF-17C jets is part of a broader defense cooperation deal between Pakistan and Azerbaijan, which has been expanding in recent years. While the total value of the deal or the exact number of aircraft delivered has not been officially disclosed, defense publications from both countries earlier reported that the agreement is valued at approximately \$1.6 billion. This deal is an essential step in fostering a deeper strategic partnership between the two nations, further solidifying their commitment to defense cooperation.

This delivery follows President Ilham

exporter, showcasing its strength in the field of military technology. The delivery of the JF-17C jets to Azerbaijan reflects Pakistan's growing influence in the international defense sector, allowing it to compete with other leading global defense manufacturers.

As part of the deal, Azerbaijan's military is expected to continue strengthening its defense infrastructure, and both countries are likely to explore further collaboration in defense technology and military strategy. The acquisition of the JF-17C (Block-III) fighter jets could pave the way for future joint projects, ensuring the continued evolution of defense capabilities in both nations.

A Strategic Partnership Amid Changing Geopolitical Dynamics

The defense deal between Pakistan and Azerbaijan also reflects their shared geopolitical interests. Azerbaijan has been a key ally of Pakistan, particularly in the context of the ongoing dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Pakistan has long been a vocal supporter of Azerbaijan in its efforts to regain control over the disputed territory, and the relationship between the two countries has only strengthened as a result.

Pakistan's diplomatic backing of Azerbaijan, alongside Turkey, over the issue of Karabakh has underscored the countries' mutual respect and commitment to one another's sovereignty. This defense deal further solidifies their growing military alliance and strategic alignment in the face of evolving global challenges.

The Future of Azerbaijan-Pakistan Defense Relations

The acquisition of the JF-17C (Block-III) fighter jets is a testament to Azerbaijan's commitment to modernizing its military and securing its national defense. The deal not only strengthens Azerbaijan's defense capabilities but also elevates Pakistan's position in the global defense industry, providing both countries with new opportunities for military collaboration.

As the two countries continue to enhance



China's Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation. Known for its superior maneuverability at medium and low altitudes, the JF-17C (Block-III) is renowned for its air-to-air and air-to-ground combat capabilities, making it a formidable addition to Azerbaijan's defense arsenal.

At the ceremony, Air Vice Marshal Hakim Raza, Chairman of the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex Board, shared important tactical specifications, operational guidelines, and performance metrics of the JF-17C (Block-III) jets. The advanced design and technological capabilities of these fighter jets represent a significant leap forward for Azerbaijan's air force, allowing the country to modernize its military and enhance its defense capabilities.

Aliyev's visit to Pakistan, where the two countries discussed enhancing bilateral relations, with a particular focus on military and defense collaboration. During the visit, the Pakistan Air Force provided an air escort for President Aliyev as his plane entered Pakistan's airspace, symbolizing the close military ties between the two countries.

Expanding Pakistan's Role in the Global Defense Market

The deal is a significant achievement for Pakistan as it further establishes the country as a key player in the global defense market. Through this partnership, Pakistan has demonstrated its capabilities as a defense

their defense and economic cooperation, the implications of this deal extend beyond immediate military improvements. It serves as a foundation for future joint ventures in defense technology, military strategy, and geopolitical cooperation. With both nations committed to deepening their strategic partnership, the JF-17C fighter jets are just the beginning of what is expected to be a long-lasting and fruitful defense relationship.

In conclusion, the arrival of the JF-17C (Block-III) fighter jets in Azerbaijan marks a significant development in the military collaboration between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. With both nations looking to further enhance their defense capabilities, this deal sets the stage for a new chapter in their alliance, reinforcing their shared commitment to regional security and stability.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Visit Aims to Secure Foreign Investment Amid IMF Review

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit was focused on attracting more foreign investment to Pakistan. This visit comes at a crucial time, as the country is set to undergo a review of its three-year bailout program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March. The IMF's review is essential for Pakistan, as it holds the key to the continuation of the \$7 billion loan agreement Pakistan secured with the Washington-based lender last September. This loan was pivotal in helping Pakistan avert a severe balance-of-payments crisis and stabilize its economy.

The timing of Sharif's visit is significant, as Pakistan prepares to meet with IMF officials next month for the program's evaluation. In a broader effort to strengthen Pakistan's economic and diplomatic ties with countries in the Central Asian region, Sharif is also scheduled to visit Uzbekistan on Tuesday. His trip to Uzbekistan is part of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to foster stronger economic partnerships with neighboring Central Asian nations, which are seen as key players in Pakistan's strategy to boost trade, investments, and regional cooperation.

During his visits, Sharif is expected to engage in talks with officials in both Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to explore opportunities for expanding bilateral trade, securing investment deals, and deepening collaborative ventures in various sectors. This diplomatic push reflects Pakistan's commitment to improving its economic outlook and securing a stable financial future through international cooperation.



Previous Relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan

The relationship between Pakistan and Azerbaijan has been characterized by strong diplomatic, economic, and defense cooperation, based on shared interests and mutual respect. Here are some key aspects of their bilateral relations:

1. Diplomatic and Political Relations:

- **Formal Establishment of Relations:** Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan were established in 1992, shortly after Azerbaijan gained independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Since then, both countries have maintained a cordial and supportive relationship.
- **Mutual Support on Regional Issues:** Pakistan and Azerbaijan have shown support for each other on various international platforms. Pakistan has been a strong advocate for Azerbaijan's sovereignty, particularly regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, where Azerbaijan has faced territorial

disputes with Armenia.

- **Support for Azerbaijan's Territorial Integrity:** Pakistan has consistently backed Azerbaijan's stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, refusing to recognize Armenia's occupation of Azerbaijani territories and reiterating its commitment to Azerbaijan's territorial integrity.

2. Economic and Trade Relations:

- **Bilateral Trade:** The trade volume between Pakistan and Azerbaijan has grown over the years, with both countries expressing interest in increasing their economic cooperation. Pakistan exports products such as textiles, rice, and pharmaceuticals to Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan exports oil, gas, and other natural resources to Pakistan.
- **Energy Cooperation:** One of the key areas of cooperation has been in the energy sector, where Azerbaijan's rich oil and gas reserves have attracted Pakistani interest. Both countries have held discussions on joint ventures in energy exploration, including oil and gas extraction, as well as pipelines and energy infrastructure.
- **Investment Cooperation:** Azerbaijan has expressed interest in investing in Pakistan's infrastructure, particularly in energy, construction, and other strategic sectors. Likewise, Pakistan sees Azerbaijan as a gateway to Central Asia for increasing trade and economic activity.

3. Defense Cooperation:

- **Military and Defense Ties:** Defense cooperation between the two countries has been a significant aspect of their relationship. Azerbaijan has acquired defense equipment from Pakistan, and both nations have discussed expanding military ties. This includes possible joint defense production ventures and technology exchange.
- **Joint Military Exercises and Training:** Pakistan and Azerbaijan have conducted joint military training exercises, further strengthening their defense cooperation. These exercises have allowed both countries to enhance their military readiness and develop closer defense relations.

4. Cultural and Educational Exchanges:

- **Cultural Diplomacy:** Cultural exchanges between Pakistan and Azerbaijan have been a part of their diplomatic efforts. Both countries have celebrated shared cultural ties, including mutual interests in the fields of music, art, and literature. Various cultural events and initiatives have been organized to promote deeper people-to-people contact.

- **Educational Cooperation:** Pakistan and Azerbaijan have also worked to enhance educational exchanges. Scholarships, research collaborations, and academic partnerships have been explored as part of efforts to further strengthen ties between their educational institutions.

5. Shared Geopolitical Interests:

- **Strategic Partnerships in the Region:** Both Pakistan and Azerbaijan have recognized the importance of regional cooperation, particularly in energy and security. Pakistan's strategic location in South Asia, coupled with Azerbaijan's position in the Caspian region, allows both countries to work together on issues such as regional stability, energy security, and counter-terrorism.
- **Collaborations in International Forums:** Pakistan and Azerbaijan have worked together on various international forums, including the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), advocating for each other's interests and broader global cooperation on security, development, and other key areas.

6. Recent Developments:

- **Continued Strengthening of Relations:** In recent years, the diplomatic and economic ties between Pakistan and Azerbaijan have continued to strengthen. High-level visits and discussions on trade, defense, and energy cooperation have been held, as both countries explore new ways to deepen their bilateral relations.
- **Azerbaijan's Investment in Pakistan:** Azerbaijan has committed to investing in Pakistan's energy sector, and both countries are exploring new avenues for cooperation in infrastructure and trade. In 2022, Azerbaijan's president visited Pakistan, during which several agreements were signed to enhance bilateral cooperation, including in defense and trade.

Overall, Pakistan and Azerbaijan have developed a robust and multi-faceted relationship, grounded in mutual respect and shared strategic goals. Both countries continue to work towards expanding their ties across various sectors, and the relationship shows strong potential for further growth in the years to come.



The Syrian File: Lessons for anti-establishment narratives in the developing states



By Naqi Akbar

Almost two months passed when the Baathist government under the Assad clan of Latakia melted away to give way to the Hizb Tahrir al-Sham or HTS, practically Syria as a country or a nation-state stands nowhere, and does not matter much when a lot of developments are happening in the immediate neighborhood; the occupied territories under the Israeli control.

For the people of Syria, it has been an end to a fairly long rule of one family, or party. For them, it is a newly found freedom and they despise anyone who denies them that freedom and welcome anyone, who created the conducive environment for ensuring this. For obvious reasons, the anti-Israeli nation-states are condemned and the ones on the opposite side of the fence are lauded for their role, perceived or otherwise. As things stand, the Syrian nation-state ceases to exist effectively; but what is next once the freedom 'honeymoon' is over?

The answers to the quagmire that led to that situation as well as what precedents have been set internationally can be a reason for debate in the ensuing paragraphs.

To begin with, the Syrian experience with the Baath dates back to the resurgence of Arab nationalism in the Middle East, which automatically, based on the so-called value system, divided the Middle East into conservative monarchies' settled by Western powers and supported by the United States. States like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, where the newly trained and educated army, and Airforce officers (late Hafez Al Assad, himself a combat pilot with Syrian Air Force) saw the world from a different angle. For obvious reasons, they aligned with the then-ascending Soviet bloc. The composition of weapon systems with monarchies as well as free officers' dictatorships in the above-mentioned leftist states illustrates the geo political composition of the Middle East in the period between 1948 (the creation of Israel) till the 1979 upheavals in the Middle East, like Camp David accord breaking away Egypt from the rejectionist front and fall of a pro-Israeli Shah in Iran; which panicked the Arab monarchies about anyone taking control of Tehran.

That period again prompted the new line

up in the Middle East, which prompted or rather forced the Americans to solve the problem in a cosmetic manner. The Oslo accord and the emergence of the Palestinian Authority was one such cosmetic surgery in the Middle East.

That new lineup acted badly for the nation-states timelines not only in their domestic political journey, but also in the context of the geo-political positioning. To elaborate more, nation-states signified as front-line states by the respective great powers got stuck in a political stalemate which in turn made things difficult for the respective nations.

For example, Pakistan's identification as a front-line state against Soviet designs, unconsciously made that state a hostage to the US designs, from the Cold War to the Afghan war and up until the so-called war on terror. During that period, in normal circumstances, the transition from a front-line state of the '60s and '70s to a welfare democratic state could have been hiccups-free. However, due to the above-mentioned geo-political developments, Pakistan lost the required

balance between the various factors in play in the polity and society and consequently landed itself into a “hybrid quagmire”. While in Pakistan, all that happened in a much-sophisticated manner, Middle Eastern affairs were more crudely handled.

Initially, Saddam was the West favorite and thus allowed to unleash all types of repression, until it fell from grace. The political contradictions caused a situation where the disgruntled elements in Iraqi society welcomed the US invasion. Precisely the same thing happened in Syria; where the ensuing factors were not the US support for the equally repressive anti-Israeli dictatorship, but rather the other camp led by post-1991 Russia and flanked by Iran and its regional proxies.

Under normal circumstances, Iranians could have been sermonizing the Syrian establishment to reform and allow a multi-party rule, an agreed constitution, and a breathing space for the general public to express their will. However, the Russians and Iranians ended up supporting a politically repressive dictatorship. In a way, they blocked the natural corrective process of a society as well as a polity.

Having observed the underlying currents in

various societies, it can be safely argued that the antiestablishment narrative, if not correctly handled has the potential to create a situation similar to the one witnessed in Libya and again witnessed in Syria, where the Turkish influence seems to undo all other factors for the time being.

As was evident, the disconnect between the Syrian people and the government coupled with international game plans, precipitated a situation, where the political trends that played into the vacuum had in turn scant regard for the strategic interests of the Syrian nation-state. To elaborate it further, the world over people disagree with a type of government. Either there are forums like elections or there is a magna carta situation like a mass protest, which is translated into a strategic national social contract. The 1979 revolution in Iran was one such transition where the army was not dismantled rather cushioned with revolutionary forces best encapsulated in the form of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. The gadgetry in the Navy, Army, and Air Force (particularly Air Force Phantoms and Tomcats which are still kept airborne) was not destroyed or returned or senselessly cannibalized by the Iranian revolutionary government, but rather kept as a legitimate strategic capital of the Iranian nation.

