

Fortnightly

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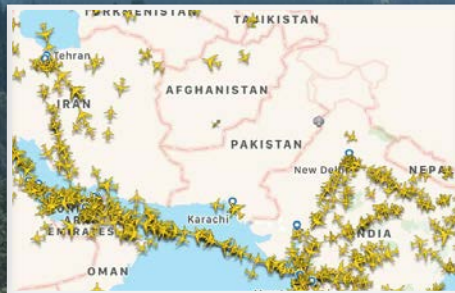
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What does it mean for Pakistan?

India's Dirty War  
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New Budget for 2025-26  
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## PAHALGAM 'FALSE FLAG OPERATION' RESPONSE

### PAKISTAN SUSPENDS TRADE WITH INDIA, CLOSES WAHGA BORDER AND AIRSPACE





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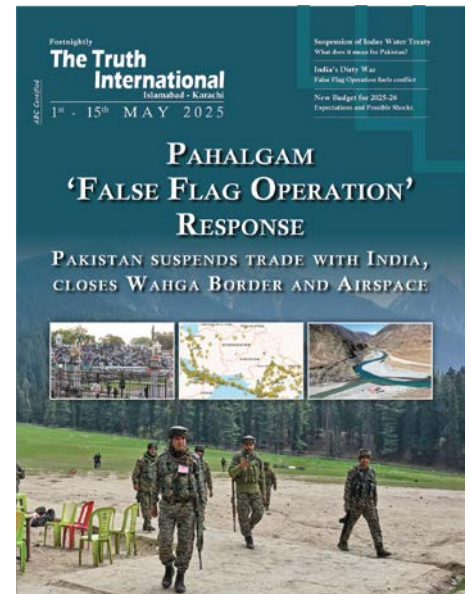
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# Indus Water Treaty Suspension and Record Low Snowfall in Hindu Kush Himalayas Signal Water Crisis for Pakistan



The Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) mountain range—spanning from Afghanistan to Myanmar and often called the "Third Pole" for its vast ice reserves beyond the Arctic and Antarctic—has recorded its lowest snowfall in 23 years, driven by accelerating climate change. This dramatic decline in snow and ice poses a serious threat to the water security of nearly two billion people who rely on the region's river systems. Additionally, India has announced the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty unilaterally, and this scenario could trigger a water crisis in Pakistan.

A new study by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), an intergovernmental body representing Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, found that the 2024–25 winter saw snow persistence levels (the duration snow remains on the ground) drop by 23.6 percent below normal for the third year in a row.

The UN's World Meteorological Orga-

nization (WMO) also reported last month that five of the past six years have seen record rates of glacier retreat.

Experts warn that, at the current pace, the glaciers of the HKH, which make up the world's largest freshwater reservoirs outside the poles, could shrink by two-thirds by the end of the century. Such a loss would have devastating consequences for agriculture, energy production, and economic stability across the region.

Pakistan, home to over 7,000 glaciers—the largest concentration outside the Polar Regions—is already grappling with the environmental fallout. Communities in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral have suffered from glacial lake outburst floods and landslides, while shifting rainfall patterns are damaging homes, farmlands, and critical infrastructure.

The rapid warming of the HKH is fueled by greenhouse gas emissions from both older industrial economies and newer heavy polluters like India

and China, making the region heat up faster than the global average and accelerating glacier melt at an alarming rate. Scientists have long warned that unchecked glacial melting would trigger cycles of floods and droughts. That warning is now becoming reality, with longer, hotter summers and more frequent heatwaves already affecting millions. Several countries have issued drought alerts to farmers as water supplies dwindle.

The ICIMOD report serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need to address climate change's devastating impact on the water flows of twelve major river basins, including Pakistan's Indus River system—the backbone of its agriculture-based economy. Already one of the world's most water-stressed nations, Pakistan must act swiftly to strengthen regional and international cooperation. Equally critical is the rapid implementation of climate adaptation and mitigation strategies to safeguard its precious water resources for future generations.

# Pahalgam ‘False Flag Operation’ Response: Pakistan suspends trade with India, closes Wagah Border and airspace



By Kanwal Munir

## What was the Pahalgam Attack?

On April 22, 2025, the picturesque town of Pahalgam in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) was rocked by a devastating terrorist attack that claimed the lives of 26 individuals, including 25 Indian nationals and one Nepalese tourist. The incident occurred in the Baisaran meadow, a popular tourist spot known for its scenic beauty and as a base for the Amarnath Yatra, an annual Hindu pilgrimage. The attackers, identified as militants from the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) group, carried out a targeted assault on a group of tourists, indiscriminately opening fire on them. This brutal attack left at least 17 others injured, with several critically wounded.

The attack has drawn widespread condemnation both in India and abroad, not only for its horrific nature but also because it came at a time of fragile peace in the region. The rise of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, fueled by local separatist movements and external militant groups, has long been a source of tension between India

and Pakistan. However, the Pahalgam attack marked a new high in the violence targeting civilians and tourists, further destabilizing an already volatile situation.

## Was the Pahalgam Attack a False Flag Operation?

Following the deadly Pahalgam attack, speculation and conspiracy theories began to circulate across various platforms. Some voices, particularly on social media, suggested the possibility of a false flag operation—an attack allegedly orchestrated by Indian agencies or external actors to justify heightened military presence or to target militant groups in the region. These theories are not new, as similar narratives have emerged after previous attacks in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

However, there is no credible evidence to support such claims. The attack was swiftly claimed by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a Pakistan-based militant organization with a long history of operations in the region. Indian intelli-

gence and security analysts pointed to the group's past involvement in high-profile attacks and noted that the Pahalgam strike bore the hallmarks of LeT's modus operandi—targeting civilians in a high-tourism zone to maximize psychological and political impact.

While critics have referenced India's history of blaming Pakistan for unrest in Kashmir, suggesting a political motive, these arguments remain largely speculative. In the absence of any solid proof or whistleblower revelations, the theory of a false flag operation lacks foundation. All signs indicate a coordinated terrorist attack, not a staged event.

## Viral Video Sparks Misinformation Storm

Amid the emotional aftermath of the attack, a misleading video added to the chaos. The clip, shared widely on platforms like X, Instagram, and Facebook, claimed to show Indian Navy officer Lt. Vinay Narwal dancing with his wife during their honeymoon—moments before his alleged death in the attack.



The video was later debunked by Indian journalist Sachin Gupta, who posted a follow-up showing the actual couple in the video—Yashika Shish Sahrawat and Yashika Sharma Sahrawat—explaining that they were alive and uninvolved in the incident. They condemned the spread of their personal video as deeply distressing and urged social media users to verify facts before sharing.

This episode highlighted how misinformation during crises can amplify grief, cause confusion, and harm innocent people already grappling with tragedy.

## India's Response to the Attack

India's response to the Pahalgam attack was swift and forceful. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, alongside senior officials, immediately condemned the attack and vowed to take punitive action against those responsible. The attack was perceived as part of a broader pattern of militant violence in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly involving groups supported by Pakistan.

The Indian government's response came in the form of both diplomatic and military measures:

1. **Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT):** In an unprecedented move, India announced the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, a 1960 agreement between India and Pakistan on the shared use of river waters in the Indus basin. The treaty, considered a vital lifeline for Pakistan, governs the distribution of water from rivers that flow through both countries. India's decision to suspend the treaty was seen as a retaliatory action, signaling that India would no longer tolerate what it sees as Pakistan's support for cross-border terrorism. The move immediately escalated tensions between the two countries, with Pakistan warning that any violation of the treaty would be regarded as an "act of war."
2. **Diplomatic Measures:** In addition to military actions, India responded diplomatically by expelling Pakistani diplomats from New Delhi and calling

for an international coalition to address Pakistan's alleged sponsorship of terrorism. India also summoned the Pakistani High Commissioner to register a formal protest, demanding that Pakistan take concrete steps to eliminate terrorist cells operating from its soil.

3. **Military Countermeasures:** On the military front, India launched counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir to neutralize militant threats. Special forces were deployed, and air surveillance was increased to track down any militant groups operating in the area. These operations were aimed at preventing further attacks and dismantling the infrastructure supporting such terrorism.
4. **Closure of Border Post:** India also closed the Wagah Border Crossing—one of the few land routes between India and Pakistan. The closure affected trade and travel and served as another sign of India's determination to take a hardline approach to Pakistan's alleged support for terrorism.

India's actions in response to the Pahalgam attack reflect a broader policy of zero tolerance for terrorism emanating from Pakistan. By suspending the Indus Waters Treaty and taking strong military and diplomatic measures, India sent a clear message that it would not hesitate to take decisive actions to defend its sovereignty.

## Modi Government Admits Security Lapse in Pahalgam Attack

During a high-level all-party meeting led by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the Indian government acknowledged security failures that may have contributed to the Pahalgam attack. A member of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidly admitted, "There have been lapses somewhere that we have to find out."

Opposition leaders, including Asaduddin Owaisi and Rahul Gandhi, demanded answers. They criticized the absence of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in the Baisaran area, a

known tourist hotspot. It was revealed that local authorities had opened the area without coordinating with central security forces, and no specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) existed for that zone.

Former Army Chief General VP Malik labeled the incident a "clear intelligence failure," especially given the heavy footfall during tourist season. Meanwhile, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) passed a resolution blaming Pakistan but also calling for an internal review of India's three-tier security structure in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting exposed growing political tensions, especially after journalist Rakesh Sharma was allegedly assaulted by BJP workers in Kathua for questioning the government's responsibility. The incident has added fuel to a national debate over India's security preparedness in conflict-prone regions.

## Pakistan's Response and the Role of the National Security Committee (NSC)

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, Pakistan was quick to reject India's allegations that it was responsible for orchestrating the violence. Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the attack in the strongest terms, calling it an act of terrorism that must be condemned irrespective of its origin. Pakistan also reiterated its longstanding position that it was not involved in any such attack and that the situation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) was the result of the Indian government's repression of Kashmiri Muslims.

The Pakistani government rejected the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, calling it a politically motivated move by India aimed at escalating tensions. Pakistan also expressed concerns over India's broader military activities in the region, particularly the increased military presence in Kashmir, which Pakistan argued was leading to greater violence and instability.

## National Security Committee (NSC) Meeting

On April 24, 2025, Pakistan's National Security Committee (NSC), which includes Pakistan's top civilian and military leadership, convened a special meeting to discuss the situation in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack. The NSC is the highest-level decision-making body in Pakistan on matters related to national security and foreign policy. The meeting was presided over by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and attended by military chiefs, intelligence officials, and key government ministers.

The NSC's primary objectives were to assess the situation, respond to India's allegations, and formulate Pakistan's response to India's aggressive actions. The committee's deliberations focused on several key issues:

### 1. Rejection of Indian Allegations

The National Security Committee (NSC) of Pakistan categorically rejected the allegations made by the Indian government that Pakistan was behind the Pahalgam terror attack. The committee, led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and attended by top civilian and military leadership, stated that the Indian accusations were unfounded, and part of a sustained disinformation campaign aimed at maligning Pakistan's global reputation.