However, what seems to have happened in Syria after the HTS takeover has been the complete wiping out of army, navy, and air arms assets belonging to the Syrian nation-state with active intelligence assistance from rebel groups to the IDF. The Syrian experience is dangerous on the count that anger on the streets can be dangerously manipulated by vested interests of all kinds. As things stand; as said before, the Syrian society might degenerate into a civil war situation, which might resemble that of the Libyan experience, a breeding ground for undesirable seeding by unscrupulous international players.

There are lessons for the establishments and the political movements, whether they want to lead the societies to the points of no return or allow the natural processes to take their due course for the necessary corrective action. In societies, where the political institutions are weak and leaders are mediocre, the dangers of falling into that abyss are great and dangerous.

Conclusively, national leaders need to be on alert that firing a few tear gas shells and picking up a few enraged minds in the middle of the night cannot solve problems, rather consensus-building is necessary, to keep the nation-states intact for better days.



France's Hijab Ban in Sports: Secularism or Systemic Exclusion?

By Romana Afsheen

In February 2025, France's right-leaning Senate approved a bill aiming to ban the wearing of religious symbols, including the Muslim hijab, in all professional and amateur sports competitions. This legislative move has ignited a nationwide debate, drawing sharp criticism from human rights organizations, political figures, and the public. The bill, which still requires approval from the National Assembly to become law, has been backed by the right-wing government, intensifying discussions about secularism, religious freedom, and discrimination in France.

Historical Context of Secularism in France

France's commitment to secularism, or "laïcité," is deeply rooted in its history. The 1905 law on the Separation of the Churches and the State established secularism as a core principle of the French Republic, aiming to ensure that public institutions remain neutral concerning religious matters. This principle has been the foundation for various policies regulating religious expressions in public spaces.

Over the years, France has implemented several laws to uphold secularism. In 2004, the government banned conspicuous religious symbols, including headscarves, in public schools. This was followed by a 2010 law prohibiting the wearing of full-face veils in public spaces. These measures have been subjects of intense debate, reflecting the ongoing tension between maintaining secularism and respecting individual religious freedoms.

The Proposed Legislation: Scope and Implications

The recent bill extends the secularism principle to the realm of sports. It seeks to prohibit "the wearing of any sign or outfit ostensibly showing a political or religious affiliation" in competitions organized by all sports federations at regional and national



levels. This includes the hijab, kippah, turbans, and visible crosses. Additionally, the draft law aims to ban outfits that might "contravene" principles of French secularism in swimming pools, potentially affecting swimwear like the burkini.

Proponents of the bill argue that it is a necessary step to preserve the neutrality of sports arenas and prevent religious influences from disrupting public order. Junior Interior Minister François-Noël Buffet, from the right-wing Republicans (LR) party, stated that the government "forcefully supports" the bill, describing it as a move "against separatism." Michel Savin, the LR senator who introduced the draft law, expressed concerns about "communitarian temptations" overrunning sports arenas.

Criticism and Opposition

The bill has faced significant opposition from various quarters. Critics argue that it infringes upon individual freedoms and targets specific religious communities, particularly Muslims. Socialist senator Patrick Kanner accused the bill's proponents of using secularism to serve "anti-Muslim rhetoric," thereby fostering confusion and stereotypes. Mathilde

Ollivier, a Greens party senator, contended that the right-wing majority is "directly and gutlessly targeting Muslim women" to exclude them from sports.

Human rights organizations have also condemned the proposed legislation. Amnesty International warned that such a law would "exacerbate the blatant religious, racial, and gender discrimination already experienced by Muslim women in France." Anna Blus, an Amnesty researcher, emphasized that "all women have the right to choose what to wear," and described the sports hijab bans in France as measures "underpinned by Islamophobia and a patriarchal attempt to control what Muslim women wear."

The United Nations has weighed in on the issue as well. In October 2024, UN experts called on France to reverse bans that prevent Muslim women and girls who wear the hijab from participating in sports. They argued that these restrictions are discriminatory and violate international human rights obligations, infringing on individuals' rights to express their religion, identity, and beliefs, as well as their right to participate in cultural life. The experts emphasized that "the neutrality and secular nature of the State are not legitimate

grounds for imposing restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief."

Impact on Muslim Women and Athletes

The proposed ban has profound implications for Muslim women athletes in France. Many feel that their identities and freedoms are under attack, leading to a sense of exclusion from public life and sports. The ban not only affects professional athletes but also trickles down to amateur levels, discouraging young Muslim girls from participating in sports due to fears of discrimination and ostracism.

The psychological impact of such exclusion can be severe. Feelings of isolation, decreased self-esteem, and internalized discrimination are common among those affected. The ban may also deter Muslim women from pursuing careers in sports, limiting their professional opportunities and reinforcing societal inequalities.

Legal and Constitutional Considerations

The bill raises critical questions about its alignment with both French constitutional principles and international human rights laws. France's constitution guarantees equality and freedom for all citizens, and critics argue that the proposed ban contradicts these fundamental rights by discriminating based on religious expression.

Internationally, France is a signatory to various human rights treaties that protect freedom of religion and expression. The United Nations' condemnation of the ban suggests that it may violate international norms and obligations. Legal challenges to the bill are likely, with opponents prepared to contest its constitutionality and compliance with international human rights standards.

Public Opinion and Societal Implications

Public opinion in France is deeply divided over the issue. Some citizens support the ban, viewing it as a reinforcement of secular values and a necessary measure to

maintain public order. Others see it as an infringement on personal freedoms and an example of state overreach into individual choices.

The societal implications of the ban are far-reaching. It risks deepening societal divisions and fostering an environment of intolerance and discrimination. The exclusion of Muslim women from sports can lead to further marginalization of an already vulnerable community, exacerbating social inequalities and hindering efforts toward integration and social cohesion.

Comparative Perspectives

France's approach to secularism and religious symbols in public life is notably stringent compared to other democratic nations. In countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, freedom of religious expression is broadly protected, where athletes are generally allowed to wear religious attire, including hijabs, without facing legal restrictions. International sporting bodies like FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) permit hijabs in competitions, emphasizing inclusivity and the right of athletes to express their faith.

Countries such as Canada and Germany have also taken a more accommodating approach, allowing hijab-wearing athletes to participate freely in sports at all levels. In contrast, France's rigid interpretation of secularism has led to repeated controversies surrounding Muslim women's attire, reinforcing perceptions of state-imposed restrictions on religious freedoms.

Voices of Affected Athletes and Advocates

Many Muslim female athletes in France have expressed frustration and disappointment over the proposed ban. French footballer and activist Assma Belaidi has spoken out against the measure, stating that the law would "effectively erase" Muslim women from sports. "Wearing the hijab is my personal choice, and it does not prevent me from being a good athlete," she said. "This law is not about neutrality; it is about exclusion."

Other athletes have taken their protests to social media, with hashtags like #LetUsPlay and #HijabisInSports gaining traction. Several women who have been barred from sports competitions due to existing hijab restrictions have shared their stories, highlighting the emotional and professional toll such policies take.

Fatima H., a basketball player from Lyon, described how her dreams of playing professionally were shattered when she was told she could not compete while wearing a hijab. "I trained for years, I worked hard to be the best in my league, but because I choose to wear the hijab, I am denied the same opportunities as my peers," she said.

Implications for Diversity and Inclusion in Sports

Beyond religious freedom, the proposed ban raises broader concerns about diversity and inclusion in French sports. Sports federations worldwide have increasingly recognized the importance of representation and inclusivity, with organizations like FIFA and the IOC embracing hijab-friendly policies to encourage greater participation from women of all backgrounds.

If France enforces the hijab ban in sports, it could set a precedent for other restrictions on minority groups, undermining efforts to create an inclusive sporting environment. It could also alienate young Muslim girls who might otherwise aspire to careers in professional athletics, depriving the nation of potential talent.

Political Motives and Election Dynamics

The timing of the proposed hijab ban has led to speculation that it is politically motivated. France is set to hold elections in 2025, and some analysts believe that the right-wing government is using the hijab ban to rally conservative voters. By positioning themselves as defenders of secularism and national identity, politicians backing the bill may be seeking to appeal to those concerned about immigration and cultural integration.

The far-right National Rally

(Rassemblement National) has long championed restrictive measures on religious symbols, and the latest bill aligns with its broader anti-immigration and nationalist agenda. However, even centrist politicians have struggled to take a firm stand against such measures, fearing backlash from voters who support stricter secularism policies.

International Backlash and Human Rights Concerns

France's stance on religious attire has drawn criticism from international human rights organizations, and the proposed hijab ban in sports is no exception. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has previously ruled on France's controversial secularism laws, and legal experts suggest that the new measure may face challenges in European courts.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have called on France to reconsider the ban, arguing that it violates fundamental human rights principles. "The right to participate in sports should not be conditional on abandoning one's religious beliefs," said a statement from Amnesty International. The organization also pointed out that such policies disproportionately affect women, further exacerbating gender-based discrimination.

The United Nations Human Rights Council has also expressed concerns, stating that the ban could lead to France violating its commitments under international human rights treaties. "No state should be allowed to dictate how women dress," said UN rapporteur on religious freedom Nazila Ghanea. "This ban is not about secularism—it is about controlling women's bodies."

Legal Challenges and Potential Outcomes

If passed, the law is almost certain to face legal challenges from civil rights groups and affected individuals. France's Constitutional Council, which reviews the legality of legislation, may be called upon to assess whether the ban aligns with the country's constitutional values. Previous rulings on religious attire have been mixed, with some

laws upheld and others deemed excessive.

If the law is challenged in European courts, France could face significant pressure to amend or repeal it. The European Union has generally upheld religious freedom as a fundamental right, and a ruling against France could set a legal precedent affecting similar restrictions across Europe.

The Future of Secularism in France

The debate over the hijab ban is part of a larger conversation about the future of secularism in France. While many French citizens support the idea of a neutral public sphere, others argue that the government's strict interpretation of secularism has led to the exclusion of religious minorities.



The growing Muslim population in France, estimated at nearly 6 million, continues to face challenges in gaining full acceptance within French society. From employment discrimination to restrictions on religious expression, Muslim women, in particular, have been at the center of policies that critics say are designed to suppress their visibility.

As France moves forward, the country must grapple with the question of whether secularism should be used as a tool of integration or exclusion. While supporters of the hijab ban argue that it reinforces the country's values, opponents warn that it risks alienating entire communities,

deepening social divides, and fostering resentment among minority populations.

Conclusion: A Defining Moment for France

The proposed ban on hijabs and other religious symbols in sports is a defining moment for France. It raises fundamental questions about religious freedom, women's rights, and the role of the state in regulating personal choices. While supporters frame it as a necessary measure to uphold secularism, critics see it as yet another step toward institutionalized discrimination against Muslim women.

As the bill moves through the legislative process, it will continue to be a flashpoint

for debate, both in France and internationally. The outcome will not only shape the future of religious expression in the country but also send a message about France's commitment to equality and human rights on the global stage.

If history is any indication, this will not be the last time France grapples with the issue of religious symbols in public life. The question remains: will the country choose a path of inclusion and respect for individual freedoms, or will it continue to tighten restrictions on religious expression in the name of secularism? The answer will determine the nation's identity for years to come.

Pakistan is formally joining the New Development Bank of the BRICS bloc

By Javed Mahmood

The Pakistan government has taken a bold decision by approving the country's membership in the New Development Bank of the BRICS bloc. A few days ago, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet approved Pakistan's membership in the New Development Bank, established by BRICS member countries. This includes the purchase of 5,882 capital shares, valued at \$582 million, with \$116 million as paid-in capital. This formal decision will allow Pakistan to join the prestigious New Development Bank of the BRICS.

Additionally, the ECC allowed the transfer of shares of DISCOs (Distribution Companies) to the President of Pakistan and endorsed the establishment of an International Joint Trading Company in Singapore, a collaboration between Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR). The ECC meeting, chaired by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb in Islamabad, approved a technical supplementary grant of Rs19 billion for 133 development schemes under the defunct Pakistan Public Works Department. These decisions aim to advance Pakistan's developmental priorities while fostering international cooperation and financial sustainability.

Upcoming Summit in Rio

The next BRICS summit is scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro in July 2025, where member nations are expected to further address economic cooperation and global governance reforms.

Brazil withdraws from BRICS currency initiative

Brazil, which holds the BRICS presidency this year, will not be



advancing the proposal for a common currency among the bloc's major developing economies, according to four government officials. However, its agenda is likely to promote steps toward reducing global reliance on the US dollar in trade and financial transactions. The decision comes amid growing discussions on de-dollarization, a move that could potentially draw the ire of former US President Donald Trump. Trump has issued multiple warnings in recent months against any attempts by the BRICS nations—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—to challenge the dominance of what he called "the mighty US dollar."

"There is no chance that BRICS will replace the US dollar in international trade, or anywhere else, and any country that tries should say hello to tariffs, and goodbye to America!" Trump wrote on social media last month.