The NSC pointed out that blaming Pakistan for every incident in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) had become a default Indian strategy to divert attention from its internal governance and intelligence failures. The committee cited India's history of scapegoating Pakistan without evidence, especially in high-profile attacks, to deflect criticism from its security apparatus and suppress Kashmiri dissent.

Pakistan also raised concerns over the timing of the allegations, suggesting that they were politically motivated—possibly aimed at creating a hostile atmosphere ahead of Indian elections or to justify increased militarization in Kashmir. The NSC highlighted that no credible investigation had been launched by India before pointing fingers at Pakistan, thereby

violating international norms of due process and transparency.

### 2. Diplomatic and Military Measures

In a strong diplomatic move, the NSC announced the immediate suspension of all existing bilateral agreements with India, notably including the Simla Agreement of 1972 and the Lahore Declaration of 1999. These agreements had long served as cornerstones for peaceful engagement and conflict resolution between the two countries. By suspending them, Pakistan effectively declared that the current Indian leadership had rendered these frameworks meaningless through unilateral actions in Kashmir and continued hostility.



The military was instructed to enhance operational readiness along the Line of Control (LoC) and the Working Boundary. Pakistan's armed forces increased surveillance activities and intelligence coordination, particularly in vulnerable sectors of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The NSC emphasized a "zero-tolerance" policy towards any cross-border provocations and reaffirmed Pakistan's right to self-defense under international law.

Additionally, joint military exercises were greenlit to ensure preparedness and to send a strategic message to India and international observers that Pakistan was fully capable of safeguarding its territorial integrity.

### 3. Closure of Wagah Border

The Wagah Border, a historically symbolic checkpoint that links Lahore in Pakistan with Amritsar in India, was ordered to be

closed for all forms of movement. This included pedestrian crossings, trade shipments, and cultural exchanges. The NSC characterized this decision as both symbolic and necessary given India's "warmongering" posture. This closure effectively ended all people-to-people exchanges through land, including visa-based visits, business travel, and educational delegations. The NSC acknowledged the humanitarian impact on families separated by the border but justified the measure as a temporary but crucial response to Indian aggression.

The daily flag-lowering ceremony at Wagah, which had been a point of cultural engagement and tourist attraction, was also

suspended indefinitely. Security at the border was significantly increased with military deployments and armored reinforcements.

### 4. Visa Restrictions and Diplomatic Expulsions

The NSC moved to suspend all Indian visa issuance under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES), which had previously allowed limited freedom of travel among South Asian countries. This included tourist, business, and cultural visas. The only exception granted was for Sikh pilgrims visiting Pakistan's holy sites, including Kartarpur Sahib and Nankana Sahib. The NSC reiterated Pakistan's respect for religious freedoms and historical sites, maintaining that its dispute was with the Indian government—not its people or minority communities.

Moreover, Pakistan downgraded



diplomatic ties with India by expelling senior Indian diplomats and restricting embassy operations. Reciprocal measures were anticipated from New Delhi, but Pakistan justified its decision on the grounds that “diplomatic decorum and constructive engagement are impossible under the current hostile Indian regime.”

All official diplomatic interactions were paused, and the Indian High Commission in Islamabad was instructed to minimize its footprint. The NSC also ordered tighter monitoring of Indian diplomatic personnel’s activities in Pakistan to prevent potential surveillance or propaganda operations.



## 5. Airspace and Trade Suspensions

A sweeping order was issued to close Pakistani airspace to all Indian commercial and cargo flights. This decision led to immediate logistical disruptions for Indian airlines and forced them to reroute flights over longer distances, increasing fuel costs and travel time.

Trade via land routes—primarily through the Wagah-Attari border and Thar Express—was also completely suspended. This measure impacted various sectors including textiles, pharmaceuticals, agricultural produce, and handicrafts. The NSC declared that “no trade is possible with a country that violates ceasefire agreements, sponsors disinformation, and spreads hostility.”

Customs operations were halted, and shipments that had been en route were

ordered to return or be held at neutral points until further notice. Pakistani traders and chambers of commerce expressed initial concern but broadly supported the government’s stance considering the national interest and security concerns.

## 6. International Appeals for Support

Pakistan’s foreign ministry was tasked with a global diplomatic mission to counter India’s narrative and expose what it described as “New Delhi’s disinformation warfare.” Special envoys were dispatched to key capitals—including Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Ankara, and Riyadh—to present Pakistan’s case and seek mediation

or statements of concern from influential countries.

The United Nations was approached with formal complaints highlighting India’s violation of UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir. Pakistan urged the UN Secretary-General to send a fact-finding mission to IIOJK to assess the ground realities, especially in the wake of increased military crackdowns after the Pahalgam attack.

Additionally, Pakistan engaged the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the European Union, and major human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, urging them to speak out against the human rights violations in Kashmir and India’s ongoing suppression of minority voices.

Social media campaigns were launched

under the supervision of the Ministry of Information to ensure Pakistan’s narrative reached global audiences, particularly in the West. Hashtags such as #KashmirUnderSiege, #IndiaWarCrimes, and #PahalgamTruth trended globally, reflecting the government’s push to control the narrative in digital spaces.

## Pakistan’s Long-Term Strategy

Pakistan’s response to the Pahalgam attack reflects a broader strategy to counter India’s narrative on Kashmir and highlight the human rights abuses allegedly committed by Indian forces in the region. Pakistan has long maintained that Kashmiris should be allowed to determine their own political future through a referendum, a position backed by various United Nations resolutions. By rejecting India’s aggressive posturing and suspending bilateral agreements, Pakistan is signaling its commitment to defending the rights of Kashmiris and opposing India’s actions in the region.

At the same time, Pakistan is seeking to garner international support for its position, drawing attention to the humanitarian situation in Kashmir and calling for greater international intervention to prevent further escalation.

## Conclusion

The Pahalgam attack of April 2025 has set in motion a series of actions and reactions between India and Pakistan that could have far-reaching consequences for regional stability. India’s swift military and diplomatic response reflected its determination to take decisive action against cross-border terrorism, while Pakistan’s rejection of India’s allegations and retaliatory measures demonstrated its commitment to defending its sovereignty and the rights of Kashmiris.

As both nations continue to escalate tensions, the role of the National Security Committee (NSC) in Pakistan will remain pivotal in shaping the country’s strategy for dealing with India. Whether through diplomacy or military action, the coming weeks will be crucial in determining the future trajectory of relations between these two nuclear-armed nations.



# Indian plan of a terror attack in Pakistan through the TTP: Defence Minister warns of full-scale war



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif has issued a stern warning, claiming that credible intelligence indicates India is planning an attack on Pakistan through the banned militant group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Khawaja Asif alleged that India is arming TTP militants with explosives and weapons, channeling them through the Afghan Taliban to destabilize Pakistan. He described the situation as a serious threat to regional peace and a sign of growing hostility.

"Under Modi's leadership, India is reverting to its old, aggressive strategies rooted in the same Gujarat mindset," Asif said, referencing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's controversial political past. He warned that any hostile action from India would receive a robust response, drawing a parallel to the Pulwama incident in 2019.

"India faced international embarrassment after Pulwama. If it tries something similar again, the outcome will be no different," he asserted.

Following these claims, Pakistan summoned a senior Indian diplomat to formally protest what it described as hostile and provocative actions. Assuring the public, Asif said Pakistan remains vigilant and is working closely with its security agencies to safeguard national sovereignty. He emphasized that the government is fully prepared to respond decisively to any form of aggression or subversion.

## It will be full-scale war: Defence Minister

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has urged the international community to take serious note of rising tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, warning that recent hostilities could spiral into a full-scale conflict. Khawaja Asif expressed deep concern over the situation following a deadly shooting in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), where 26 tourists, including one Nepali national, were killed in an attack in the scenic Pahalgam area.

India has accused Pakistan of orchestrating the attack, an allegation Islamabad has categorically rejected, calling it a "false flag operation" intended to deflect attention from internal failures.

Minister Asif emphasized that while Pakistan's military is fully prepared to respond, any reaction will be calculated. "We will measure our response to whatever is initiated by India," he said. "If there is an all-out attack or something like that, then obviously there will be an all-out war."

Despite the stark warning, Asif said Pakistan remains open to dialogue. "We should be solving our problems through negotiations," he reiterated.

Asked if the international community should be alarmed by the unfolding situation, the minister was unequivocal. "Yes, absolutely. A clash between two nuclear powers is always a matter of grave concern. If things go wrong, the consequences could be catastrophic."

Meanwhile, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to track down the perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack “to the ends of the Earth,” further escalating tensions between the two countries.

When pressed on whether he believed India was responsible for the current crisis, Asif responded: “Yeah, absolutely. They create these situations.” He underscored Pakistan’s firm rejection of terrorism in all its forms and reaffirmed that the country had no involvement in the Pahalgam incident. “Pakistan has absolutely nothing to do with it. Allegations alone do not absolve India from responsibility—they must conduct a credible investigation.”

In response to the attack, India has taken a series of retaliatory steps, including the unilateral suspension of the decades-old Indus Waters Treaty, a move that has drawn strong criticism from Islamabad and further heightened fears of regional instability.

As the situation continues to develop, Asif’s remarks serve as a sobering reminder of the stakes involved—and the urgent need for diplomatic intervention to prevent the crisis from escalating beyond control.

## Pakistan can use the nuclear option to secure its water

In a move fraught with potentially severe consequences, India unilaterally suspended the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan, citing Islamabad’s alleged involvement in a deadly attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Pakistan, strongly rejecting India’s accusations, has warned that any attempt to halt or divert water flow governed by the IWT will be regarded as an “act of war” and met with a full-spectrum response, including the use of both conventional and non-conventional force.

Experts believe Pakistan would not hesitate to use military means, including nuclear deterrence, to defend its water rights. One defence expert noted, “If India proceeds to construct facilities aimed at altering Pakistan’s water flow, those structures will be targeted militarily. The term ‘complete spectrum of national power’ includes all available means,

including nuclear capabilities.”

Experts have also criticized India’s decision as political posturing aimed at appeasing domestic sentiment rather than a practical policy shift. The IWT, signed in September 1960 with the World Bank as a broker, has long been seen as a rare model of cooperation between the hostile neighbors. It defines the allocation and management of the waters of the Indus River system and has remained intact despite decades of military and political tensions.

India’s Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) announced the suspension of the treaty in what experts are calling the most provocative move since the agreement’s inception. It is part of a broader set of retaliatory measures following the Pahalgam incident, aimed at increasing diplomatic and strategic pressure on Pakistan.

For Pakistan, a country whose agriculture relies almost entirely on the Indus River system, the implications could be dire. Experts say any disruption to the treaty could exacerbate water shortages, affect crop yields, and potentially spark food insecurity and internal unrest.

In the short term, India may withhold crucial hydrological data concerning rivers flowing into Pakistan—information that becomes especially critical during the monsoon season when flood risks surge. Islamabad, however, dismissed India’s declaration, asserting that the IWT is a binding international agreement and cannot be altered unilaterally. A statement issued after a meeting of Pakistan’s National Security Committee (NSC) described water as a “vital national interest” and vowed to protect it at all costs.

“Any attempt to stop or divert the flow of Pakistan’s water, in violation of the Indus Waters Treaty, will be considered an act of war and met with full force across the entire spectrum of national power,” the NSC warned.

Strategic analysts have interpreted this as a clear message that Pakistan would not accept the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty. A former Pakistani commissioner for Indus Waters stated that neither country can suspend or revoke the treaty unilaterally.

“The Indus Waters Treaty is a permanent agreement. Any modification, suspension, or revocation requires mutual consent,” he explained, adding that India would have to consult Pakistan to lawfully alter the treaty.

Analysts believe India may use this suspension as a pretext to accelerate long-stalled hydroelectric and storage projects along the western rivers, such as Pakal Dul, Ratle, Kiru, and Sawalkot—which have faced delays due to Pakistan’s objections under the IWT framework.

## The United States is not keen on mediation

Meanwhile, the United States has once again denounced the recent terrorist attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), but remained non-committal about any mediatory involvement between India and Pakistan amid rising tensions.

During a State Department briefing, spokesperson Tammy Bruce reaffirmed Washington’s stance against terrorism: “The United States stands with India and strongly condemns all acts of terrorism. We offer our condolences to the families of the victims and call for the perpetrators of this heinous act to be brought to justice.”

However, when asked whether the U.S. was playing any diplomatic role to ease the growing strain between India and Pakistan, Bruce declined to elaborate.

Referring to past U.S. mediation offers during President Trump’s tenure, she stated:

“I’m not going to be remarking on it. I will say nothing more on that situation.”

She added that while the situation is being monitored closely, the U.S. currently holds no position on the status of Jammu and Kashmir.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan have taken a series of retaliatory steps in response to the incident and its fallout. Both nations have closed their shared land border and suspended the special visa regime that allowed limited travel between them. Additionally, each country has declared the other’s military attachés persona non grata and reduced their respective embassy staff.



India has also suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, a long-standing agreement governing the shared use of the Indus River system. Pakistan warned that any attempt to disrupt water flow would be considered an act of war and met with “full force.”

Further escalating the standoff, Pakistan has frozen all bilateral agreements, halted trade with India, including via third countries, and closed its airspace to Indian-operated flights. As the region watches closely, international observers continue to urge restraint from both sides in the interest of regional stability.

## Indian Opposition parties question security lapse: Pahalgam attack

Moreover, Opposition parties in India have expressed full support for the government and strongly condemned the recent Pahalgam attack during an all-party meeting aimed at unifying political voices in response to the crisis, Indian media reported on Thursday.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge highlighted that opposition leaders voiced concern over Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s absence from the critical meeting, as well as a perceived “security lapse” leading to the deadly incident.

Despite their concerns, Kharge emphasized that the opposition remains united with the government on this matter to present a strong, collective national front.

“All parties agreed that any action taken by the government in the national interest will have our full support. We stand together to send a clear message of unity,” Kharge stated.

In Modi’s absence, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh chaired the meeting. Kharge noted that the Congress party reiterated that the Prime Minister, as the nation’s top decision-maker, should have personally led the discussions.

The attack resulted in the deaths of 28 tourists, including a Nepali national. The Indian government has blamed Pakistan for the assault—a claim that Islamabad has categorically denied, labeling it a “false flag operation.”

Following the attack, India has taken several retaliatory measures under the Modi-led government, including suspending the Indus Waters Treaty and banning Pakistani nationals from entering the country. In a further escalation, India has shut down the Integrated Check Post at Attari and ordered Pakistan’s military, naval, and air attachés to leave the country within a week, declaring them persona non grata.

Pakistan, in response, has recalled its advisers and announced a significant downsizing of its High Commission staff in India—from 55 to 30—by May 1, which is also the deadline set for Pakistani nationals to exit the country.



## Senate Rejects India’s Allegations Over Pahalgam Attack

The Senate of Pakistan has unanimously passed a resolution categorically rejecting India’s allegations linking Pakistan to the recent Pahalgam attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), describing the claims as unfounded and politically driven.

The resolution, adopted during a Senate session, strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and affirmed that targeting innocent civilians runs counter to Pakistan’s fundamental values.

Lawmakers also denounced India’s orchestrated propaganda campaign and its unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, calling the move a serious violation that

could be construed as an act of war. The resolution warned that Pakistan remains fully capable of defending its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of any hostile action.

Reiterating Pakistan’s unwavering support for the Kashmiri people’s right to self-determination, the Senate demanded that India be held accountable for its involvement in acts of terrorism and targeted killings abroad, including incidents on Pakistani soil.

The resolution came in response to India’s sweeping actions against Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pahalgam shooting, which included suspending the decades-old

water-sharing treaty, closing the main land border crossing, downgrading diplomatic ties, and cancelling visas for Pakistani citizens.

In retaliation, Pakistan expelled Indian diplomats and military representatives, revoked visas for Indian nationals—excluding Sikh pilgrims—and closed the border crossing from its side. The United Nations has urged both countries to exercise “maximum restraint,” emphasising that all disputes must be resolved peacefully through meaningful dialogue.

Addressing the Senate, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar noted that while India had avoided directly naming Pakistan, it had implied involvement without presenting any evidence. He said India’s narrative was baseless and politically motivated, and that Pakistan had anticipated such accusations.



## UN Chief Antonio Guterres urges Pakistan and India to exercise restraint

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has called on both India and Pakistan to exercise “maximum restraint” and avoid actions that could further escalate tensions following the deadly attack in Indian-Occupied Kashmir earlier this week.

“The Secretary-General is following the situation very closely and with deep concern,” UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said during a daily press briefing at UN Headquarters in New York.

The appeal comes in the aftermath of a gun attack near the Pahalgam tourist resort in Indian-Occupied Kashmir, which reportedly left 26 people dead. Guterres condemned the incident and expressed condolences to the families of the victims. In response to the attack, the Indian government has taken a series of punitive measures against Pakistan, including the unilateral suspension of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, closure of border crossings, expulsion of Pakistani diplomats, and orders for certain Pakistani visa holders to leave the country within 48 hours.

Pakistan, while strongly denying any involvement in the attack, responded by suspending all visa exemptions for Indian nationals, expelling Indian diplomats, and closing its airspace to Indian aircraft. When

asked about the developments, Dujarric confirmed that the Secretary-General has not had direct communication with the leaders of either country but reiterated the UN’s longstanding position on peaceful resolution through dialogue.

“We believe that any issues between India and Pakistan can and should be resolved peacefully through meaningful mutual engagement,” Dujarric emphasized.

Regarding India’s decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, the spokesperson said, “This falls under our broader appeal for maximum restraint and for avoiding actions that could worsen an already tense situation.” The United Nations continues to monitor the situation with concern as both nuclear-armed neighbours engage in tit-for-tat measures, raising fears of a broader conflict in the region.

## Mushaal Mullick seeks an end to the ban on VPNs and X to counter Indian propaganda

Kashmiri leader Mushaal Mullick has urged the Pakistani government to immediately lift the ban on Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), stressing the critical need to counter India’s growing propaganda campaign in the digital space.

“India is running an aggressive campaign against Pakistan on social media,” she stated, speaking to reporters in Islamabad.

“We are currently in the midst of an information war, with the entire Indian state machinery focused on discrediting the Kashmiri freedom movement.”

Warning of rising tensions in the region, Mullick cautioned, “We are dangerously close to the brink of conflict. At a time like this, the Pakistani nation must stand in solidarity with the people of Kashmir.”

She called on the public to actively participate in online discourse, especially on platforms like X, to help amplify Pakistan’s narrative globally. “The nation must rise to the occasion and use social media to effectively communicate Pakistan’s stance to the world,” she emphasized.

Her remarks come amid heightened tensions between Pakistan and India, following Indian media allegations implicating Islamabad in the recent attack in Pahalgam, located in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed 26 lives.

In response to India’s unilateral decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, Pakistan has issued a firm rejection and convened a high-level National Security Committee (NSC) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The NSC, in a strongly worded statement, reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to defending its water rights. “Water is a vital national interest of Pakistan, a lifeline for its 240 million people, and its availability will be safeguarded at all costs,” the statement read.



# India's Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty: What It Means for Pakistan



By Hina Kashif

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), signed in 1960, has long been one of the most resilient examples of cooperation between adversarial neighbors India and Pakistan. Brokered by the World Bank, the treaty divided the water of the six rivers in the Indus Basin between the two countries, allowing each to develop water infrastructure and irrigation systems based on guaranteed flows. It survived wars, military standoffs, and diplomatic impasses for over six decades.

But in a startling development, India has recently announced it is placing the treaty “in abeyance” until Pakistan, it claims, “credibly and irreversibly” halts cross-border terrorism. This move has not only injected a new and dangerous variable into an already fragile relationship but also directly threatens the security of Pakistan’s water-dependent economy and population.

This article unpacks what the suspension means, the structure of the treaty, the physical and geopolitical limitations of India’s actions, and the cascading consequences that could unfold for Pakistan in the short,

medium, and long term.

## The Foundation of the Indus Waters Treaty

The IWT divides the six rivers of the Indus Basin into two categories:

- Eastern Rivers: Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej – allocated to India.
- Western Rivers: Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab – allocated to Pakistan.

Under the agreement:

- India has unrestricted use of the eastern rivers.
- Pakistan has rights over the western rivers but India may use them for limited purposes, such as non-consumptive uses (like hydropower) and agricultural use with constraints.
- India is not allowed to construct storage reservoirs or divert the western rivers in ways that would harm Pakistan’s downstream usage.

What made this treaty particularly resilient was its technical, not political foundation. It established a Permanent Indus Commission with a representative from each country, a framework for dispute resolution (including a neutral expert and a Court of Arbitration), and robust technical guidelines governing what each side could and could not do. Crucially, the treaty has no provision for unilateral suspension or termination—a safeguard intended to keep water issues separate from politics.

## India’s Justification for the Suspension

India’s rationale for the suspension ties the treaty’s future to Pakistan’s alleged support for terrorism—a claim made frequently after attacks in Kashmir or along the border. Following the 2016 Uri attack, India began exploring how to use its rights under the IWT more aggressively. Now, India has gone a step further, stepping outside the treaty altogether by declaring it suspended.

This declaration marks a fundamental departure from the treaty's spirit. It transitions a technical water-sharing arrangement into the volatile terrain of geopolitical retaliation, raising the risk of conflict and undermining decades of water security.

## What Can India Actually Do?

Despite the political rhetoric, India cannot immediately or meaningfully reduce water flow to Pakistan, especially during the high-flow season (May–September). Here's why:

### 1. Limited Infrastructure

India's current infrastructure on the western rivers—like the Baglihar and Kishanganga dams—are run-of-the-river projects. They can generate electricity but store very little water. India lacks the large-scale reservoirs needed to hold back the massive flow of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab.



### 2. Seasonal Constraints

During the monsoon and snowmelt season, these rivers carry tens of billions of cubic meters of water. Attempting to disrupt flows during this period would not only be technically difficult, but could also cause flooding in upstream Indian territories.

### 3. Legal and Diplomatic Risk

Any unilateral action, such as building large new dams or diversions outside the treaty's framework, would expose India to international legal challenges and damage its reputation as a responsible riparian

state—especially with China, from which rivers like the Brahmaputra flow into India.