Despite earlier discussions about a shared BRICS currency, Brazilian officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, confirmed that such a proposal has not been formally discussed at the technical level. Instead, Brazil is focusing on reforms aimed at facilitating international payments in local currencies. While this approach could lessen dependence on the US dollar, officials emphasized that this is not the primary goal.

"It's not directed against anyone," one source stated, explaining that the main objective is to reduce trade barriers and make global transactions smoother. As part of this effort, BRICS nations are exploring financial technologies such as block-chain and looking into ways to integrate their payment systems. By following global standards set by institutions like the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), they hope to cut transaction costs and improve the efficiency of cross-border payments.

"No one wants to create trouble, but BRICS countries also don't want to abandon the idea of exploring these possibilities," another source noted, adding that none of the member states intend to completely replace their dollar reserves.

Even Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who had previously floated the idea of a shared BRICS currency, has tempered his stance. While still advocating for economic independence, he recently clarified that the goal is not to eliminate the dollar but rather to expand trade options for BRICS nations. Brazil's Finance Ministry and central bank have been actively working on proposals related to international payment mechanisms, which were discussed during recent BRICS presidency meetings. However, neither institution has provided an official statement on the matter.

BRICS Summit and Payment Innovations

BRICS representatives met in South Africa on the sidelines of the G20 meetings. The BRICS bloc, originally formed in 2009, has expanded over the years to include South Africa and more recently Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The inclusion of these countries has strengthened BRICS as a growing diplomatic and economic counterweight to Western powers. Brazil's leadership in digital payments has positioned it at the forefront of discussions on financial innovation. The country's instant payment system, Pix, launched in 2020, has revolutionized transactions, surpassing the use of cash, credit, and debit cards.

Brazil's new central bank chief, Gabriel Galipolo, highlighted that Pix was designed with the potential for easy integration with other international payment systems. However, he acknowledged that governance challenges remain a key hurdle.

Brazil also operates a Local Currency Payment System (SML), which allows direct settlements in Brazilian reais through agreements with Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay. By bypassing the dollar as an intermediary, this system reduces foreign exchange contract requirements and lowers transaction costs. However, it currently takes at least three business days for settlements, limiting its adoption.

In 2023, Argentina was the top trade partner using the SML system, with transactions amounting to 5.1 billion reais (\$878 million). However, this remains a small portion of the \$27.4 billion in total bilateral trade between the two nations.

Officials believe that advancements in instant payment technologies could improve the system, making cross-border transactions faster, more secure, and cost-effective. As Brazil takes the lead in BRICS discussions this year, its focus will remain on financial innovation and trade facilitation rather than pushing for a common currency. The country's agenda reflects a strategic approach to modernizing global payments while balancing diplomatic ties with major economic powers.

Trump's stern warning to BRICS nations against replacing the US dollar as a reserve currency

US President Donald Trump has issued a stern warning to BRICS nations against replacing the US dollar as a reserve currency, reiterating his threat of imposing 100% tariffs.

"We are going to require a commitment from these seemingly hostile countries that they will neither create a new BRICS currency nor back any other currency to replace the mighty US dollar, or they will face 100% tariffs," Trump stated on



Thursday via Truth Social. The BRICS bloc—comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—has long discussed alternatives to the US dollar, especially following Western sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine war. While BRICS does not yet have a common currency, recent geopolitical shifts have fueled renewed interest in de-dollarization.

"There is no chance that BRICS will replace the US dollar in international trade, or anywhere else," Trump declared. "Any country that tries should say hello to tariffs and goodbye to America!"

Trade Battles and Tariff Plans

Trump's warning comes as Canada and Mexico await his decision on a proposed 25% tariff. He aims to use tariffs as leverage to pressure these nations into taking stronger action against illegal drug

trafficking, particularly fentanyl, and unauthorized migration into the US.

"The idea that BRICS countries are trying to move away from the dollar while we stand by and watch is OVER," Trump asserted.

US Dollar Dominance Remains Firm

Despite de-dollarization efforts, the US dollar's global influence remains strong, bolstered by the resilient US economy, tighter monetary policies, and rising geopolitical tensions. A study by the Atlantic Council's Geo-Economics Center found that the US dollar continues to be the

world's primary reserve currency, with neither the euro nor BRICS alternatives significantly challenging its dominance.

Indonesia joins BRICS bloc

Indonesia welcomed Brazil's announcement on Tuesday that it has officially joined BRICS, a bloc of major developing economies increasingly viewed as a counterbalance to Western influence.

In a statement on Monday, Brazil's foreign ministry highlighted Indonesia's shared vision with other BRICS members to reform global governance institutions and strengthen cooperation within the Global South. Brazil, which will hold the BRICS presidency in 2025, confirmed that Indonesia's membership bid was approved during the 2023 summit in Johannesburg. Indonesia expressed its gratitude, calling the inclusion a testament to its active role in addressing global challenges.

"This achievement reflects Indonesia's commitment to fostering multilateral cooperation and contributing to a more inclusive and equitable global structure," the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement on Tuesday.

BRICS Expansion and Strategic Goals

BRICS was originally formed in 2009 by Brazil, Russia, India, and China, with South Africa joining the following year. In 2023, the bloc expanded to include Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates. Indonesia described its membership as "a strategic step to enhance collaboration with other developing nations, grounded in principles of equality, mutual respect, and sustainable development." Jakarta also extended its "gratitude to Russia," the 2024 BRICS chair, and Brazil for supporting its accession.

Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, outlining his priorities for Brazil's presidency, emphasized strengthening ties within the Global South and reforming multilateral institutions. A key focus will be the development of alternative payment systems to facilitate trade among member nations.

Non-Dollar Trade and US Response

At the November 2024 BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, members discussed promoting non-dollar transactions and enhancing the use of local currencies. The initiative drew criticism from US President-elect Donald Trump, who warned of "100 percent tariffs" on BRICS members if they undermined the US dollar's dominance in international trade.

Background

The literature on the New Development Bank (NDB) can be broadly categorized into three main areas: the bank's impact on global governance, comparisons of its normative and operational features with other multilateral development banks (MDBs), and its unique financing characteristics.

In recent years, discussions about the

NDB's establishment, characterization, and financial role within the context of a new international financial architecture (IFA) tailored to the needs of emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) have gained prominence (Shelepov, 2016; Schulz, 2018). Some researchers argue that while the bank reflects the BRICS bloc's desire for greater participation in global economic governance, it does not diverge significantly from the operational norms of traditional MDBs. Others contend that while the NDB does not signify the emergence of an entirely alternative order, it marks a shift toward development institutions led by developing countries.

A second stream of literature compares the NDB to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), particularly in light of China's prominent role in these institutions. This comparison reflects contrasting traditions in global financial governance. Meanwhile, a third group of studies examines the bank's normative, operational, and instrumental aspects. Over the past decade, comparative analyses of the NDB, World Bank, and regional development banks have grown significantly.

However, existing literature lacks a detailed analysis of the NDB's general strategies and the actual financing provided to sovereign and non-sovereign borrowers. This study seeks to address this gap by comparing the bank's two general strategies with its actual lending practices. The analysis spans from the bank's operational inception in 2016 through 2023. Given the NDB's stated mission as an instrument of BRICS-led economic cooperation, this study examines the extent to which its lending aligns with strategic priorities, particularly regarding non-sovereign borrowers, priority sectors, and local currency financing.

Relevance of the Study

This research is timely due to significant changes on the global stage, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israel-Hamas conflict, which have redefined leadership dynamics among BRICS countries. These shifts are evident in recent expansions of NDB membership, including oil-producing nations like Egypt and the UAE, alongside the BRICS bloc's

acceptance of Ethiopia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Driven by China and Russia, these moves aim to bolster BRICS as a geopolitical and financial alliance. In contrast, Brazil and India exhibit varying levels of opposition. These developments also influence the NDB's operations. For instance, Russia, a founding member, has been excluded from NDB funding since 2022, while geopolitical tensions between India and China, as well as the balancing acts of members like South Africa and India, further complicate dynamics.

The New Development Bank: Scope and Features of a New International Financial Architecture

The emergence of the New Development Bank (NDB) reflects the growing influence of emerging powers seeking greater participation in the global order, particularly amid crises in global financial and climate governance. The BRICS bloc has championed this effort, deploying what has been termed "collective financial statecraft" to address frustrations with the slow pace of reforms in Bretton Woods's institutions post-2008. These frustrations stem from low representation levels and conditionalities imposed by these institutions, which impact the ability of developing economies to finance their growth.

Despite tensions over commitments to multilateral climate agreements and national interests, BRICS countries have shown consistent support for climate governance reforms, particularly since COP15. As a bloc responsible for 42% of global greenhouse gas emissions, they have backed the Paris Agreement and emphasized the need for financial resource mobilization from developed to developing nations to support economic development and climate action. More recently, at COP26 and COP28, BRICS members advocated for reducing fossil fuel reliance and facilitating energy transitions in developing countries.

In this context, the NDB and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) were established as tools to complement

existing efforts by institutions like the World Bank while influencing international financial architecture. The idea for the NDB was first proposed by India in 2009, and its Articles of Agreement were approved at the 2014 BRICS Summit in Fortaleza. The bank became operational in 2016, aiming to distinguish itself in three areas: innovative instruments and flexible project implementation, a focus on member demands without compromising sovereignty, and a governance model based on consensus with a non-resident Board of Directors. Its financing instruments include guarantees, syndicated loans, equity investments, and project bonds.

The NDB's core mission is to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects that drive green economies in member countries. These projects, designed to incorporate economic, environmental, and social criteria, target both sovereign and non-sovereign borrowers, to allocate 30% of financing to non-sovereign borrowers by 2026. The bank's strategies have evolved, shifting focus from traditional infrastructure projects to those that directly contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Its current strategy (2022–2026) commits 40% of its total approval volume to projects advancing sustainable development and addressing climate change.

The NDB has also prioritized local currency financing to mitigate exchange rate risks for borrowers, aiming for 30% of its financing in local currencies by 2026. Its successful issuance of a Green Financial Bond in China's Interbank Bond Market in 2016 exemplifies this commitment. However, the bank faces challenges in this area, including limited private financing for projects due to low profitability and difficulties in risk mitigation. Additionally, expanding local currency financing and thematic bond offerings remains a challenge, particularly in deepening capital markets in member countries while meeting the 30% local currency financing target.

In summary, the NDB has evolved its mission, expanded commitments to non-sovereign financing, prioritized local currency funding, and redefined its focus on sectors contributing to sustainable development. These shifts reflect the bank's

efforts to align its operations with the changing needs of its member countries while navigating global financial and climate challenges.

Saudi Trade with BRICS nations

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan led the Kingdom's delegation at the BRICS Plus 2024 Summit in Kazan, Russia, representing King Salman. Prince Faisal conveyed the greetings of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to Russian President Vladimir Putin and other BRICS leaders. In his speech, he emphasized Saudi Arabia's



growing role in global multilateral cooperation. Expressing gratitude for the warm reception, Prince Faisal acknowledged the strengthening ties between Saudi Arabia and BRICS countries. Though Saudi Arabia is not a formal member of the BRICS bloc, it actively participates in its activities as an invited nation.

"The volume of bilateral trade with BRICS countries surpassed \$196 billion in 2023, accounting for 37 percent of the Kingdom's total foreign trade," Prince Faisal noted, highlighting the robust economic relationships that underpin Saudi Arabia's engagement with the group.

The summit offered Saudi Arabia an opportunity to advocate for international cooperation in addressing global challenges, according to the Saudi Press Agency.

"In a time when global challenges require

unity, we are instead witnessing escalating tensions and increased polarization," Prince Faisal remarked. He urged for stronger international institutions to ensure fair representation and address the needs of all nations.

Addressing the Middle East, Prince Faisal condemned Israel's military actions in Gaza, warning that the ongoing escalation poses a threat to both regional and global security. He called for an immediate ceasefire, unhindered humanitarian aid, and the release of hostages. Prince Faisal also spotlighted Saudi Arabia's recent peace efforts, including the launch of the International Alliance to Implement the Two-State Solution initiative. This

initiative seeks a lasting resolution based on the 1967 borders and the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He commended BRICS nations for their solidarity with the Palestinian cause and their support for a solution that respects Palestinian self-determination. In concluding his address, Prince Faisal reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's commitment to expanding its partnerships with BRICS and enhancing cooperation in various sectors.

"The Kingdom will continue to strengthen its partnerships with the BRICS group and broaden cooperation across all fields, striving to achieve development and prosperity on a global scale," he stated. The Saudi delegation also included high-ranking officials, such as Abdulrahman Al-Ahmad, the Kingdom's ambassador to Russia, and senior advisors from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Prime Minister's Vision for Economic Growth: Prioritizing Key Sectors and Ensuring Reforms

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's economic vision for Pakistan is centered on achieving sustainable, export-led growth, especially through the development of vital sectors such as services, information technology (IT), and agriculture. By aligning this approach with the "Uraan Pakistan" vision, which emphasizes the country's potential to rise above its current challenges and foster inclusive growth, the Prime Minister has laid out a roadmap for revitalizing Pakistan's export sector and enhancing economic prospects in the coming years. This strategy is rooted in comprehensive reforms, technological advancement, and the utilization of the nation's resources to their fullest potential.