## Where the Risk Truly Lies: Erosion of Predictability

The greater threat to Pakistan is not an immediate loss of water but the erosion of predictability.

Pakistan's entire irrigation and agricultural planning system is built on decades of reliable flows from the western rivers. If India begins delaying flows during critical periods—even if total volumes stay constant—it can still severely disrupt Pakistan's farming cycles, electricity generation, and urban water supply.

### Short-Term Implications

- Delayed planting seasons: If water arrives late during sowing (e.g., wheat in October–November), crop yields can drop.

- Reduced hydropower output: Pakistan's major dams like Tarbela and Mangla depend on timely inflows. Disruptions can lead to energy shortages.
- Urban water supply pressure: Cities like Lahore and Multan rely on consistent water inflows for drinking and sanitation.

### Medium-Term Risks

- Inter-provincial conflict: Water disputes between Punjab and Sindh are already contentious. Added uncer-

tainty can inflame political tensions.

- Indus Delta degradation: Already shrinking due to reduced freshwater outflows, any further decrease threatens livelihoods, biodiversity, and food security in the coastal regions.

## Strategic Vulnerabilities for Pakistan

### 1. Agricultural Backbone Under Threat

Pakistan's economy, employing over 38% of its workforce in agriculture, is tightly bound to the Indus River System. Any uncertainty in water delivery destabilizes this foundation, impacting food security and rural income.

### 2. Energy Crisis Risk

With roughly one-third of Pakistan's electricity coming from hydropower, changes in river flow timing could lead to blackouts, increasing reliance on costlier and polluting thermal power sources.

### 3. No Ready Alternatives

Unlike oil or gas, water has no substitute. And Pakistan's water storage infrastructure is already under strain. New dam projects like Diamer-Bhasha are still years from completion and face funding, environmental, and political hurdles.

## Geopolitical and Legal Repercussions

India's move also carries risks and precedents that extend beyond South Asia.

### 1. Global Water Diplomacy

By walking away from a landmark transboundary water agreement, India undermines the global norm of respecting downstream rights. This weakens its own standing in future negotiations with neighbors like China, which controls upper reaches of the Brahmaputra and Sutlej rivers.

### 2. Legal Limbo

Pakistan could escalate the issue internationally, potentially involving the Interna-



tional Court of Justice or appealing to the World Bank to intervene. However, resolution through legal channels is time-consuming and uncertain.

### 3. Military Tensions

Pakistan has explicitly warned that any attempt to divert or store the western rivers' flows at scale would be seen as an act of war. In a region already prone to military standoffs, water could become a flashpoint if provocations escalate.

## The Treaty Was Already Under Strain

Even before this suspension, cracks had begun to show:

- Post-2016, India hardened its position and began fast-tracking hydro projects.
- In 2023, India invoked Article XII to seek a treaty renegotiation, citing Pakistan's objections as obstructive. Pakistan refused, insisting on the original terms.
- By early 2025, both nations had activated competing legal forums—the Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration—a scenario the treaty never anticipated.

The current suspension is not a sudden rupture, but the climax of years of growing frustration and strategic recalibration.

## Where Does This Leave Pakistan?

### 1. A System Built on Certainty Now Faces Chaos

The greatest asset the treaty gave Pakistan was predictability. With that gone, every season now carries the risk of disruption.

### 2. Urgent Need for Water Sector Reform

Pakistan must now double down on:

- Improving water-use efficiency, especially in agriculture.
- Investing in water storage and conservation.

- Digitizing irrigation systems for better monitoring and control.
- Fostering internal consensus to manage water-sharing equitably among provinces.

### 3. Diplomatic Challenge

Pakistan needs to mobilize international opinion, highlight the treaty's importance, and seek mediation through neutral global platforms, including the World Bank and UN bodies.



## A Turning Point with No Clear Path Forward

The Indus Waters Treaty has been a lifeline for Pakistan—not just for water, but for peace. Its suspension may not dry up rivers overnight, but it does something perhaps more dangerous: it erodes trust and predictability in an already volatile region.

In a time of increasing water scarcity, population growth, and climate change, this move risks turning rivers of life into rivers of conflict. Both countries—particularly Pakistan—have everything to lose if the spirit of cooperation collapses.

Water is not just a shared resource. For Pakistan, it is a lifeline with no alternative. The flows must continue—not out of goodwill, but because the consequences of stopping them are simply too great for either nation to bear.

## A Fragile Future Demands Resilient Leadership

As the subcontinent faces a future shaped by climate stress, rapid urbanization, and growing water demands, the Indus Waters Treaty—flawed though it may be—offered a rare example of responsible, rules-based management of shared natural resources. Suspending it removes the legal scaffolding that has held regional water cooperation

together for over six decades.

What happens next will test the wisdom and foresight of leaders on both sides. For Pakistan, this is a moment to rethink its water governance and build resilience into every level of its water infrastructure. For India, it is a moment to weigh short-term geopolitical gains against long-term regional stability. Cooperation over water must be rebuilt—not because it is easy, but because the cost of failure is simply too high.

If the rivers that nurtured the Indus Valley Civilization for millennia are allowed to become tools of retaliation and leverage, then both nations risk pushing their people toward a future where scarcity, not stability, defines their destiny. The time to act wisely is now—before the flow of dialogue dries up like the very rivers at the heart of this crisis.

# India's Dirty War: How False Flags Fuel Conflict with Pakistan



By Saad Khan Jadoon

**F**alse flag operations—covert actions designed to deceive by making them appear like another group or nation carried them out—have been a recurring tactic in geopolitical conflicts. India, particularly under the Modi-led BJP government, has frequently been accused of orchestrating such operations against Pakistan to justify military aggression, manipulate international opinion, and destabilize its neighbor. From staged terror attacks to fabricated evidence, India's history of false flags is extensive and well-documented. This article explores key instances where India has allegedly engineered crises to malign Pakistan, the implications of these actions, and how Pakistan has consistently exposed these deceitful tactics on global platforms.

## The Ganga Hijacking - 1971

One of the earliest and most compelling cases pointing to a potential false flag was the 1971 hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane, Flight Ganga, which was taken to Lahore by two Kashmiri separatists. India quickly blamed Pakistan for orchestrating the incident, used it as justification to ban Pakistani overflights, and escalated

tensions, leading to the Bangladesh Liberation War.

However, years later, retired Indian officials and independent journalists questioned the official narrative. According to ex-RAW officer R.K. Yadav, the operation was allegedly staged to isolate East Pakistan and block Pakistani logistics. Even the BBC and Guardian reported inconsistencies in India's version of events. It is now widely suspected in Pakistan that this hijacking was India's covert attempt to provoke a larger conflict.

## The 2001 Indian Parliament Attack: A Fabricated Crisis?

One of the earliest and most controversial examples of a potential Indian false flag operation was the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament. India immediately blamed Pakistan-based militant groups Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), leading to a massive military standoff (Operation Parakram) that brought the two nuclear-armed neighbors to the brink of war. However, several irregularities cast

doubt on India's official narrative. The attackers were labeled as Pakistani militants, yet no credible evidence was provided linking them to Pakistan's intelligence agencies. Indian authorities hastily buried the bodies of the alleged attackers without proper forensic examination or independent verification.

Later investigations revealed inconsistencies in India's claims, with some Indian journalists and analysts suggesting the attack may have been staged to justify a military buildup. Despite Pakistan's demand for an independent investigation, India refused, leaving the incident shrouded in suspicion. Many experts now view it as a possible false flag operation designed to vilify Pakistan.

## 2007 Samjhauta Express Bombings: Indian Extremists, Pakistani Blame

The Samjhauta Express bombings in February 2007—targeting a train service connecting India and Pakistan—resulted in 68 deaths, mostly Pakistani civilians. India



initially pointed fingers at Pakistan-based groups, but the truth turned out to be far more damning. Investigations led by Indian agencies, including the National Investigation Agency (NIA), revealed that Hindu extremist groups with links to Indian military personnel were responsible. Key suspects, including Swami Aseemanand, a member of the radical RSS, confessed to orchestrating the attack to incite violence against Muslims and Pakistan. Despite these confessions, Indian courts delayed proceedings, and most accused were acquitted due to "lack of evidence," raising serious suspicions of a state cover-up. This case remains one of the clearest examples of an Indian false flag operation where domestic extremists targeted civilians to frame Pakistan.

## The 2008 Mumbai Attacks: Exploiting Tragedy for Geopolitical Gains

The November 2008 Mumbai attacks were a horrific tragedy that killed 166 people, including foreigners. India immediately blamed Pakistan's ISI and LeT, using the incident to launch a global propaganda campaign against Pakistan. However, contradictions in India's narrative soon emerged. Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving attacker, was paraded as "proof" of Pakistan's involvement, yet his initial testimony was riddled with inconsistencies, and reports suggested he was tortured into giving a false confession. Additionally, Maharashtra ATS chief Hemant Karkare, who was investigating Hindu extremist terror plots, was mysteriously killed during the attacks, leading to suspicions that his death was linked to his findings on Indian-sponsored terrorism. Despite Pakistan's cooperation in investigations, arrests, and trials, India continued to exploit the tragedy for political gains without providing substantive proof of state involvement.

## The 2016 Uri Attack & Surgical Strikes Drama

In September 2016, an attack on an Indian army base in Uri, Kashmir, killed 19 soldiers. India blamed Pakistan-based

militants and claimed to have conducted "surgical strikes" across the Line of Control (LoC) in retaliation. However, the narrative quickly unraveled. No verifiable proof of surgical strikes was provided—satellite images showed no damage, and international observers found no evidence of cross-border operations. Indian media further fueled the deception by circulating fabricated videos and images, later exposed as recycled footage from other military exercises. Pakistan's military invited foreign journalists to the alleged strike sites, where no signs of damage were found, completely debunking India's claims. This was yet another instance where India manufactured a crisis to justify aggression against Pakistan while misleading its public and the international community.



## The 2019 Pulwama Attack: A Convenient Election Ploy?

The February 2019 Pulwama attack, which killed 40 Indian soldiers, occurred just months before India's general elections. India instantly blamed Pakistan, leading to aerial dogfights and heightened tensions. However, the circumstances surrounding the attack were highly suspicious. The attacker, Adil Ahmad Dar, was a local Kashmiri with grievances against Indian occupation—no direct link to Pakistan was established. Indian authorities had reportedly ignored intelligence warnings about the attack, raising questions of deliberate negligence to create a crisis. Modi's government exploited the attack for electoral gains, using hyper-nationalist rhetoric to

dominate the election campaign. Despite Pakistan's offer to cooperate in investigations, India refused, opting instead for military posturing. Many analysts believe the Pulwama attack was either allowed or staged to bolster Modi's image as a "strong leader" amid growing domestic discontent.

## Recent Hybrid Warfare: Fake News, Cyber Attacks & Balochistan Propaganda

Beyond physical false flags, India has engaged in hybrid warfare against Pakistan through disinformation campaigns, cyber warfare, and support for militant groups. Investigations by EU DisinfoLab exposed a

vast network of fake NGOs and media outlets spreading anti-Pakistan propaganda globally. India has also been caught funding Baloch separatists and TTP militants to destabilize Pakistan, as admitted by Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was arrested in Balochistan in 2016. Additionally, Indian hackers frequently target Pakistani institutions with cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns, further highlighting India's relentless efforts to undermine Pakistan through covert means.

## Pakistan's Resilience Against Indian Deception

India's persistent reliance on false flag operations exposes a calculated strategy of deception designed to justify military aggression, manipulate international

opinion, and obscure its own egregious human rights violations in occupied Kashmir. This dangerous pattern of manufactured crises has become a cornerstone of India's hybrid warfare against Pakistan, threatening regional stability and undermining prospects for peaceful resolution of longstanding disputes. However, Pakistan has demonstrated remarkable strategic resilience, systematically countering these malicious designs through a multi-pronged approach that combines diplomatic acumen, military preparedness, and intelligence excellence.

On the diplomatic front, Pakistan has consistently exposed India's false narratives through evidence-based advocacy at key international forums including the United Nations, OIC, and FATF. The country's diplomatic corps has successfully countered Indian disinformation campaigns by presenting irrefutable evidence of RAW's involvement in sponsoring terrorism within Pakistan, most notably through the high-profile capture and confession of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav. This watershed moment not only validated Pakistan's longstanding concerns about Indian interference but also exposed New Delhi's duplicity before the global community.

Militarily, Pakistan's armed forces have maintained an impeccable record of professional restraint combined with decisive response capability. The swift and measured reaction to India's so-called "surgical strikes" in 2016, where Pakistan not only debunked Indian claims through independent verification but also demonstrated its capacity for immediate retaliation, stands as a testament to this balanced approach. The Pakistan Air Force's decisive response to India's Balakot misadventure in 2019, which resulted in the downing of Indian jets and capture of an Indian pilot, further reinforced Pakistan's military credibility while exposing India's reckless brinkmanship.

Pakistan's intelligence apparatus has played an equally critical role in thwarting Indian designs. Through meticulous counterintelligence operations, Pakistan has uncovered and neutralized multiple Indian-sponsored terrorist networks operating within its borders. The dismantling of Indian spy rings in Balochistan and Sindh, along with the prevention of numerous terrorist attacks planned with RAW support, underscores the effectiveness of Pakistan's security establishment in safeguarding national sovereignty.

The international community must recog-

nize that India's false flag operations represent more than mere bilateral provocations – they constitute a serious threat to regional and global security. By manufacturing crises that bring two nuclear-armed states to the brink of conflict, India is playing with fire for domestic political gains. The world cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this dangerous pattern, particularly when India's actions risk triggering unintended escalation with catastrophic consequences.

Pakistan remains committed to peaceful coexistence and has repeatedly extended the hand of dialogue, but it will not compromise on its sovereignty or national security. The nation's ability to expose and counter Indian deception reflects both strategic maturity and operational capability. As India continues its campaign of misinformation and covert aggression, Pakistan's policy of truth, transparency, and measured response serves as a bulwark against destabilization. The international community must hold India accountable for its reckless behavior and support mechanisms that promote truth and de-escalation in South Asia. Pakistan stands ready to cooperate with all peace-loving nations to counter this dangerous trend of state-sponsored deception and build a more stable regional order based on facts, not fabrication.





# The Hindutva Playbook: From Spectacle to Sabotage in Modi's Crusade Against Pakistan



By Kainaat Asad

Narendra Modi's tenure as India's Prime Minister has been marked by a deliberate, orchestrated blend of nationalism, religious polarization, and anti-Pakistan rhetoric, all of which are carefully designed to serve political ends. In the process, his government has redefined the contours of Indian politics, moving it away from secular democratic ideals and steering it toward a dangerously majoritarian, militarized nationalism rooted in Hindutva ideology. This transformation is not just a domestic concern; it has spilled across borders, directly impacting regional stability, development, and peace efforts, particularly those tied to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and infrastructure projects in Balochistan. This opinion critically examines the evolution of Modi's political maneuvering, the performative and sometimes absurd acts he has used to garner sympathy, and how the systematic targeting of Pakistan has become a cornerstone of his strategy to maintain power, all while deflecting attention from internal failures and gaining domestic political capital.

Modi's use of public spectacle as political currency has been evident from the beginning of his political ascent. As the so-called "chaiwala" who rose to power from humble beginnings, Modi has consistently shaped his public image as a self-made man battling dynastic elites. However, this image is not a simple biographical note — it is a carefully crafted persona, wielded as a weapon to deflect criticism, silence opposition, and draw public sympathy. When challenged on policy failures or economic stagnation, he leans on this constructed identity, transforming critique into class warfare. This persona has been propped up with public relations stunts that often border on the theatrical. From sweeping floors before cameras to meditating in caves before elections, Modi has repeatedly used symbolic gestures to manipulate public perception, creating the illusion of humility and spiritual depth. Yet these acts, devoid of substantive policy change, are essentially tools of distraction, designed to keep the electorate emotionally invested while systemic issues are ignored.

The absurdity of some of these moves, like demonetization in 2016, which was presented as a revolutionary strike against black money, stands out as one of Modi's most reckless acts. Hailed initially as a masterstroke by state-controlled and pro-government media, the policy led to economic paralysis, destroyed livelihoods of the working class, and achieved none of its stated objectives. Yet Modi managed to emerge politically unscathed — even applauded by segments of the population. How? Through the projection of self-sacrifice and moral courage. The narrative was spun to present Modi as a bold leader willing to take unpopular decisions for the greater good, a martyr for national progress. In reality, it was a textbook case of political gaslighting, where public pain was repackaged as patriotic duty.

Another notable pattern in Modi's political playbook is his government's habitual use of national security crises to rally voter sentiment. The 2019 Pulwama attack, followed by the Balakot airstrikes, came at a politically opportune moment — just



months before general elections. Indian media, echoing the government's version without independent verification, amplified the narrative of a strong, retaliatory India under Modi's leadership. While questions about the efficacy and credibility of the Balakot strikes persisted, they were drowned in a tide of nationalistic euphoria. The tactic worked. Modi secured a landslide electoral victory. This deliberate politicization of military action has become a dangerous norm, where jingoism overrides facts, and every skirmish becomes a tool to manipulate electoral outcomes. The Pakistan scapegoat serves not just as a convenient enemy, but as a necessary one in Modi's political universe.

Under Modi, Pakistan has been demonized not merely as a foreign adversary but as an existential threat — a tactic that serves dual purposes. Externally, it justifies militaristic posturing and inflates India's global image as a tough-on-terror state. Internally, it provides cover for domestic failures by redirecting public anger outward. Whenever Modi's government faces pressure over inflation, unemployment, or social unrest, the anti-Pakistan narrative resurfaces — either through military brinkmanship, diplomatic hostility, or media-fueled propaganda. This pattern is not coincidental; it is engineered. Pakistan, in this narrative, becomes both a punching bag and a political crutch.

However, what is more dangerous is how terrorism is selectively used as a rhetorical device. Modi's government routinely accuses Pakistan of harboring terrorists, while turning a blind eye to the rise of Hindu extremist groups within India. The international community has noted the paradox: a country that claims to be fighting terrorism while enabling the ideological growth of violent religious nationalism at home. The silence on lynch mobs, hate crimes, and saffron terror is deafening. In fact, under Modi, the line between state and fringe has blurred — many radical Hindu groups enjoy protection or implicit endorsement. This selective outrage not only exposes the hypocrisy of Modi's anti-terror stance but also delegitimizes genuine security concerns.

The rise of Hindutva, as an ideological force, has coincided with Modi's rule and is far more than a cultural shift — it is a political takeover. Hindutva, unlike Hinduism, is a political ideology that seeks to create a Hindu Rashtra — a nation defined by Hindu supremacy. Under Modi, Hindutva has gone from fringe to mainstream, shaping laws, public discourse, and even foreign policy. The Citizenship Amendment Act, the abrogation of Article 370, the construction of the Ram Mandir on the ruins of Babri Masjid, and the increasing vilification of Muslims in public and media discourse are all signs

of this transformation. Modi's brand of governance blends this ideological vision with populism, creating an environment where dissent is crushed, minorities are targeted, and national unity is measured by loyalty to Hindutva ideals.

In this toxic environment, Pakistan becomes the perfect "other" — the Muslim neighbor whose existence is used to stoke fear and justify repression within. The demonization of Pakistan also provides justification for surveillance, arrests, and human rights abuses, particularly in Kashmir. Any Kashmiri who questions the state is branded as pro-Pakistan, and journalists reporting on atrocities are treated as enemies of the nation. This strategic vilification serves a political function — it renders opposition treasonous and turns criticism into betrayal.

But Modi's obsession with undermining Pakistan is not without global consequences. One of the most critical areas of concern is how India's aggressive posturing impacts regional development, especially in Balochistan. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of Pakistan's economic future, has long been in Modi's crosshairs. There have been consistent accusations from Islamabad that India is backing separatist groups and insurgents in Balochistan to destabilize the region and sabotage CPEC. Indian officials have also



made provocative statements suggesting support for Baloch “freedom fighters” — a thinly veiled endorsement of subversive activity. These tactics serve a geopolitical purpose: by destabilizing Balochistan, India aims to disrupt Chinese investment, weaken Pakistan’s economic rise, and assert itself as the dominant regional power.

CPEC’s success threatens the status quo in South Asia. It brings Chinese capital and influence into Pakistan’s heartland, connecting Gwadar Port to Xinjiang and offering a vital trade route that bypasses Indian hegemony. This economic corridor is not just a project — it’s a strategic realignment. Modi’s government views this shift with deep suspicion and seeks to derail it through covert operations, disinformation campaigns, and international lobbying. Indian media frequently projects CPEC as a debt trap or a colonial project by China, even though similar scrutiny is rarely applied to Western-backed initiatives in the region. The hypocrisy is telling, and the motive is clear: block Pakistan’s progress at any cost.

Moreover, Modi’s anti-Pakistan stance has contributed to international isolation in certain diplomatic quarters. While he has enjoyed temporary favor with far-right and authoritarian leaders globally, human rights groups, independent journalists, and even former Indian diplomats have raised

concerns about the erosion of democratic values and the targeting of minorities. The international shaming — from the UN’s reports on Kashmir to scathing editorials in global publications — reflects a growing unease with India’s internal trajectory. Yet Modi uses this criticism to fuel his narrative of victimhood, arguing that the world doesn’t understand India’s “fight against terror.” The irony, of course, is that terror has become a tool not just of war, but of narrative control.

What we are witnessing under Modi’s leadership is the weaponization of nationalism. It is not nationalism in the sense of collective pride or civic unity, but a dangerous form rooted in exclusion, suspicion, and division. Modi has perfected the art of manufacturing crises, orchestrating performative gestures, and using historical grievances to stoke present-day hatred. In this landscape, Pakistan is not just a neighboring country — it is a character in Modi’s political theatre, a villain without whom the hero cannot exist. Every diplomatic setback, every economic challenge, every act of domestic dissent is reframed through the lens of a supposed threat from across the border.