A New Era for Services, IT, and Agriculture Sectors

Among the most critical components of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's vision is the prioritization of the services, IT, and agriculture sectors as engines of export growth. These three areas not only hold tremendous potential to boost Pakistan's economic output but also offer avenues for creating jobs, attracting foreign investment, and building international partnerships.

Services Sector: The Gateway to Diversified Exports

The services sector in Pakistan has long been underutilized, despite its capacity to provide substantial contributions to the national economy. This sector encompasses various industries, including financial services, education, healthcare, tourism, and business process outsourcing (BPO), each of which can significantly enhance the country's export potential.

PM Sharif emphasized the need to enhance the services sector as a vital component of the nation's economic growth. He urged for reforms that will not only attract international businesses but also allow



domestic businesses to compete effectively in global markets. By leveraging the power of modern technologies, such as digital platforms, Pakistan can position itself as a regional leader in business services and IT outsourcing.

IT Sector: A Crucial Pillar of the Future Economy

The Information Technology (IT) sector is perhaps the most crucial pillar of Pakistan's modern economic future. In recent years, Pakistan has made significant strides in the IT industry, with a growing number of tech startups, skilled software developers, and an expanding digital ecosystem. However, to unlock its full potential, Pakistan needs to adopt a more aggressive approach to IT development, including incentivizing tech-based exports.

PM Shehbaz has underscored the importance of nurturing the IT sector through a combination of policy reforms, innovation-friendly regulations, and investment in tech education and infrastructure. The Prime Minister has

emphasized making Pakistan a leading exporter of software, IT services, and digital products. This would require strong collaborations between the government and the private sector, especially in promoting research and development (R&D) in IT and ensuring Pakistan's competitive advantage in the global tech marketplace.

Agriculture Sector: Reviving a Time-Honored Source of Growth

Pakistan's agricultural sector has always been a major contributor to the economy, but it has been facing challenges in recent decades, including low productivity, outdated technology, and inadequate infrastructure. In light of these challenges, PM Sharif has prioritized agricultural reforms to drive economic growth through increased productivity and exports.

To meet the growing demand for agricultural products globally, Pakistan must invest in modern farming techniques, climate-resilient crops, and improved

supply chains. By strengthening rural economies and ensuring food security for its population, the government can unlock the full potential of this sector. This initiative aligns with the Prime Minister's broader objective of achieving export-led growth by diversifying agricultural exports, including fruits, vegetables, and processed food products.

Trade Policy Reforms and Strategic Initiatives

Beyond prioritizing key sectors, the government is implementing a range of structural reforms to ensure a competitive business environment and enhance export capacity. During a briefing on trade-related reforms, officials highlighted several key actions and strategies aimed at improving Pakistan's trade performance.

Reducing Tariffs and Simplifying Procedures

PM Sharif directed his economic team to ensure sustainable reforms in the tariff system. Over the past two years, tariff rates have been gradually reduced, making the system more business-friendly. These measures are designed to encourage international businesses to engage with Pakistani markets and attract foreign direct investment (FDI). The government's ongoing commitment to streamlining trade procedures will enable exporters to operate more efficiently and with fewer obstacles.

The Prime Minister also emphasized the importance of implementing long-term policy frameworks that allow for greater predictability and stability in the tariff system. Reforms in the customs and tax regimes will help create a more conducive environment for export-oriented businesses and lead to stronger trade relations with Pakistan's key international partners.

Strategic Trade Policy Framework 2025-2030

The government is finalizing the 2025-2030 Strategic Trade Policy Framework (STPF), which is a critical element in guiding the country's trade policies for the next five years. Through consultation with stakeholders from both the public and private sectors, the framework aims to align

Pakistan's trade objectives with its national economic priorities. It will include concrete measures to bolster exports, expand market access, and promote industrial growth.

The policy will also outline strategies to diversify export markets, reduce reliance on traditional trading partners, and seek opportunities in emerging markets. This forward-looking framework is expected to play a crucial role in Pakistan's journey towards achieving the Prime Minister's \$60 billion export target by 2025.

E-Commerce Policy and National Compliance Centre

The government is also putting the finishing touches on the e-commerce policy, which is slated for cabinet approval in the coming months. With the digital economy playing an increasingly vital role in international trade, the e-commerce policy aims to streamline the regulatory framework for online businesses, enabling them to access global markets more efficiently.

Moreover, the government has established the National Compliance Centre (NCC) to help Pakistani industries align with international standards. This initiative is critical for industries seeking to increase their export capacity and ensure they meet the necessary quality and regulatory requirements for global markets. The NCC will also provide specialized training programs, enabling Pakistani businesses to strengthen their export capabilities and expand their international footprint.

The Fight Against Counterfeit Drugs and Healthcare Reforms

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also held a separate meeting to address healthcare sector reforms, with a focus on cracking down on counterfeit medicines and improving the pharmaceutical industry. PM Sharif directed authorities to set up an international-standard drug testing laboratory in Islamabad to enhance drug quality control.

In response to rising concerns over the sale of counterfeit medicines, PM Sharif

ordered stricter enforcement actions against those involved in the illegal trade. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of protecting public health by ensuring the availability of safe and effective medicines.

Additionally, the Prime Minister approved the launch of mobile hospitals in remote and underserved areas of Pakistan, including Gilgit-Baltistan, Kashmir, and Balochistan. These mobile health units will provide healthcare services to communities that lack access to traditional healthcare facilities.

Encouraging Collaboration with Lawmakers

PM Sharif also met with members of the National Assembly to discuss economic stabilization efforts and to address constituency-related issues. The lawmakers expressed their support for the government's economic reforms and underscored the importance of close engagement with the public. PM Sharif encouraged the lawmakers to maintain open channels of communication with their constituents and continue working toward resolving their concerns.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's economic agenda represents a bold vision for Pakistan's future, focusing on sustainable growth and the development of key sectors that can drive exports and job creation. Through a combination of targeted reforms, strategic investments, and alignment with global standards, the government is poised to unlock Pakistan's economic potential and achieve the ambitious goal of increasing exports to \$60 billion within the next five years.

By prioritizing services, IT, and agriculture, supporting export-oriented industries, and fostering international trade relations, Pakistan is positioning itself to compete in an increasingly interconnected global economy. With robust governance reforms and strategic initiatives, the Prime Minister's vision promises to pave the way for a more prosperous and export-driven future for the nation.

The Rise of Tech Startups in Pakistan and Their Contribution to the Economy



By Saad Khan Jadoon

In the past few years, Pakistan has experienced a significant shift in its economic landscape, with the tech industry emerging as a dynamic force driving growth and innovation. The rise of tech startups in Pakistan is no longer a passing trend, but rather a transformative movement that is reshaping the country's economy, job market, and global competitiveness. These startups have found a fertile ground in Pakistan's young, tech-savvy population, the growing need for digital solutions, and a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem that is gradually gaining momentum.

Tech startups in Pakistan are not only providing innovative solutions to local challenges but are also making waves on the international stage. From e-commerce platforms to fintech, health tech, and artificial intelligence (AI), the diversity of sectors being disrupted by these startups reflects the country's potential to become a key player in the global digital economy. This article explores the rise of tech startups in Pakistan, the factors fueling their growth, their contributions to the economy, and the

challenges they face in this rapidly evolving sector.

A New Dawn for Tech Startups in Pakistan

Historically, Pakistan has faced numerous challenges, including political instability, limited infrastructure, and a reliance on traditional sectors such as agriculture and textiles. However, over the past decade, the country has witnessed a significant surge in entrepreneurial activity, particularly in the tech sector. A report by the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) notes that the tech industry has seen consistent growth, with Pakistan becoming one of the fastest-growing markets for startups in the South Asian region.

The growing success of Pakistani tech startups can be attributed to a confluence of factors: a burgeoning tech-savvy youth population, increasing internet penetration, the rise of digital payment systems, and the rapid adoption of mobile technology. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), mobile phone

penetration in Pakistan stands at over 150 million, which has enabled a significant portion of the population to access digital platforms. This demographic shift has created the perfect environment for digital services to thrive, fostering the development of innovative solutions across sectors.

In 2023, Pakistani startups secured approximately \$75.8 million in funding, a notable decline of 77% compared to the previous year. This downturn was attributed to political and economic challenges both domestically and internationally. Despite this setback, the fourth quarter of 2023 witnessed a resurgence, with startups raising \$38.6 million across 15 deals, indicating a potential rebound in investor confidence.

Key Sectors Disrupted by Pakistani Tech Startups

Pakistan's tech startup ecosystem is diverse, encompassing a wide range of industries that are ripe for disruption. Below are some of the key sectors where Pakistani startups are making a notable impact.

E-Commerce: The Digital Retail Revolution

E-commerce has been one of the most prominent sectors to benefit from the rise of tech startups in Pakistan. Online shopping platforms such as Daraz, founded in 2012, have paved the way for other homegrown e-commerce companies. Daraz, which was acquired by Alibaba Group in 2018, has become a household name in Pakistan, providing a vast range of products from electronics to clothing, and food delivery services.

With the expansion of mobile internet access and a growing middle class, more consumers in Pakistan are turning to online shopping, and e-commerce startups are capitalizing on this trend. The ease of accessing products online, coupled with the convenience of cash-on-delivery payment options, has spurred the growth of e-commerce businesses across the country.

Fintech: Revolutionizing Payments and Financial Inclusion

One of the most exciting developments in Pakistan's tech ecosystem is the rise of fintech startups. With nearly 100 million people lacking access to formal banking services, the demand for digital financial solutions is enormous. In response, Pakistani fintech startups such as Easypaisa, JazzCash, and Finbox are stepping in to bridge this gap and provide financial services to the unbanked population.

The fintech sector emerged as a significant recipient of investment, securing \$19.6 million across seven deals. This was followed by the transport and logistics sector, which attracted \$13.6 million through six funding rounds. Notably, female-founded startups garnered \$10.5 million in funding, accounting for 13.9% of the total investment, a substantial increase from the average of 1.34% observed between 2019 and 2022.

Easypaisa, launched in 2009, was one of the first mobile financial services platforms to provide banking solutions to underserved populations in Pakistan. Today, the platform has over 25 million users, enabling them to send money, pay bills, and access

micro-loans via their mobile phones. Similarly, JazzCash, a subsidiary of Jazz, Pakistan's largest mobile network, offers a wide range of financial services that cater to the needs of the unbanked and underbanked.

These fintech companies are not only improving financial inclusion but also playing a significant role in transforming Pakistan's broader economic landscape by fostering digital payments, encouraging savings, and boosting access to credit for individuals and small businesses.

Health Tech: Transforming Healthcare Access

Pakistan's healthcare system, like many others in developing countries, has long been plagued by inefficiencies and accessibility issues. However, the rise of



health tech startups is transforming the delivery of healthcare services. Platforms like Sehat Kahani, a telemedicine startup, are bridging the gap between patients in remote areas and qualified doctors. By connecting patients with healthcare professionals through virtual consultations, Sehat Kahani is making healthcare services more accessible, particularly in rural areas where medical resources are scarce.

Similarly, startups like Dawaai and PharmEasy are digitizing the pharmaceutical supply chain, making it easier for consumers to order medicine online and have it delivered to their doorstep. These health tech innovations are not only

improving healthcare delivery but also enhancing public health outcomes and contributing to the overall well-being of the population.

Artificial Intelligence and Data Science: Pioneering the Future

While still in its nascent stages, artificial intelligence (AI) and data science are rapidly becoming key drivers of Pakistan's tech sector. Startups like Abacus Consulting and Markhor are harnessing the power of AI to develop machine learning algorithms and predictive models for industries ranging from agriculture to finance. These companies are using data analytics to solve complex problems, such as improving crop yields, predicting financial trends, and optimizing business operations.

AI-powered innovations in sectors like

manufacturing, logistics, and retail are helping businesses increase efficiency, reduce costs, and improve customer experiences. This not only enhances productivity but also contributes to Pakistan's competitiveness in the global tech market.

Economic Contributions of Tech Startups

Tech startups in Pakistan are having a profound impact on the country's economy. Their contributions extend beyond just job creation and economic growth—they are also playing a key role in driving innovation and enhancing global competitiveness.

Job Creation and Talent Development

One of the most significant contributions of tech startups is the creation of job opportunities. Pakistan's young population, which comprises more than 60% of the country's total population, is increasingly finding employment in the tech sector. In 2020, Pakistan's IT and tech sector employed over 300,000 people, a number that is expected to rise as the industry continues to expand.



In addition to creating direct jobs, tech startups are also fostering the development of a highly skilled workforce in areas such as software development, data analysis, AI, digital marketing, and cybersecurity. The rise of coding boot camps, online courses, and tech incubators is also helping individuals acquire the skills needed to succeed in the tech industry, further fueling Pakistan's human capital development.

Increased Investment and Capital Influx

The rapid growth of tech startups in Pakistan has attracted significant foreign investment. In recent years, Pakistan's tech sector has seen an influx of venture capital (VC) funding from both local and international investors. According to the Pakistan Venture Capital Association (PVCA), in 2020 alone, over \$50 million was invested in Pakistani startups, with a substantial portion going to tech-based companies.

Notable investment firms, including Sequoia Capital, Accel, and 500 Startups,

have shown interest in Pakistani startups, offering both capital and expertise to help scale businesses. This influx of capital is enabling startups to expand their operations, hire more talent, and invest in product development, ultimately contributing to the growth of Pakistan's economy.

Boosting Exports and Global Recognition

Tech startups in Pakistan are also playing

an essential role in boosting the country's exports. Many of the country's leading tech companies provide software development, IT services, and digital solutions to clients abroad, earning valuable foreign exchange. With Pakistan's tech exports reaching over \$1 billion in recent years, the industry is becoming a major contributor to the country's overall export portfolio.

Startups like TenPearls, a software development company, and S&P Global, an IT solutions provider, are gaining global recognition for their high-quality products and services. As Pakistani startups continue to scale, they are further enhancing the country's reputation as a hub for innovation, technology, and digital entrepreneurship.

Economic Impact

The technology sector's contribution to Pakistan's economy has been substantial. In the fiscal year 2023-24, the country's IT services exports reached \$1.15 billion

during the first five months, marking a 5.89% growth compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year.

Furthermore, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) market was valued at \$15.05 billion in 2023, with projections indicating a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.87%, reaching \$16.51 billion by 2028.

Challenges and the Road Ahead

Despite the impressive progress made by Pakistan's tech startups, the sector still faces several challenges. These include limited access to funding, inadequate infrastructure, regulatory hurdles, and a lack of awareness about the benefits of digital solutions. Moreover, Pakistan's talent pool, though growing, still faces competition from other emerging tech markets in the region, such as India and Bangladesh.

However, with the government's focus on supporting the tech industry through initiatives like the Digital Pakistan Policy, which aims to foster digital transformation, and the establishment of tech incubators and innovation centers, the future of tech startups in Pakistan looks promising.

The future of Pakistan's tech startups appears promising, with a growing number of innovative ventures addressing critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. The government's strategic focus on digital transformation, coupled with a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, is expected to drive further growth and integration of technology into the broader economy.

The rise of tech startups in Pakistan is a game-changer for the country's economy. As these startups continue to disrupt traditional sectors and create new opportunities, they are not only contributing to economic growth but also positioning Pakistan as a rising player in the global digital economy. With continued support from the government, investors, and the entrepreneurial ecosystem, Pakistan's tech startup scene is poised for even greater success in the years to come.

Halving global road fatalities within a decade is a very ambitious goal



By Harry Javed

As the world approaches the midpoint of the United Nations' Second Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030), the urgency to meet the goal of halving road traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030 is ramping up. This target, embedded within the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3.6), reflects a global commitment to addressing one of the most preventable yet persistent public health crises of our time. Road crashes claim nearly 1.2 million lives each year—around 3,300 every day—with children and young people disproportionately affected. Halving global road fatalities within a decade is, admittedly, a very ambitious goal. Even so, with every road death is a tragedy unto itself, it is something we all must strive for. The first UN decade of action for road safety—which spanned from 2011 to 2020 and had the same objective of halving fatalities and serious injuries within the decade—fell short of achieving its target, despite notable progress in many countries. The lessons learned from that period have laid a strong foundation for renewed efforts.

The Second Decade of Action has so far been characterized by an evolution of road safety strategies informed by data, research, and a growing catalog of best practices; exciting technological progress such as the advent of Intelligent Speed Assistance; and increasing funding for vital road safety improvements. Still, progress has been frustratingly slow and uneven, and there is still much work to be done.

The upcoming Fourth Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety, to be held in Marrakech, Morocco, from February 18-20, 2025, arrives at a pivotal moment. Under the theme "Commit to Life," this conference will convene transport ministers, policymakers, civil society, and industry leaders to take stock of progress since the start of the decade, identify new priorities, and forge new commitments. It will be the first Ministerial Conference on Road Safety hosted on the African continent, highlighting the region's growing role in the global road safety agenda.

The World Bank's recent milestones and momentum

For our part, the World Bank has made significant strides in advancing road safety in low- and middle-income countries, where 92% of road traffic fatalities occur. From mid-2013 to mid-2023, the World Bank directly financed \$3.34 billion in road safety improvements, benefiting millions of people worldwide. Between mid-2018 and mid-2023 alone, World Bank-financed transport projects provided 65 million people with access to safer roads—equivalent to the entire population of South Africa or the United Kingdom.

Beyond this, several recent road safety milestones over the past year position the World Bank as a key player in the global effort to achieve the 2030 target:

1. Establishment of a dedicated Road Safety Unit

In July 2024, the World Bank created a

dedicated Road Safety Unit, the first of its kind among multilateral development banks. Complementing this, the Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF), a World Bank-managed multi-donor trust fund, has been restructured with a new business plan for fiscal years 2024-2027. These initiatives elevate road safety within the institution and enhance our ability to catalyze financing and support for road safety initiatives worldwide.

2. The Hart Schafer Road Safety Award

To honor the legacy of Hartwig "Hart" Schafer, a former World Bank leader and passionate road safety advocate, the World Bank recently established the Hart Schafer Road Safety Award, which is presented to World Bank task teams and government counterparts to recognize excellence in advancing road safety financing and innovation. The 2024 inaugural award recognized the Bangladesh Road Safety Project, a \$358 million initiative aimed at significantly reducing road traffic fatalities through a groundbreaking multi-sectoral approach.

3. Launch of the Road Safety Calculator

GRSF recently launched an innovative Road Safety Calculator, a first-of-its-kind tool designed to help policymakers evaluate the expected benefits of various road safety strategies. By quantifying potential reductions in deaths and serious injuries per type of intervention (e.g. increasing helmet usage rates by 10%, or installing roadside barriers on high-speed roads), the calculator supports evidence-based decision-making, enabling countries to allocate resources more effectively to maximize the impact of their investments.

4. Road Safety Capacity Building Program

Recognizing the critical role of leadership in driving systemic change, the World Bank's Transport Global Department will soon be launching a capacity building program focused on road safety management. The initiative will provide learning and leadership opportunities for mid- and senior-level managers through interactive

workshops, case studies, and site visits. The capacity building program will be modeled on the established Leaders in Urban Transport Planning program, and is affiliated with the World Bank Group Academy.

Optimism for the path ahead

As we look ahead to the Marrakech Ministerial Conference, there is cause for both reflection and optimism. The slight decline in global road deaths reported by more than half of UN Member States demonstrates that progress is possible with the right policies, strategies, and investments in place.



The World Bank's recent milestones underscore our steadfast commitment to halving road crash fatalities and serious injuries by 2030. Building on this momentum, we will also be launching two new reports at the upcoming Ministerial conference—the first, Financing Road Safety: Catalyzing the Sustainable Finance Market to Bridge the Gap, will highlight new and emerging instruments that can mobilize private capital to fund essential road safety improvements, while the second, Strengthening Road Safety Management (3rd edition), will provide updated tools and methodologies to help countries identify their road safety management priorities.

By integrating road safety into broader development agendas, leveraging data-driven tools, and fostering leadership at all levels, we are helping to build a safer future for all road users. As we reach the midpoint of the Second Decade of Action, the next five years are crucial. Let us harness the momentum, strengthen our partnerships, and commit to life.

Strategies to reduce road fatalities

Reducing road fatalities globally requires a multi-faceted approach that incorporates policy changes, improved infrastructure, education, enforcement, and technological advancements. Here are some key strategies to achieve this goal:

1. Strengthen Road Safety Policies

- Adopt and enforce stricter traffic laws: Implement and enforce laws related to speeding, seatbelt use, drink-driving, distracted driving, and helmet use for motorcyclists.

- Set and monitor road safety targets: Countries can set measurable road safety targets as part of national development plans.
- Improve vehicle safety standards: Mandate advanced safety features such as airbags, ABS, and electronic stability control in vehicles.
- Promote shared responsibility: Involve government, private sectors, and communities in road safety initiatives.

2. Improve Road Infrastructure

- Build safer roads: Design roads with features like pedestrian crossings, cycling lanes, roundabouts, crash barriers, and proper signage.
- Separate road users: Designate separate paths for vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians to minimize conflict.
- Implement traffic calming measures: Use speed bumps, rumble strips, and narrower lanes to reduce speeding in high-risk areas.

- Increase visibility: Improve street lighting, reflective road signs, and markings.

3. Education and Awareness

- Road safety campaigns: Educate road users about traffic rules, safe driving habits, and the dangers of risky behaviors like speeding or texting while driving.
- Driver training programs: Improve the quality of driver education to ensure new drivers are well-prepared.
- Target vulnerable groups: Focus on educating children, pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists on road safety.

systems (ADAS): Promote technologies like lane-keeping assistance, automatic emergency braking, and adaptive cruise control.

- Smart traffic management systems: Use AI and IoT technologies to manage traffic flow and reduce congestion.
- Telematics and data: Use telematics to monitor driver behavior and promote safe driving practices through feedback mechanisms.

6. Focus on Vulnerable Road Users

- Protect pedestrians and cyclists: Create safe walking and cycling



4. Enforce Traffic Laws Effectively

- Increase law enforcement presence: Deploy traffic police to enforce compliance with traffic rules.
- Use technology for enforcement: Install speed cameras, red-light cameras, and automatic number plate recognition systems to monitor violations.
- Implement strict penalties: Impose fines, license suspension, or community service for repeat offenders to deter dangerous driving behaviors.

5. Leverage Technology and Innovation

- Introduce advanced driver assistance

infrastructure and enforce right-of-way laws for pedestrians.

- Promote public transportation: Encourage the use of safer modes of transport like buses and trains.
- Ensure accessibility for all: Design roads and crossings with consideration for people with disabilities.

7. Improve Emergency Response Systems

- Quick response to accidents: Strengthen emergency medical services (EMS) to respond to road crashes quickly.
- First aid training: Train citizens, especially professional drivers, in first aid to provide immediate assistance.

- Trauma care facilities: Increase the number of well-equipped trauma care centers.

8. Data-Driven Approaches

- Collect and analyze crash data: Use data to identify high-risk areas and behaviors, enabling targeted interventions.
- Adopt evidence-based strategies: Use proven methods to reduce accidents, such as "Vision Zero" strategies.

9. Promote Global Collaboration

- Learn from best practices: Share successful road safety strategies and frameworks from countries with low fatality rates, such as Sweden and the Netherlands.
- Work with international organizations: Collaborate with groups like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP).

10. Promote Sustainable Urban Planning

- Design walkable cities: Reduce reliance on private vehicles by promoting mixed-use development and accessible public transit.
- Reduce traffic volumes: Encourage carpooling, cycling, and the use of public transportation to lower the number of vehicles on roads.

11. Address Socioeconomic Inequalities

- Improve road safety in low-income areas: Invest in better roads, lighting, and education in regions where fatalities are disproportionately high.
- Subsidize safety gear: Make helmets and child car seats affordable for lower-income groups.

By integrating these strategies into local, national, and international efforts, road fatalities can be significantly reduced, contributing to safer roads for all users worldwide.

The Struggle for Water in Pakistan: A Looming Crisis



By Saad Jadoon

Pakistan, a country of over 250 million people, faces an unprecedented water crisis. As one of the most water-scarce nations in the world, Pakistan is grappling with numerous challenges, ranging from inadequate water management to the unpredictable effects of climate change. With its agricultural economy heavily reliant on irrigation, the consequences of water scarcity are especially dire, impacting everything from crop yields to the livelihoods of millions of farmers. If left unchecked, this crisis will not only affect the economy but also lead to severe social and political instability.

Water Scarcity in Numbers

Pakistan's water crisis is deepening at an alarming rate. According to the World Bank, the country's per capita water availability has decreased from 5,260 cubic meters in 1951 to less than 1,000 cubic meters today, which classifies Pakistan as a water-scarce country.

To put this in perspective, countries with per capita water availability below 1,000 cubic meters are considered to be facing severe water stress. This trend is not merely a result of population growth but also a combination of poor water management, climate change, and political disagreements over water distribution.

The 2020 World Resources Institute's (WRI) Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas highlighted that Pakistan is one of the 17 countries facing extremely high water stress. This is exacerbated by the fact that the country relies heavily on the Indus River, which provides water to over 90% of the agricultural land in Pakistan. Yet, due to a lack of infrastructure, mismanagement, and the depletion of water reserves, the future of water in Pakistan is increasingly uncertain.

In 2025, Pakistan is facing an unprecedented water crisis due to declining rainfall, mismanagement of water resources, and climate change. The Pakistan Meteorological Department

reports that some regions, such as Sindh and Balochistan, have experienced up to a 52% reduction in rainfall, leading to drought conditions that threaten agriculture and daily life.

Pakistan, once a water-abundant country, is now among the most water-stressed nations in the world. The country crossed the "water stress line" in 1990 and the "water scarcity line" in 2005. By 2025, experts warn that Pakistan could completely run out of usable water if immediate action is not taken. Groundwater depletion is worsening, as over 90% of extracted groundwater is used for agriculture, often inefficiently. The World Bank estimates that Pakistan loses nearly 60% of its water due to poor irrigation systems, leaks, and wastage. Urban centers are also suffering. In Karachi, home to over 20 million people, the daily water supply falls short by nearly 50%, forcing residents to rely on expensive private tankers. Islamabad and Lahore are also experiencing severe shortages as groundwater levels drop alarmingly.