This toxic narrative has real consequences. It keeps India and Pakistan locked in a cycle of hostility, undermining prospects

for peace, trade, and cooperation. It empowers radical elements on both sides and closes the door on dialogue. For Pakistan, the challenge is twofold — defending against actual security threats and countering the global perception war being waged by India. Modi’s propaganda machine is sophisticated, leveraging social media, friendly news channels, and diaspora networks to spread disinformation and reinforce stereotypes. By constantly labeling Pakistan a terrorist state, Modi seeks to delegitimize its government, isolate it diplomatically, and create barriers to its development ambitions.

Modi’s leadership has not only transformed India’s internal politics but has also cast a long, dark shadow over South Asia. His strategies — a mix of populist deception, ideological extremism, and targeted aggression — are not just damaging to India’s democracy, but to the region’s collective future. Pakistan, despite being on the receiving end of this hostility, must navigate a path forward — one that focuses on strengthening internal stability, fostering unity in Balochistan, and ensuring that CPEC and other developmental projects are shielded from sabotage. The road ahead is fraught, but so long as Modi’s politics depend on Pakistan’s demonization, regional peace will remain a distant dream.



# Middle East (Iran)

## The Reformist Utopia

### Islamic Republic's credibility hangs in the balance



By Naqi Akbar

As the western and developed world governments battle with the new Republican administration over the unilateral trade war initiated by the aforementioned administration, there are talks of Break Through in the Iranian capital Tehran, which many observers of geo politics might have expected to be up in flames and smoke after Trump was installed as the President of United States.

The reasons for that state of mind emanate from the fact that the current administration in Tehran, voted into the presidency in the June 2024 elections prioritizes normalcy of relations with the United States above all other things. The conduct of Aqsa Storm from Tehran after the reformists were voted into the power corridors illustrates that fact. The swearing in of the reformist president and the very next day the assassination of the Hamas political wing leader in the heart of Tehran was ominous enough and an indicator for the objective observers where the tide within the Iranian political system was going.

The promised retaliation from Tehran for Ismael Hania never came despite the fact that the leadership had issued clear orders and the IRGC was more than ready to do the needful. The radical element in Tehran infact risked its credibility in the international arena to the point that many in the resistance grew skeptical of Iranian sincerity for the Palestinian cause in the first place.

The UNO General Assembly visit by the reformist President and the foreign minister was another debacle or indicator of how things were crystalizing in Tehran. Instead of taking a firm stance for Hamas and Palestine, the two Islamic Republic's office bearers were busy creating ground for resumption of talks with the US administration. Their desperate attitude was evident from the fact that while the US election forecast did not give any chance to the Democrats in the November 2024 elections, they were even ready to talk to them to go for any 'forced' breakthrough.

The attitude of the Islamic Republic under

the reformists gave enough signals to the IDF and its supporters that Tehran was fast transforming into a paper tiger. Even in normal circumstances the IDF could have avoided hitting Hezbollah leadership, but sensing that Tehran was distancing itself from Dahlia (the Hezbollah neighborhood) metaphorically, they went for the unbelievable, eliminating the charismatic Syed Nasrullah. It was a devastating blow to the resistance, from which the Lebanese group has still not recovered to date.

The Tehran leadership while shying away from any retaliation for Hania, had to preserve its credibility and went for True Promise 2 to symbolically avenge Syed Nasrullah killing. Later IDF strikes on Iran on the identical pattern of PAF Swift Retort also prompted Iran to go for a tit for tat. Again, as is now revealed by few members of Iranian parliament, that it was the reformist puppet president who opposed the launching of True Promise 3, a promise which almost six months on is still unfulfilled.



The same attitude rules the Iranian power corridors with the leadership or Wilayat Faqeeh coming out considerably weak and ineffective practically. Despite the fact that Khamenei is opposed to the talks with an American administration, the reformists are adamant of pursuing the talks, despite the fact that the US attitude militarily goes in tune with the IDF. The US military is more than ready to strike Iran, while the reformist journalists are more than happy to take it as a credit that Americans have accepted to talk indirectly, which is a shallow victory for the Reformist Administration.

The picture of the Iranian system, which one can visualize after analyzing the above-mentioned stream of facts is that the dominant system in Iran is on the defensive for all practical purposes. As opposed to the reformist wailing that Khatami and Rouhani administrations were powerless, the current administration is practically hitting at the very basic foundations of the Islamic Republic founded 46 years back by clerical leadership led by Imam Khomeini.

To begin with, the resistance infrastructure is in shambles, the technological advances the Iranians made have been wasted by an administration which would not mind compromising these capabilities for the sake of normalizing relations with the United States. The IRGC, all it can do is to reveal its underground missile cities as a PR

activity, while actual action button has been lost here and there by the reformist administration.

In the domain of the basic tenant of the constitution, the Wilayat Faqeeh has been insulted to the point that Iran looks more like the neighboring Republican Iraq, where Ayatollah Sistani dictates are listened and thrown in the waste basket, but not binding upon the government in Baghdad.

In that way the Reformists have even surpassed many Iranian systems of the yesteryears, ranging from Qajars to even Pahlavi, where the grand Ayatollah was taken seriously, or at least pacifying Qom was the cornerstone of any of the government in Tehran. Now the buzzword to appease has shifted metaphorically from 'Husaniya Imam Khomeini' (the hall where policy statements and responses are issued by the supreme leader) to anyone in the White House.

The reformists administration better recoined the Zarif administration seems to be undoing the character of the Islamic Republic more efficiently than what the CIA coup team tried to uninstall Mosaddeq in 1953. The coup of 1953 was a 'naked intervention' while the 2024 political coup, resulting out of unexplained helicopter crash has proven to be a soft coup.

As things stand, the signs of numbness from the leadership regards US talks, the more than confident attitude of the reformists administration with respect to even 'indirect talks' with the United States brings home the hard fact that Iran is transforming through an election, very much like India and Turkey transformed.

The cost paid in the process is that Iran has lost its support in the international arena for a counter narrative or an alternate way of life. Iran is now more like the beleaguered Pakistani nation state which is always willing to give 'moral and diplomatic support' to all the nice causes sans any actual impact on ground. In case the negotiations are successful and the new JCPOA is signed, like the Pakistani missile program, it would not be an unusual happening if the Iranian reformists dutifully dismantle similar infrastructures in Iran.

The reformist foreign minister of Rouhani era Zarif contention that the 'men of the field' or 'mard maidan' ruined his diplomatic results, now has no 'men of the field' blocking his way; a clear reference to the slain Iranian military genius Soleimani and practically the Iran which is going to emerge from the 'Reformist Ruins' is likely to be a foregone civilization which tried to make its impact in alternate narrative, but was stabbed by its own people.



# Canal Water Dispute Between Sindh and Punjab: A Threat to National Unity and Water Security



By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

Pakistan is facing one of the most severe water crises in the world, driven by a combination of rapid population growth, climate change, inefficient irrigation practices, and poor water governance. While these structural and environmental issues are critical, an equally urgent concern is the ongoing inter-provincial conflict over water distribution. Central to this dispute is the longstanding canal water conflict between Sindh and Punjab, the two major provinces reliant on the Indus River system. The conflict is rooted in historical grievances, political mistrust, and competing agricultural demands. Over time, it has escalated into a serious challenge to national unity, especially as both provinces continue to accuse each other of unfair water usage. The failure to implement equitable water-sharing mechanisms not only deepens regional disparities but also threatens the broader goal of sustainable water management in Pakistan. Addressing this issue is vital for maintaining harmony and ensuring water security for future generations.

## Historical Background of the Dispute

The roots of the Sindh-Punjab canal water dispute trace back to British India, where the first irrigation canals were built to divert water from the Indus River system for agricultural use. Post-partition in 1947, water distribution became a contentious issue among the provinces. The Indus Waters Treaty (1960), brokered by the World Bank, allocated water from the Indus River and its tributaries between Pakistan and India. While this agreement resolved cross-border disputes, it left unresolved challenges within Pakistan, particularly regarding internal water sharing among the provinces. The construction of link canals, such as Chashma-Jhelum (CJ) and Taunsa-Panjinad (TP), further strained water relations between Sindh and Punjab, with Sindh arguing that Punjab's use of these canals deprived them of their rightful share.

In 1991, the Water Apportionment Accord was signed to address these tensions, setting water quotas for the

provinces: Punjab received 55.94 million acre-feet (MAF), Sindh 48.76 MAF, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 8.78 MAF, and Balochistan 3.87 MAF. Despite this, disagreements have persisted regarding the implementation of the accord, especially with the increased demands from growing populations and agriculture.

The conflict has resurfaced more recently due to increasing water scarcity exacerbated by climate change, rising demands for irrigation, and political factors. The construction of new projects, such as the Jalalpur Canal by Punjab, has intensified the dispute, as Sindh perceives these actions as violations of the water-sharing agreement, fearing further depletion of their water resources.

## Punjab's Use of Link Canals: A Flashpoint

A central issue in the Sindh-Punjab canal water dispute revolves around Punjab's use of the Chashma-Jhelum and Taunsa-Panjinad link canals, which have been a point of contention for





years. These canals were originally constructed to manage floodwaters and were intended to be used only during periods of surplus water. However, Sindh contends that Punjab is frequently extracting water from these canals, even during times of water scarcity, thereby violating the spirit and intent of the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord, which was designed to ensure fair water distribution between the provinces.

Sindh argues that Punjab's continued use of these canals, especially during water shortages, exacerbates the already severe water crisis in the province. Reports suggest that despite Sindh's objections and the growing urgency of the water shortage, Punjab has not curtailed its withdrawals from these canals, leading to significant imbalances in water distribution. The situation has reached a point where Sindh has formally raised complaints with the federal government, urging intervention to ensure adherence to the accord and more equitable distribution of water.

The continued dispute undermines the credibility of the 1991 Accord and further strains the already fragile relations between the provinces. The controversy not only contributes to worsening water shortages in Sindh but also intensifies the pressures on agriculture, livelihoods, and the general well-being of communities dependent on the river system. These ongoing tensions highlight the pressing need for a robust, transparent water management framework, strengthened enforcement of agreements, and greater collaboration between the provinces to prevent further conflicts. Additionally, establishing a neutral and efficient mechanism for monitoring water usage could help restore trust and ensure sustainable water management for future generations.

## Jalalpur Canal Project: Deepening the Divide

The Jalalpur Irrigation Canal project, introduced by the Punjab government to irrigate 160,000 acres in the Potohar region, has sparked significant controversy and opposition from Sindh. Sindh argues that the project will further deplete its already limited water resources, exacerbating the existing water crisis in the province.

Officials in Sindh have raised concerns that the project was initiated without proper consultation with all provinces, particularly Sindh, thus violating the core principles of equitable water distribution as laid out in the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord. Sindh believes that this unilateral approach undermines the spirit of cooperation that should guide water management in Pakistan.

The issue has been taken to the Council of Common Interests (CCI), which is responsible for addressing such inter-provincial disputes, but the matter remains unresolved. Critics argue that the creation of such projects without consensus sets a dangerous precedent that could lead to further disputes over water usage between provinces. The lack of a coordinated approach to water management undermines trust between provinces and increases the likelihood of more conflicts in the future. The dispute over the Jalalpur Canal underscores the urgent need for a collaborative, transparent, and legally binding framework for managing Pakistan's water resources to prevent further escalation of tensions.