The agricultural sector, which contributes about 19% of Pakistan's GDP, is at risk. Major crops like wheat, cotton, and sugarcane are seeing reduced yields due to limited water availability. The situation is further aggravated by increasing glacial melt in the Himalayas, which initially boosts water supply but threatens long-term sustainability.

In response, Pakistan has partnered with the World Bank on a \$20 billion initiative to improve water conservation, clean energy, and climate resilience. However, without strong policy reforms, better water management, and investment in sustainable solutions, Pakistan's looming water crisis could escalate into a full-blown humanitarian disaster.

Causes of the Water Crisis

1. Climate Change and Its Impact

One of the most significant contributing factors to Pakistan's water crisis is the changing climate. With the country located in a region vulnerable to extreme weather events, the impacts of climate change are already being felt. Rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and an increase in the frequency of droughts and floods have intensified water shortages in both urban and rural areas. For instance, the glacial melt from the Himalayas and Karakoram mountain ranges, which feed into the Indus River system, has been accelerating due to rising temperatures. While this may provide temporary relief, it is not a sustainable solution, as these glaciers are predicted to be gone by the end of this century.

Additionally, changes in rainfall patterns have caused irregularities in water availability. In recent years, Pakistan has faced a significant reduction in annual rainfall, which has aggravated the situation. In 2023, the country experienced one of its driest years on record, with rainfall levels significantly below the average. The lack of rain not only exacerbates the water shortages but also leads to lower river flow and reduced water reserves in the country's dams. The situation in 2024 remains dire, with the Indus River, which is already experiencing reduced flow due to erratic rainfall, showing alarmingly low water levels.

2. Depleted Water Reserves in Dams

Pakistan's major dams—Tarbela, Mangla, and Chashma—are facing dangerously low water levels due to reduced rainfall and inadequate water storage capacity. According to the latest reports from Pakistan's Ministry of Water Resources, the water levels in these dams have reached critical lows, threatening not only the country's agricultural output but also its ability to generate hydropower. In 2023, water levels in the Tarbela Dam dropped to just 25% of their full capacity, a historic low that raised serious concerns about the country's ability to meet its water needs for both consumption and agriculture.

The Mangla Dam, which has historically been one of the country's most important reservoirs, also experienced significant depletion, with its water levels at their lowest in years. These reduced water reserves in major dams are putting enormous pressure on the country's ability to provide water for irrigation during the crucial rabi and kharif crop seasons. The lack of water storage has worsened the situation during dry spells, leaving farmers vulnerable and limiting Pakistan's agricultural productivity.

The declining water reserves in these dams are also impacting the country's power generation capacity. Pakistan's hydropower plants rely on consistent water flow from these dams, and with low water levels, electricity generation has dropped significantly, leading to power shortages and increased electricity tariffs. This vicious cycle of water scarcity and energy shortages is compounding Pakistan's economic woes.

3. Poor Water Management and Infrastructure

Pakistan's water management system, despite relying on the Indus River for over 90% of its water needs, is outdated and inefficient. The water distribution system, including dams, canals, and reservoirs, is in dire need of modernization. A considerable amount of water is lost due to leakage, mismanagement, and outdated infrastructure. Additionally, Pakistan's reliance on traditional irrigation systems, which waste water through inefficient practices, exacerbates the problem.

Pakistan has an extensive network of canals, but much of the system is plagued with issues such as poor maintenance, lack of modernization, and widespread corruption. The construction of new dams, which could potentially store more water and regulate supply, has been delayed for decades due to political disagreements, legal hurdles, and a lack of funding. The most significant example is the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, which has faced setbacks for years, despite being critical for the country's water storage needs.

4. Over-Extraction and Pollution

Another contributing factor is the over-extraction of groundwater. In rural areas, where access to surface water is limited, people are increasingly relying on groundwater. However, this extraction is unsustainable, leading to the rapid depletion of aquifers. In some urban areas like Karachi, water is extracted from deep underground sources that are now becoming costlier and harder to access. Over-extraction is also leading to land subsidence, which further exacerbates the problem.

Simultaneously, pollution is contaminating freshwater sources, especially in urban centers. Industrial effluents, agricultural runoff, and untreated sewage have contaminated rivers, streams, and groundwater, making it unsafe for consumption. Pakistan's wastewater treatment systems are inadequate, leaving water supplies polluted and unfit for drinking or agriculture. This situation is particularly alarming in cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, where population growth has outpaced water treatment infrastructure.

5. Political Challenges and Water Distribution Disputes

Water distribution in Pakistan has long been a contentious issue. The country's political structure makes it difficult to implement uniform water policies across provinces, leading to frequent conflicts. The Indus Waters Treaty, signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan, regulates the distribution of water from the Indus River and its tributaries. However, disagreements over water sharing and the construction of dams on both sides of the border have caused tensions between the two nations.

The recent construction of dams by India on rivers flowing into Pakistan has added fuel to these disputes.

Internally, there are also conflicts between provinces over the equitable distribution of water from the Indus River. Sindh and Punjab, the two most populous provinces, have long clashed over water rights, particularly regarding the construction of dams and the diversion of water for irrigation purposes. These disputes have hindered the development of a unified approach to water management and conservation.

The Socioeconomic Impact

Water scarcity in Pakistan is not just an environmental issue—it is a socioeconomic one as well. The country's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, with over 60% of its population working in this sector. The water crisis has a direct impact on crop yields, especially for staple crops like wheat, rice, and cotton. The reduction in agricultural productivity has led to increased food prices, which places a heavy burden on the poorest sections of society. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), more than 40% of Pakistan's population is already food insecure, and water shortages only make this situation worse.

In addition to the economic impact, water scarcity is contributing to internal migration. Many rural areas that depend on agriculture are seeing a rise in rural-to-urban migration as people move in search of better opportunities. Cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad are growing at an unprecedented rate, putting additional pressure on already strained water supplies. The increased demand for water in urban areas has led to water rationing in some regions, further worsening the living conditions of millions.

Solutions and Future Outlook

Addressing Pakistan's water crisis requires urgent and coordinated action at both the national and international levels. There are several solutions that, if imple-

mented effectively, could help mitigate the crisis:

1. Improved Water Management and Conservation

A more efficient water management system is essential for Pakistan's future. Modernizing the irrigation system and implementing better water conservation techniques is crucial. By adopting more efficient irrigation methods like drip irrigation, Pakistan can significantly reduce water wastage. The use of technology, such as satellite data, can also help monitor water usage and ensure that it is distributed equitably across the country.



2. Investing in Infrastructure and Storage

Building new dams, as well as rehabilitating and modernizing existing ones, is a critical step. Dams like Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand should be prioritized, and the government should focus on increasing water storage capacity. Furthermore, the construction of smaller dams and reservoirs to store water during the monsoon season could alleviate water shortages during dry periods.

3. Pollution Control and Wastewater Treatment

Pakistan must invest in better wastewater treatment facilities, especially in urban areas, to reduce pollution in rivers and groundwater. Moreover, industrial

practices need to be regulated to prevent harmful chemicals and waste from contaminating water sources. Public awareness campaigns on water conservation and pollution prevention could help reduce the strain on water resources.

4. Policy Reforms and Regional Cooperation

On a political level, Pakistan must focus on equitable water distribution between provinces, ensuring that water-sharing agreements are implemented fairly. The government should engage in dialogue with India to address cross-border water-sharing

concerns and explore ways to improve bilateral cooperation. Furthermore, Pakistan should strengthen its water diplomacy with neighboring countries to ensure better management of transboundary rivers. Pakistan's water crisis is a ticking time bomb that requires immediate attention. With the country already facing the consequences of water scarcity—be it in the form of agricultural loss, political conflict, or the displacement of people—there is little time left to act. Addressing the issues of water management, infrastructure development, pollution, and policy reform is essential for securing Pakistan's future. If the country fails to take urgent action, the economic and social consequences of water scarcity will continue to worsen, further destabilizing the region and affecting the lives of millions of people.

Pakistan's Champions Trophy 2025 Debacle: A Host Nation's Nightmare



By Romana Afsheen

Cricket fans worldwide tuned in with eager anticipation as the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 kicked off, marking a historic moment for Pakistan. This was the first time in 29 years that the country was hosting an ICC event, filling the air with optimism and national pride. The tournament promised fierce competition, with teams battling it out for glory on cricket's grand stage. However, for Pakistan, the tournament quickly turned into a nightmare, with a disappointing performance leading to their early elimination. Their struggles were met with intense scrutiny, including sharp criticism from none other than former Prime Minister and cricket legend Imran Khan. Meanwhile, New Zealand once again demonstrated their quiet dominance, proving that their consistency and resilience make them one of the most formidable teams in world cricket.

The Journey Begins: Pakistan's High Hopes and Harsh Reality

As the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 commenced, Pakistan entered the

tournament with immense expectations, carrying the weight of a passionate cricketing nation on its shoulders. For the first time in 29 years, Pakistan had the honor of hosting an International Cricket Council (ICC) event, a moment that reignited the fervor of cricket lovers across the country. The Green Shirts, led by Mohammad Rizwan, were the defending champions, having won the previous edition of the tournament in 2017. The anticipation surrounding their campaign was electrifying, with fans hoping that the team would make full use of home advantage and deliver a performance befitting their reputation.

Pakistan's journey into the Champions Trophy, however, was already clouded by a series of inconsistent performances in preceding international tournaments. Their dismal outing in the ODI World Cup 2023, where they won only four out of nine matches and finished in fifth place, had left fans disheartened. The disappointment was further compounded when they failed to progress past the group stage in the T20 World Cup 2024, suffering defeats against both India and an unexpected loss to the United States. These

setbacks raised concerns about the team's ability to perform under pressure and deliver on crucial occasions.

Despite these recent struggles, there was renewed hope as Pakistan stepped onto the field for their opening match against New Zealand. The return of international cricket to Pakistani soil was a historic moment, and the presence of a passionate crowd at National Stadium, Karachi, created an electrifying atmosphere. The players were aware that this was more than just another tournament; it was an opportunity to reassert their dominance on the world stage and prove their critics wrong.

The selection of the squad, however, raised eyebrows. Some of the decisions made by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) were met with skepticism. Experienced players were either overlooked or sidelined, and many questioned the leadership of Mohammad Rizwan, who was relatively new to captaining the side in a high-stakes tournament. Critics pointed out that Pakistan lacked a well-balanced combination, particularly in the middle order, and that their bowling attack, once

their greatest strength, was not as formidable as it had been in previous years.

Nevertheless, optimism prevailed. Pakistan had a history of unpredictable performances—capable of turning the tide when least expected. The team's ability to rise from the ashes had been witnessed on multiple occasions, including their famous Champions Trophy win in 2017, when they started as underdogs and went on to defeat India in a historic final. This unpredictability was both a strength and a weakness, as it meant they could either soar to glory or crumble under pressure.



As the first match against New Zealand approached, the excitement reached its peak. Pakistani fans, known for their unwavering support, filled the stadiums, donned green jerseys, and chanted slogans in favor of their team. Social media was abuzz with discussions, predictions, and debates over Pakistan's potential performance in the tournament. Cricket analysts debated whether the team would be able to overcome its recent shortcomings and play fearless cricket.

However, the harsh reality soon set in. The Green Shirts struggled right from their first game, losing to New Zealand by 60 runs. Their batting lineup faltered, unable to chase the competitive target set by the Kiwis. The bowlers, once feared across the cricketing world, lacked the cutting edge to restrict New Zealand's resilient batting order. This defeat set the tone for what would become a disappointing campaign for Pakistan, dashing the high hopes that millions had placed upon them.

Despite this setback, fans and cricket experts hoped for a strong comeback. But the road ahead only grew tougher as Pakistan faced their arch-rivals India in a highly anticipated encounter. The match, played in Dubai, saw Pakistan faltering once again, suffering a six-wicket defeat. Losing to India was particularly painful, as matches between the two nations transcend sport and carry deep emotional significance for fans on both sides. The disappointment was visible across the country, with many questioning the team's approach, strategy, and overall mindset.

The back-to-back defeats meant Pakistan's chances of progressing in the tournament now hinged on the outcomes of other matches. Unfortunately, fate did not favor them. With New Zealand defeating Bangladesh, Pakistan's elimination was sealed, cutting short their Champions Trophy journey in a heartbreaking manner. The dream of reclaiming the trophy on home soil had been shattered, leaving players and fans grappling with the harsh reality of the team's declining form on the global stage.

As the dust settled, discussions around Pakistan's performance intensified. Cricket legends, former players, and fans voiced their frustration, with many calling for structural changes within the PCB and a reevaluation of the team's strategy. The emotions ranged from anger to disappointment, as supporters tried to make sense of what had gone wrong for a team that once carried an aura of unpredictability and dominance.

The Champions Trophy 2025 was meant to

be Pakistan's redemption arc, a chance to restore their pride on the international stage. Instead, it exposed the deep flaws within the team, raising critical questions about leadership, selection policies, and the overall state of cricket in the country. What began as a journey of hope ended in bitter disappointment, leaving the nation yearning for answers and a roadmap to revival.

Match-by-Match Breakdown: Triumphs, Defeats, and Drama

Match 1: New Zealand vs Pakistan – A Stinging Opening Defeat

Venue: National Stadium, Karachi

Result: New Zealand won by 60 runs

Pakistan's campaign began on a disastrous note as they suffered a 60-run defeat at the hands of New Zealand. Batting first, the Black Caps posted a challenging total of 298, led by a brilliant century from Kane Williamson. In response, Pakistan's batting order crumbled under the disciplined Kiwi bowling attack, with only Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan showing some resistance.

The loss sent shockwaves through the Pakistani cricket fraternity, sparking early doubts about the team's ability to perform under pressure. Fans were left disappointed, and experts began questioning the team's strategy and selection choices.

Match 2: Bangladesh vs India – A Comfortable Chase for India

Venue: Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Result: India won by 6 wickets

India, always a strong contender, got off to a smooth start by chasing down Bangladesh's total with ease. Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli anchored the innings, showcasing India's batting depth. The win reaffirmed India's status as one of the favorites in the tournament.

Match 3: South Africa vs Afghanistan – A Dominant Victory

Venue: National Stadium, Karachi

Result: South Africa won by 107 runs

South Africa made an early statement with a comprehensive win over Afghanistan. Their batting fired on all cylinders, and the bowlers wrapped up the Afghan lineup efficiently. This victory positioned them as a strong contender in Group B.



Match 4: England vs Australia – The Ashes Rivalry Ignites

Venue: Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore

Result: Australia won by 5 wickets

The marquee clash between arch-rivals England and Australia lived up to expectations, with Australia successfully chasing England's target. A strong middle-order performance sealed the win for the Aussies, reinforcing their title ambitions.

Match 5: Pakistan vs India – A Heartbreaking Defeat

Venue: Dubai International Cricket Stadium, Dubai

Result: India won by 6 wickets

The most anticipated match of the tournament saw Pakistan suffer another demoralizing loss. Batting first, Pakistan posted a below-par 245, despite a steady knock from Babar Azam. India chased the target comfortably, with KL Rahul and Virat Kohli ensuring a smooth victory. The loss

triggered widespread disappointment and a scathing reaction from Imran Khan, who lamented the state of Pakistan cricket.

Match 6: Bangladesh vs New Zealand – Another Kiwi Masterclass

Venue: Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, Rawalpindi

Result: New Zealand won by 5 wickets

New Zealand continued their stellar form,

securing another comfortable victory. Their balanced approach, combining disciplined bowling and clinical batting, further established them as tournament favorites.

What Went Wrong for Pakistan?

Pakistan's early exit raised pressing questions about the team's strategy, selection, and leadership. Led by Mohammad Rizwan, the team struggled with inconsistency, lack of planning, and an apparent absence of resilience. Their defeat to New Zealand exposed weaknesses in both batting and bowling. Against India, the inability to handle pressure cost them dearly.

A major issue was the underwhelming performance of the middle order. Players who had been expected to deliver under pressure failed to step up. Additionally, Pakistan's bowling attack, once feared worldwide, appeared toothless. The lack of strategic decision-making further compounded their woes, with questionable

squad selection and ineffective captaincy drawing criticism from fans and experts alike.

Imran Khan's Reaction: A Scathing Critique

One of the most vocal critics of Pakistan's performance was none other than PTI founder and cricket legend Imran Khan. Despite being incarcerated, Khan's words resonated far and wide. His sister, Aleema Khan, relayed his thoughts to journalists outside Adiala Jail, highlighting his deep disappointment.

Imran Khan, a cricketing mastermind who led Pakistan to World Cup victory in 1992, did not hold back. He blamed favoritism in leadership positions for the downfall of Pakistan cricket. According to him, appointing individuals based on connections rather than merit was destroying the sport in the country. He expressed particular dismay over the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi's role, questioning his cricketing credentials. "Cricket will be eventually destroyed when favorites are put in decision-making positions," he said, pointing fingers at the leadership choices in the PCB. His remarks were fueled by Pakistan's string of losses, particularly against arch-rival India.

PTI Secretary-General Salman Akram Raja echoed Khan's sentiments, emphasizing that cricket was a passion deeply embedded in Pakistan's identity. He stated that the sport had been reduced to a mere joke due to years of mismanagement and incompetence. The outcry from Khan and his party sparked debates on whether Pakistan's cricketing infrastructure needed urgent reforms to restore past glory.

New Zealand's Quiet Dominance: A Team Built on Resilience

While Pakistan struggled, New Zealand once again proved why they are one of the most respected teams in world cricket. The Kiwis, often seen as underdogs, have a reputation for performing on the biggest stages with remarkable consistency. Their campaign began with an emphatic victory against Pakistan, setting the tone for their dominance.

New Zealand's resilience was on full display throughout the tournament. Their ability to adapt to different conditions and execute game plans with precision was remarkable. They followed up their win against Pakistan with another strong performance against Bangladesh, securing a place in the semi-finals with ease. Their disciplined approach, sharp fielding, and composed batting lineup made them a formidable opponent for any team.

Unlike teams that rely on star power, New Zealand thrives on collective effort. Their ability to rotate players effectively and back each other in tough situations makes them stand out. The leadership of Kane Williamson has been instrumental in shaping a team that consistently punches above its weight. While other teams struggle with unpredictability, New Zealand's structured approach and tactical awareness continue to bring them success on the global stage.

Fan and Player Reactions: Disappointment and Frustration

The reaction from Pakistani fans was a mix of heartbreak, frustration, and anger. Social media exploded with criticism, with many blaming the PCB for the team's lackluster performance. Fans questioned the team's fitness, selection decisions, and overall strategy. The repeated failures in major tournaments, including the 2023 ODI World Cup and the 2024 T20 World Cup,

only added to their agony.

For Pakistani players, the disappointment was evident. Skipper Mohammad Rizwan acknowledged the team's shortcomings but urged fans to remain patient. Star batsman Babar Azam, who had been under scrutiny for his performances, expressed his regret over the team's early exit, stating that they needed to reflect and make significant improvements.

Meanwhile, other cricketing nations took note of Pakistan's decline. Former cricketers and analysts weighed in on the crisis, with many urging PCB to rethink its approach. Critics emphasized the need for stability, better infrastructure, and a long-term vision to ensure Pakistan's cricketing future remains competitive.

The Road Ahead for Pakistan Cricket

Pakistan's early exit from the Champions Trophy 2025 serves as a wake-up call for the PCB and the team. The need for structural reforms is more urgent than ever. The focus must shift from short-term fixes to long-term planning, with an emphasis on nurturing young talent, improving domestic cricket, and ensuring transparency in leadership appointments.

While Imran Khan's remarks may have been blunt, they highlight an undeniable truth: Pakistan cricket needs a fresh approach. The nation has a rich cricketing history, and with the right leadership and

reforms, it can reclaim its lost stature in international cricket.

For now, the Champions Trophy 2025 will be remembered as yet another missed opportunity for Pakistan. But with a renewed commitment to improvement, the Men in Green can rise again, learning from their mistakes and striving for a future where they compete at the highest level once more.

Conclusion: Lessons and the Road Ahead

While the Champions Trophy 2025 was a disappointment for Pakistan, it provided valuable lessons. The backlash from Imran Khan and cricketing experts signals a call for major reforms in Pakistan's cricket administration.

On the other hand, New Zealand once again proved why they are one of the most consistent teams in world cricket. Their methodical approach and unwavering commitment to excellence ensure they remain a dominant force in international tournaments.

As the cricketing world moves forward, Pakistan must reflect on its shortcomings and rebuild with a clear vision, while New Zealand will look to capitalize on their momentum and add yet another feather to their illustrious cap.

One thing is certain: the Champions Trophy 2025 has set the stage for a thrilling new chapter in international cricket.



Pakistan Returns to the Global Stage by Hosting ICC Tournament After 29 Years



By Saad Jadoon

Cricket has always been more than just a sport in Pakistan. It is a passion, a unifying force, and a source of national pride. For decades, cricket has been woven into the country's cultural fabric, capturing the hearts of millions. However, Pakistan was excluded from hosting major international cricket tournaments for nearly three decades due to security concerns, political instability, and the global cricketing community's reluctance to play on Pakistani soil.

Fast forward to 2025, and Pakistan is poised to make a monumental return to the global cricket stage. The announcement that the country will host the ICC Champions Trophy in February 2025 marks a historic moment for Pakistan cricket. This is the first time in 29 years that an ICC tournament will be hosted in Pakistan, and it has reignited hope, excitement, and national pride. The return of international cricket to Pakistan signifies the end of a long drought and the beginning of a new chapter for the nation's cricketing future.

The Struggles and Setbacks: A Brief History

Pakistan's relationship with international cricket has not been without its challenges. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Pakistan was a dominant force in the cricket world, with players like Wasim Akram, Imran Khan, and Javed Miandad etching their names into the annals of cricket history. The country frequently hosts major international tournaments, with matches being played in iconic stadiums such as the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and the National Stadium in Karachi. However, the turn of the millennium saw a rapid decline in Pakistan's standing as a host nation due to security issues.

The watershed moment came in 2009 when a terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore brought international cricket in Pakistan to a halt. The attack, which injured several players and killed several police officers, forced the international community to reconsider touring

Pakistan. For years, Pakistan was forced to play "home" matches in neutral venues, particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and it became increasingly difficult to attract major international tournaments to the country.

The absence of international teams left a vacuum in Pakistan's cricketing ecosystem. Fans in Pakistan, once accustomed to watching world-class cricket in their stadiums, had to settle for viewing matches from afar. While the Pakistan Super League (PSL) gained popularity and helped rejuvenate domestic cricket, the void left by the absence of international fixtures remained a sore point for fans and players alike.

A Turning Point: The Return of International Cricket

Despite the challenges, Pakistan never gave up on its dream of bringing international cricket back to its shores. Over the years,

the country made significant strides in improving its security situation, and the government worked closely with international agencies to ensure the safety of foreign players. In 2015, Pakistan began hosting the Pakistan Super League in its entirety, and by 2017, matches began returning to Pakistan, including the PSL final in Lahore.

The successful hosting of the PSL in Pakistan proved that the country was ready to safely host international cricket once again. The event was a major success, with foreign players participating and the stadiums filled with passionate fans. As a result, other teams began to show interest in touring Pakistan once more.



In 2021, Pakistan's efforts to host international teams were further validated when they hosted a full series against top-tier teams such as England, New Zealand, and South Africa. These series, although played under strict security measures, showed that Pakistan was capable of hosting international cricket in a safe and secure environment.

A Historic Milestone: The ICC Champions Trophy 2025

The announcement of Pakistan as the host of the ICC Champions Trophy in 2025 marks a defining moment for the country's cricketing landscape. The Champions Trophy is one of the most prestigious tournaments in international cricket, featuring the best teams from around the

world. The tournament, which is set to take place in Pakistan for the first time in nearly three decades, is expected to bring together teams from the cricketing elite, including traditional rivals like India, Australia, England, and South Africa.

For Pakistan, hosting the ICC Champions Trophy is more than just a tournament; it is a symbolic return to the global cricketing stage. The country's ability to host such a prestigious event demonstrates the progress it has made in overcoming the security challenges of the past. The event will also serve as a testament to the resilience of Pakistani cricket and the passion of its fans, who have long yearned for the return of international cricket to their shores.

The Economic and Social Impact of Hosting the ICC Champions Trophy

Hosting the ICC Champions Trophy is not just a win for Pakistan's cricket team; it is a victory for the country as a whole. The event will have a significant impact on Pakistan's economy, particularly in sectors like tourism, hospitality, and retail. With the tournament expected to attract thousands of international visitors, the demand for hotels, restaurants, transportation, and other services will soar. This influx of tourists will provide a much-needed boost to Pakistan's economy, especially in cities like Lahore, Karachi, and Rawalpindi, where the matches will be held.

In addition to the economic benefits, the Champions Trophy will also create

employment opportunities for Pakistanis. From event organizers and security personnel to hospitality workers and local vendors, the tournament will provide thousands of jobs and help stimulate the local economy. Moreover, the event will showcase Pakistan's cultural richness, with cricket fans from all over the world experiencing the warmth and hospitality of the Pakistani people.

The Impact on Pakistani Cricket

For Pakistan's cricket team, the ICC Champions Trophy is an opportunity to make a statement on home soil. The team, led by Captain Muhammad Rizwan, has been performing well in recent times, and the tournament provides them with a chance to showcase their talent in front of passionate home fans. The experience of playing in front of a home crowd, which has been absent for most of the players' careers, will be an emotional and motivating factor.

The atmosphere in the stadiums will undoubtedly provide a boost to the team's morale, and the pressure of performing in front of their home fans will drive the players to deliver their best performances.