## Sindh's Water Crisis: Unequal Burden

Sindh faces a disproportionately severe water crisis compared to other provinces in Pakistan, with annual water shortfalls ranging between 40-45%. In contrast, Punjab experiences a relatively lower shortfall of around 15%. This disparity has a profound impact on agricultural productivity, the primary livelihood for millions in Sindh, and severely affects the province's economy. While Sindh's total arable land spans approximately 26 million acres, only about 8.2 million acres are cultivated due to inadequate water supply for irrigation. This shortage has resulted in lower crop yields, undermining food security and reducing income opportunities for rural farmers.

The southern districts of Sindh, particularly Thatta and Badin, are among the worst affected by these water shortages. These areas are witnessing severe desertification and soil salinity, both consequences of the reduced river flow, which has disrupted the region's delicate ecological balance. The lack of sufficient freshwater has led to the

salinization of agricultural land, making it unfit for cultivation and exacerbating poverty in these communities.

As a result of these ongoing hardships, social unrest has surged in Sindh, with local communities staging protests and strikes to demand equitable water distribution. The situation has deepened the sense of injustice among Sindh's population, further intensifying tensions between the province and Punjab.

## Environmental and Socioeconomic Impacts

The consequences of the Sindh-Punjab water dispute extend far beyond political tensions, with profound environmental and socioeconomic implications. Reduced water flow to Sindh has caused severe environmental degradation, especially in the Indus Delta. Once a lush and thriving ecosystem, the delta is now rapidly drying up due to the diminished river flow. This environmental collapse has led to a significant loss of biodiversity, with numerous plant and animal species either disappearing or facing extinction. Furthermore, the reduced freshwater supply has resulted in the intrusion of seawater into fertile agricultural lands, making them saline and unproductive. This salinization of the land has further exacerbated the agricultural crisis in Sindh, leaving many communities unable to sustain their livelihoods.

The socioeconomic impact is equally alarming. With water shortages worsening, many farmers are abandoning their lands, leading to increased rural-to-urban migration. This trend is straining urban infrastructure and resources, creating social challenges in cities. Women and children are disproportionately affected, as they bear the burden of traveling long distances to fetch water, often from contaminated sources. This has resulted in a rise in water-borne diseases, contributing to high child mortality rates and public health crises. The combination of environmental decline and worsening public health underscores the urgent need for a resolution to the water dispute.

## The Role of IRSA and Federal Institutions

The Indus River System Authority (IRSA)



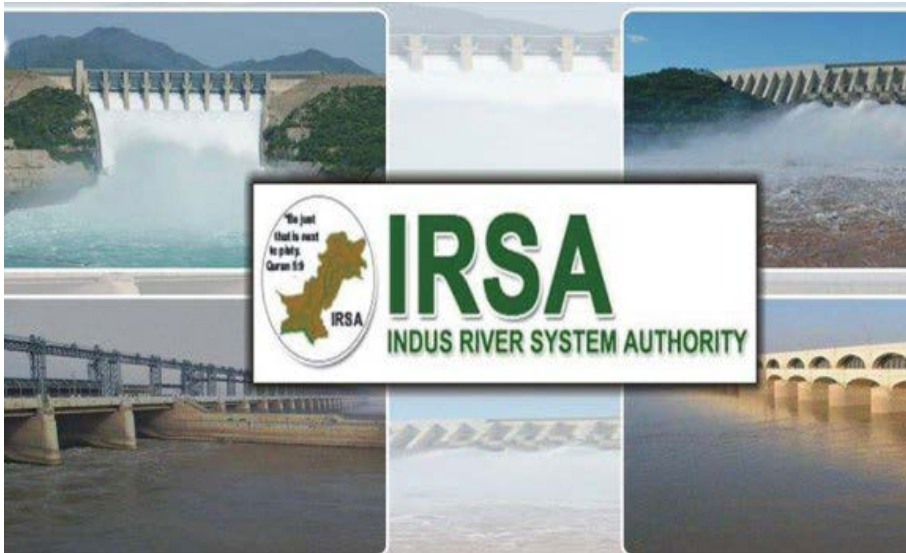
is the federal body tasked with monitoring water distribution among Pakistan's provinces under the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord. However, IRSA's credibility and neutrality have often been questioned, particularly by Sindh, which accuses the authority of favoring Punjab. These allegations of bias have significantly undermined IRSA's authority and have fueled growing mistrust between the provinces. As a result, Sindh has raised concerns about the fairness of water distribution, further intensifying the conflict.

duality creates significant administrative ambiguities that complicate the resolution of water-related conflicts. The 1991 Water Apportionment Accord, though legally binding, faces challenges in enforcement due to these jurisdictional overlaps and political disagreements. The lack of a clear mechanism for enforcing water-sharing agreements has allowed disputes, such as the Sindh-Punjab canal issue, to persist.

Legal experts have recommended the establishment of an independent water

with both floods and droughts becoming more frequent and severe. In recent years, Pakistan has experienced devastating floods that have caused widespread damage, followed by prolonged droughts that have severely affected water availability. These climate-induced changes are further complicating the already tense water-sharing arrangements between the provinces.

Experts warn that without coordinated efforts to adapt to these changes, the Sindh-Punjab water conflict could intensify. The unpredictability of river flows means that the water quotas established under the 1991 Accord may no longer be sufficient to meet the growing demands of both provinces. To address this, experts call for building resilience through better water management infrastructure, such as storage facilities and more efficient irrigation systems. Additionally, early warning systems and adaptive management strategies are crucial for responding to changing water availability. If these steps are not taken, the pressure on Pakistan's already strained water resources will continue to escalate, deepening regional conflicts and threatening national stability.



While federal institutions such as the Council of Common Interests (CCI) and the Supreme Court have occasionally intervened, their efforts have largely been ineffective due to political considerations and the lack of a robust enforcement mechanism. The limited success of these interventions has left the water dispute unresolved. There is an increasing consensus that to prevent further conflicts, IRSA must be strengthened, made more transparent, and held accountable for equitable water distribution. Without significant reforms to ensure impartiality and better governance, disputes like the Sindh-Punjab canal issue are likely to persist, further threatening national unity and water security.

## Legal and Constitutional Perspectives

Under Pakistan's constitution, water is classified as a provincial subject, while rivers fall under federal jurisdiction. This

commission to ensure compliance with the accord and promote transparency in water management. Such a commission could act as a neutral body to resolve disputes and monitor water distribution. Additionally, there are growing calls for constitutional amendments to clarify the roles and responsibilities of both federal and provincial governments in managing water resources. These reforms are seen as crucial to improving governance and preventing further escalation of water-related conflicts in Pakistan.

## Climate Change and the Bigger Picture

The canal water dispute between Sindh and Punjab must be understood in the broader context of climate change, which is exacerbating the water crisis in Pakistan. The country's glaciers, which feed the Indus River system, are melting at an unprecedented rate due to rising temperatures. This has resulted in increasingly erratic river flows,

## Proposed Solutions and the Way Forward

1. To resolve the Sindh-Punjab canal water dispute and ensure equitable water distribution, a comprehensive approach is required, involving a combination of legal, administrative, and technological measures. Below are several critical steps that can help address this longstanding issue:
2. Strict Enforcement of the 1991 Accord: The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) must play a pivotal role in strictly enforcing the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord. This includes real-time monitoring of water distribution, sharing transparent data with all provinces, and ensuring that the allocations outlined in the accord are adhered to. Clear guidelines for handling water shortages should be established, with mechanisms to ensure that no province is unfairly deprived of its share.





3. **Third-Party Audits:** Independent, third-party audits of water usage and canal operations can be instrumental in ensuring transparency. These audits would verify water withdrawals and canal management practices, helping to build trust among the provinces. Regular third-party assessments would create accountability and discourage any potential misuse of water resources.
4. **Joint Water Management Committees:** Establishing inter-provincial committees for joint water management could facilitate regular dialogue and address conflicts before they escalate. These committees should consist of representatives from all provinces, ensuring that every stakeholder has a voice in decision-making and conflict resolution.
5. **Infrastructure Development:** Modernizing irrigation systems is essential to improving water efficiency. Investments in the lining of canals, construction of new reservoirs, and upgrading water storage facilities can drastically reduce water wastage. Smart irrigation technologies that optimize water usage in agriculture should also be promoted, especially in water-scarce regions like Sindh.
6. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Educating the public, especially farmers, about water conservation techniques

and sustainable water usage is critical. Public awareness programs can encourage responsible water consumption and highlight the importance of efficient water management practices in mitigating the ongoing water crisis.

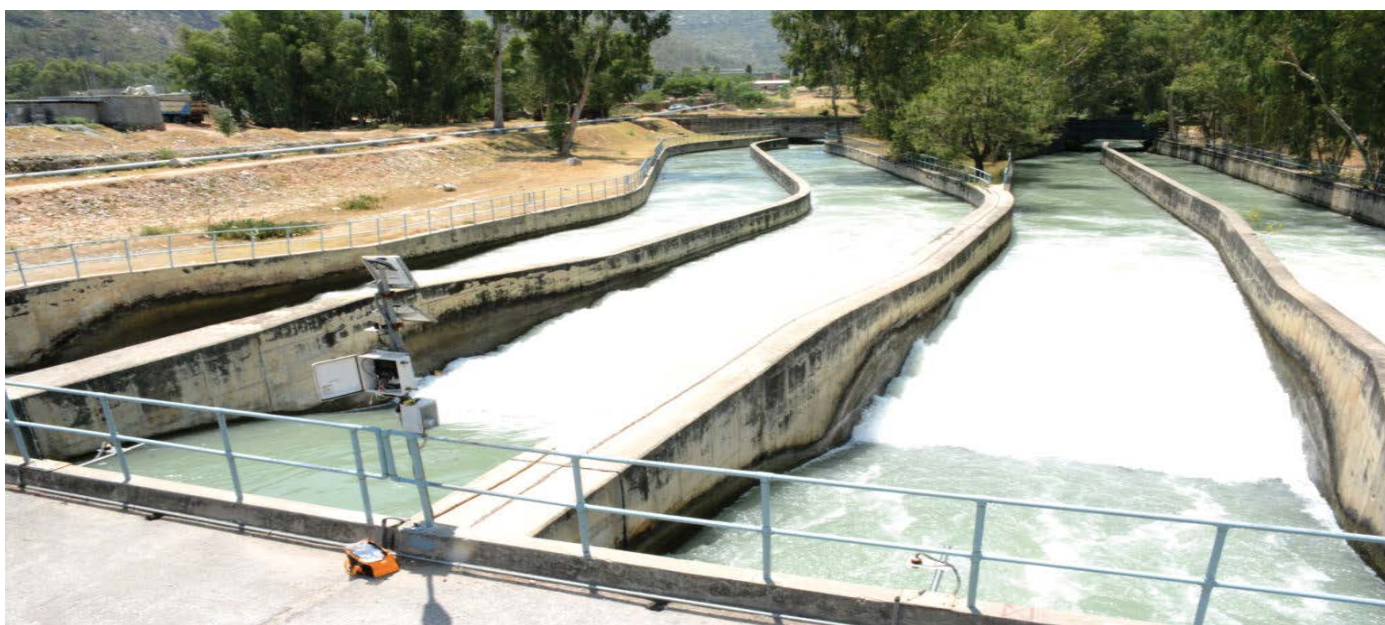
7. **Rainwater Harvesting and Groundwater Recharge:** Promoting rainwater harvesting systems and encouraging groundwater recharge are vital alternatives to traditional canal water systems. These measures can reduce the dependency on river water, particularly during dry periods, while also replenishing aquifers for future use.
8. **International Mediation and Technical Assistance:** In the event of a stalemate, neutral third-party mediation from international organizations or experts can help resolve disputes impartially. Technical assistance from international bodies, such as the World Bank or UNDP, could provide valuable input on water-sharing frameworks and technologies to enhance water management across the provinces.
9. **Reform of IRSA:** To restore its credibility and effectiveness, IRSA should undergo structural reforms. This includes making it an autonomous body, accountable to a broader oversight framework, and ensuring that it is inclusive in its decision-making process. IRSA must also adopt transparent data-sharing practices and

engage in regular consultations with the provinces to rebuild trust.