The ICC Champions Trophy will also allow Pakistan to build its cricketing infrastructure and legacy. The tournament will shine a spotlight on the country's newly renovated stadiums, such as the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, the National Stadium in Karachi, and the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. These venues, which have undergone significant upgrades, are now equipped to handle world-class cricket events and provide fans with an unforgettable experience.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Cricket in Pakistan

The ICC Champions Trophy in 2025 is only the beginning of Pakistan's journey back to the top of world cricket. With the success of the PSL and the return of international teams, Pakistan is poised to continue its rise as a cricketing powerhouse. The country's commitment to developing its grassroots cricket programs, improving its coaching infrastructure, and

fostering young talent ensures that Pakistan's cricketing future is bright.

The ICC Champions Trophy will also provide valuable experience for the players, which will be crucial in preparing them for future international tournaments such as the ICC World Cup and the T20 World Cup. With a young and talented squad, Pakistan is well-positioned to compete at the highest level and challenge for major titles in the coming years.

Cricket Experts' Prediction for Champions Trophy

Former Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, the "Rawalpindi Express," has named Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India as the top contenders for the semi-finals of the upcoming tournament.

Former England captain and commentator Kevin Pietersen has made his predictions for the upcoming Champions Trophy, naming the top four teams he believes will shine, while notably omitting two of the world's strongest cricket sides. Pietersen suggested that Pakistan, India, South Africa, and New Zealand are the teams to watch, with these nations poised to make a deep run in the tournament and secure a semifinal spot.

Cricketing legends Ricky Ponting and Ravi Shastri, meanwhile, expect India and



Australia to once again face off in the final. Shastri also included England and South Africa as potential semi-finalists but ultimately backed India and Australia to reach the final. Although not considered top favorites, Shastri noted that Pakistan's recent white-ball experience and strong performances could make them a surprise package in the tournament.

Former Australian captain Michael Clarke has selected India, Pakistan, Australia, and New Zealand as his picks for the semifinals.

Pakistan's return to the global cricketing

stage, marked by hosting the ICC Champions Trophy in 2025, is a momentous occasion for the country. After 29 years of challenges and setbacks, Pakistan is finally reaping the rewards of its hard work and perseverance. The tournament will not only showcase Pakistan's cricketing talent but also highlight the nation's ability to host world-class events. As Pakistan welcomes the world back to its cricketing fold, the ICC Champions Trophy will symbolize the country's resilience, passion, and love for the game of cricket. It is a historic moment that will undoubtedly shape the future of cricket in Pakistan for generations to come.



Dunes of Cholistan: The Ultimate Rally



By Hina Kashif

The Cholistan Jeep Rally started in 2005, and it was initiated as a way to promote tourism, adventure sports, and showcase the unique culture and beauty of the Cholistan Desert, located in southern Punjab, Pakistan.

The rally was designed to highlight the desert's harsh yet mesmerizing landscape and attract local and international visitors. It also aimed to raise awareness about the desert's heritage, wildlife, and traditions while boosting local economies through tourism. The event is also intended to celebrate Pakistan's rich motorsport culture by involving off-road vehicle enthusiasts in a thrilling competition.

Since its inception, the rally has grown in popularity and has become one of Pakistan's most exciting motorsport events. It typically takes place every February, offering an exciting and challenging race through the rugged desert terrain. The Cholistan Jeep Rally has not only attracted local drivers but has also drawn international participants, making it a significant event in the country's motorsport calendar.

Cholistan Desert

History of the Cholistan Desert

Ancient Civilization: The Cholistan Desert has a long history dating back to ancient civilizations. It is believed that the region was once inhabited by the Indus Valley Civilization, one of the world's earliest urban cultures that existed around 2500 BCE. Evidence of early human settlements, including pottery, tools, and other artifacts, has been found in the area.

Invasions and Empires: Over the centuries, the Cholistan Desert became a part of several powerful empires, including the Mughals, Rajputs, and later the British Empire. During the Mughal period, the region saw a flourishing of architecture, with impressive fortresses and buildings constructed by rulers who saw strategic value in the desert's trade routes.

Bahawalpur State (1700s - 1947): The Bahawalpur princely state played a significant role in shaping the desert's history. Founded in the early 18th century,

the state developed as a key region in southern Punjab, with Bahawalpur being the capital. The desert served as a trade route and a strategic point for the empire. Many of the region's forts and historical sites, such as Derawar Fort and the Lal Suhanra National Park, were built during this period, showcasing the architectural influence of the time.

Post-Independence: After Pakistan's independence in 1947, the Cholistan Desert became part of the newly-formed nation. The region's distinctive culture, economy, and lifestyle continued to thrive, even as the political landscape shifted. It has remained an important cultural center in southern Punjab.

Cholistan Jeep Rally: Origins and Significance

The Cholistan Jeep Rally began in 2005 as an effort to boost tourism, engage local communities, and celebrate the adventure sports culture in Pakistan. The rally is not just a motorsport event but a blend of Pakistan's rich history, culture, and the natural beauty of the Cholistan Desert.

Here's why and how the rally began:

1. **Promotion of Adventure Tourism:** Pakistan's government and tourism authorities were looking for ways to promote adventure tourism in the country. The Cholistan Desert, with its challenging and rugged terrain, presented a perfect backdrop for off-road racing. This event was designed to draw attention to the natural beauty of the region and attract both local and international visitors.
2. **Cultural and Economic Revival:** By involving local communities, particularly in Bahawalpur and the surrounding areas, the rally aimed to revitalize the local economy. Tourism, particularly through such events, became an essential source of income for these regions. The rally helped raise awareness of the traditional lifestyle of the Cholistan Desert's nomadic tribes, as well as the desert's historical significance.
3. **First Event in 2005:** The first Cholistan Jeep Rally was organized in 2005 under the auspices of the Bahawalpur District Administration and the Punjab Sports Department. The event quickly gained popularity, becoming one of the most prominent motorsport events in Pakistan.
4. **Growth and Recognition:** Over the years, the Cholistan Jeep Rally has grown in size and importance, attracting more drivers, both from Pakistan and abroad. The event now includes several categories: from professional off-road racing to amateur categories, as well as motorcycle and quad bike races. It has become an integral part of the motorsport calendar in Pakistan, drawing hundreds of participants and thousands of spectators.

The rally has become a major tourist attraction, with people traveling from across the country and abroad to experience the adrenaline rush of the race, witness traditional performances, and learn more about the unique cultural heritage of the Cholistan Desert.

Key Features of the Cholistan Jeep Rally:

1. **Challenging Terrain:** The rally takes

participants through the rugged desert terrain, with its shifting sand dunes, rocky patches, and unpredictable weather conditions. It is an extremely challenging race, requiring skill and strategy from participants, as well as the right kind of off-road vehicles.

2. **Traditional Cultural Displays:** Apart from the race itself, the Cholistan Jeep Rally is an opportunity to experience the traditional culture of the region. Local music, folk dances, and exhibitions of the area's craftsmanship are a significant part of the event, bringing the Cholistan Desert's culture to life.



3. **Promotion of Local Businesses:** The rally encourages local businesses, especially those in handicrafts, tourism, and hospitality, to participate. It helps boost the local economy by bringing in tourists and creating opportunities for small businesses to thrive during the event.
4. **International Participation:** The event has grown in prominence over the years and now attracts international participants, including from neighboring countries like India and Afghanistan, as well as global motorsport enthusiasts.

Eligibility and Participation in the Cholistan Jeep Rally

The Cholistan Jeep Rally is open to both professional and amateur off-road enthusiasts from Pakistan and around the world. However, participants must meet specific requirements to be eligible for the competition. Here's an outline of who can partici-

pate and the vehicles they need for the rally, as well as the selection process:

Who Can Participate?

1. Categories of Participants:

- o **Professional Drivers:** These are experienced off-road racers with a proven track record in motorsports, particularly in off-road events.
- o **Amateur Drivers:** Individuals who may not have significant professional racing experience but have a passion for off-road racing and meet the basic requirements.

- o **Local Participants:** Many local participants from the Punjab region, particularly from Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and surrounding areas, are encouraged to take part, adding local flavor to the competition.
- o **International Drivers:** In recent years, the rally has attracted international participants, particularly from neighboring countries like India, Afghanistan, and other countries with an off-road motorsport presence.

2. Driver's License and Age Requirement:

- o Drivers must possess a valid driving license, with some experience in off-road driving.
- o The minimum age requirement for participation is generally 18 years, though some categories may have age limits depending on the event's rules.

3. Team Participation:

- o A participant may race as part of a team. These teams may consist of the



driver, co-driver (navigator), and a support crew. The co-driver helps navigate the desert terrain and assists in strategy, especially when driving through difficult parts of the course.

- o Teams must have basic safety and medical equipment in place, as well as a support vehicle.

Required Vehicles for the Cholistan Jeep Rally

1. Types of Vehicles:

- o The rally is designed specifically for off-road vehicles. These vehicles need to be modified for desert terrain, capable of handling rough, uneven, and shifting sand dunes, rocky patches, and unpredictable weather conditions.
- o 4x4 Vehicles: Most participants use four-wheel-drive (4x4) vehicles, which are essential for navigating the desert terrain. Common choices include:
 - Jeep Cherokee
 - Land Cruiser
 - Suzuki Vitara
 - Toyota Land Cruiser
 - Nissan Patrol
 - Mitsubishi Pajero
- o Other 4x4 Off-Road Vehicles: Besides Jeeps, other off-road vehicles such as buggies, quads, ATVs (All-Terrain Vehicles), and dune buggies may also

participate, depending on the rally categories and vehicle eligibility criteria.

2. Vehicle Modifications:

- o Suspension Modifications: Since the desert terrain is rough and uneven, suspension modifications are required to handle high-impact landings on sand dunes.
- o Tires: Off-road tires are a necessity, with deep treads designed to handle soft sand and provide traction on slippery surfaces.
- o Roll Cages: Roll cages are often required to ensure driver safety in the event of an accident or rollover.
- o Safety Features: Additional safety equipment, such as fire extinguishers, first aid kits, communication radios, and satellite tracking systems, is mandatory for all vehicles.
- o Fuel Tanks: Extended fuel tanks are necessary to ensure vehicles can cover the long distances between refueling points in the desert.

Selection Process for Participation

1. Registration:

- o Online Registration: Interested participants must register online or through official channels set up by the Bahawalpur District Administration

or the Punjab Sports Department. Registration details include personal information, vehicle specifications, and team details.

- o Documentation: Participants are required to submit certain documents during registration, including proof of identity, a valid driving license, and possibly past experience in off-road events.

2. Eligibility Check:

- o After registration, the event organizers conduct an eligibility check to ensure all participants and their vehicles meet the necessary requirements. This includes:
 - Verification of vehicle specifications (engine size, modifications, safety features, etc.).
 - Ensuring that the participant has the required driving experience or meets the age and licensing criteria.
 - Review of the team's safety preparedness, including medical kits and communication tools.

3. Vehicle Inspection:

- o All participating vehicles must undergo a technical inspection to ensure they are ready for the demanding conditions of the desert rally. This inspection assesses:
 - Vehicle condition: Ensuring the car is fit for off-road conditions.

- **Modifications:** Verifying that all modifications adhere to rally regulations.

- **Safety equipment:** Ensuring that the vehicle is equipped with essential safety gear (seat belts, roll cages, fire extinguishers, etc.).

4. Training and Briefing:

- o Before the rally begins, participants may be required to attend a pre-race briefing organized by the event organizers. The briefing covers:

- Course layout and navigation instructions for the drivers and co-drivers.

- Rules and regulations of the rally, including safety protocols and environmental guidelines.

- Medical and emergency procedures, especially since the desert can be a dangerous environment.

5. Qualification Rounds (if applicable):

- o For more competitive categories, there might be qualifying rounds to ensure that only the most skilled drivers advance to the main event. These qualifying rounds often involve timed tests on short, controlled courses to assess the driver's abilities in handling the vehicles in challenging desert terrain.



Rally Categories and Format

1. Professional and Amateur Categories:

- o The rally is usually divided into professional and amateur categories based on the experience level of the participants.

- o Professional participants may compete in a faster, more competitive section, while amateurs race in a less demanding category designed for those with less experience.

2. Other Categories:

- o Quad Bikes and ATVs: These are a separate category where participants

race on all-terrain vehicles.

- o **Trophy Categories:** Special trophy categories may be introduced for specific vehicle types or participants, such as the best local team or special awards for the oldest or most unique vehicles.

The Cholistan Jeep Rally not only serves as a platform for motorsport enthusiasts to test their driving skills but also highlights the beauty, heritage, and resilience of the Cholistan Desert. The event has become an integral part of the region's cultural calendar, helping to preserve its history while introducing it to a global audience. It is a unique fusion of adventure, culture, history, and tourism that showcases the distinct identity of one of Pakistan's most fascinating regions.





الخدمت فاؤنڈیشن پاکستان
ALKHIDMAT FOUNDATION PAKISTAN

PALESTINE

EMERGENCY APPEAL

SEND AID TO GAZA &
SAVE LIVES TODAY



Medical Aid



Shelter



Food Packs

Donate Now

alkhidmat.org/donate

MEEZAN BANK: 0214-0100861151

IBAN: PK35MEZN0002140100861151 Swift code: MEZNPCCA

 **0800 44 448**