By implementing these measures, Pakistan can move toward a more sustainable and equitable water management system, alleviating inter-provincial tensions and ensuring that future generations have access to reliable water resources. However, these steps require strong political will, cooperation among all stakeholders, and a commitment to long-term solutions to resolve the canal water dispute and safeguard Pakistan's water future.

## Conclusion

The canal water dispute between Sindh and Punjab is not just a regional issue but a national concern with profound implications for Pakistan's federal structure. If left unresolved, it could further strain inter-provincial relations and destabilize the delicate balance of federalism. This crisis underscores the urgent need for comprehensive water reforms, stronger institutions, and enhanced cooperation between provinces. As climate change accelerates, and water resources become scarcer, equitable and transparent water management must take center stage. A collaborative approach, built on trust and accountability, is essential for resolving the dispute and ensuring that water resources are distributed fairly. Only through such efforts can Pakistan protect its agricultural future, safeguard the environment, and promote social harmony across its diverse regions.



# Pakistan's FY2025-26 Budget: Navigating Economic Reforms and Climate Challenges



By Romana Afsheen

## Nation at the Crossroads

Pakistan's economic situation is an intricate web of challenges, each overlapping with the other, forming an ever-more complex puzzle that policy-makers are struggling to piece together. The 2025–26 budget, recently announced, marks an ambitious attempt by the government to address the country's most pressing issues: the energy sector crisis, circular debt, climate change, and fiscal imbalances.

While Pakistan has historically struggled with inefficiencies and an over-reliance on external assistance, it faces a critical moment where failure to implement comprehensive reforms could lead to significant socio-economic consequences. This budget aims to not only stabilize the economy but also lay the groundwork for more sustainable and equitable growth. At the core of this fiscal plan are bold moves to reform the energy sector, manage circular debt, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.

This article will explore the interwoven factors that drive Pakistan's economic crisis, from fiscal imbalances to unsustainable subsidies, the looming threat of climate change, and ongoing political resistance to necessary reforms. We will take a closer look at how the government is responding, what these changes mean for the average citizen, and what lies ahead for Pakistan's economic future.

## Energy Sector Crisis: A Struggling Backbone of the Economy

Pakistan's energy sector has been in a perpetual state of crisis. It is one of the largest drains on the economy, plagued by inefficiencies, a growing circular debt, and mounting fiscal pressures. Over the years, energy subsidies have been seen as the only solution to shield consumers from astronomical costs, but this approach has proven unsustainable. The energy sector has become a major factor in Pakistan's economic stagnation, and without reform, it could become an insurmountable

barrier to future growth.

In the budget for FY2025-26, the government has allocated Rs359 billion for energy subsidies, a slight increase from Rs322 billion in the previous fiscal year. This move highlights an essential pivot from providing blanket subsidies to creating more targeted support mechanisms, particularly for low-income households. However, even with these targeted approaches, the sheer scale of Pakistan's energy sector debt remains problematic.

## Rising Debt and Structural Weaknesses

Pakistan's energy sector owes a significant portion of its debt to Independent Power Producers (IPPs), a situation exacerbated by inefficiencies in power generation, transmission, and distribution. The circular debt, which has spiraled to over Rs2.6 trillion, is the result of overdue payments and unsustainable subsidies, contributing to both inflation and power shortages. These inefficiencies have crippled the country's ability to generate sufficient



electricity at a reasonable cost, and any attempts to stabilize the sector have failed due to systemic issues and political interference.

The government's plan to reduce the circular debt in FY2025-26 is multi-pronged, aiming to introduce cost-reflective tariffs and improve the efficiency of Distribution Companies (DISCOs). While these measures may help in the long term, there are significant political challenges to overcome, including widespread opposition to tariff hikes from both the general public and influential business lobbies.

## Subsidies and Tariff Rationalization

Pakistan's energy sector is heavily subsidized, a strategy that has been used to curb the effects of high energy tariffs on consumers. In FY2025-26, Rs253 billion will be used to cover payments to IPPs, and Rs85 billion will be allocated to gas subsidies. Despite the increase in subsidy allocations, experts warn that this is a short-term solution that does not tackle the deeper structural issues. The most significant challenge moving forward is the need for tariff rationalization.

Rationalizing tariffs is a delicate process, as it requires increasing electricity prices to reflect the actual cost of generation while ensuring that consumers, particularly low-income families, are not further burdened. While targeted subsidies for low-income households are part of the government's strategy, the prospect of higher energy prices for the general public remains a sensitive issue.

## Privatization and Restructuring the Power Sector

Privatization remains a key strategy in the government's reform plan for the energy sector. Pakistan's state-owned power generation and distribution companies have been characterized by inefficiency, corruption, and political influence. The government's plan to privatize certain loss-making companies, such as Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and Pakistan Steel Mills, has generated considerable political opposition.

However, the government has outlined a roadmap for privatization of key energy assets, including certain DISCOs.

The success of privatization in the energy sector is contingent on several factors: adequate market-based valuations, transparency in the process, and the ability to break free from political interference. While privatization could help inject much-needed efficiency into the sector, it must be handled carefully to avoid backlash from labor unions, which have historically opposed the sale of state-owned assets.



## Circular Debt: The Lingering Crisis

Circular debt remains the most significant bottleneck for Pakistan's energy sector. This debt, which involves overdue payments from power distributors, power producers, and the government itself, has risen to unsustainable levels. The persistent circular debt cycle is fueled by inefficient billing systems, widespread theft of electricity, and politically motivated decisions that delay payments to power companies.

The government's strategy to address this crisis in FY2025-26 includes improving collection mechanisms and implementing cost-reflective pricing. However, experts warn that these measures alone will not solve the problem unless the root causes, such as poor governance, inefficiency, and underinvestment in the sector, are

addressed.

A potential solution lies in modernizing the energy infrastructure, such as improving the energy grid, expanding renewable energy capacity, and investing in smart metering systems. These reforms could lead to greater operational efficiency and improved collection rates. However, such reforms require substantial capital investment, and the government may face difficulty raising the necessary funds without international assistance or private sector involvement.

## Public Reaction and Political Resistance

The government's energy reforms are expected to face significant political resistance, particularly from labor unions and political parties that have historically opposed austerity measures. The privatization of state-owned enterprises and the introduction of cost-reflective tariffs are likely to provoke widespread protests and strikes, as seen in previous years when similar measures were proposed. The political fallout from these changes could destabilize the government, particularly as general elections loom on the horizon.

## Climate Action: A Rising Concern

Climate change poses an existential threat

to Pakistan, making it one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations. The catastrophic floods of 2022 were a stark reminder of the country's susceptibility to climate-related disasters. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events threaten not only the economy but also food security, water availability, and infrastructure.

In response to these challenges, the government has allocated Rs4 billion to the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination in FY2025-26, with a further Rs80 billion earmarked for the Green Pakistan Initiative. This initiative includes projects designed to mitigate climate risks, promote renewable energy, and enhance Pakistan's resilience to climate change.

## Renewable Energy and Solarization

Renewable energy has taken center stage in the government's strategy for sustainable growth. Pakistan has vast untapped renewable energy potential, particularly in solar and wind energy. The budget includes funding for solar energy projects in rural areas, where off-grid communities face severe power shortages. By investing in solar power infrastructure, the government aims to reduce dependency on expensive imported fossil fuels and improve access to clean energy for millions of people.

The budget also envisions the scaling up of wind and solar projects to diversify Pakistan's energy mix and reduce the reliance on thermal power generation, which accounts for a significant portion of the country's energy production. The government has set ambitious targets for increasing the share of renewables in the energy mix over the next decade, which could significantly reduce the economic burden associated with energy imports.

## Agriculture and Climate-Smart Practices

Pakistan's agricultural sector, which is the backbone of the economy, is deeply affected by climate change. Extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, have led to crop failures and a decline in agricultural productivity. The government's

climate action strategy includes supporting climate-smart agriculture, which focuses on practices that increase resilience to climate shocks, improve water use efficiency, and reduce carbon emissions.

The budget has allocated Rs50 billion for supporting climate-resilient farming techniques, including the development of drought-resistant crop varieties and the promotion of water-efficient irrigation systems. These investments in sustainable agriculture are critical to ensuring food security and stabilizing prices for basic commodities in Pakistan.

As Pakistan grapples with the immediate challenges of fiscal reform, energy sector inefficiencies, and inflationary pressures, the need for long-term, sustainable solutions becomes ever more critical. The government's fiscal measures aim to address budget deficits, tax collection shortfalls, and debt management, while also integrating broader objectives of environmental sustainability, renewable energy adoption, and climate resilience. With the energy sector in disarray and climate change presenting an existential threat, the country must not only prioritize economic stabilization but also align its policies with global shifts towards green growth. The challenge, therefore, lies in ensuring that short-term fiscal discipline translates into long-term economic transformation, addressing both environmental and economic vulnerabilities.

## Fiscal Reforms, Taxation, and Sustainable Growth: The Road to Resilience

As Pakistan grapples with its economic crisis, fiscal discipline has become a central theme in government policy. Pakistan's inability to generate sufficient revenue, combined with its unsustainable debt levels, has created an urgent need for fiscal reforms. The recent fiscal budget for FY2025-26 is designed to tackle the revenue shortfall, curb inflation, and bring about systemic reforms in taxation, government spending, and public sector performance. However, these reforms are not without their challenges, as political will, public cooperation, and the long-term vision

required for structural change are inextricably linked to their success.

At the same time, the government's economic reforms are inseparable from the environmental challenges Pakistan faces. Climate change, exemplified by the devastating floods in 2022, has added an additional layer of complexity to the country's already frail economic landscape. With global and regional pressures mounting, Pakistan needs a strategic, integrated approach to climate action and economic recovery—one that ties fiscal policy, taxation, and sustainable growth together. In this context, the role of renewable energy, international aid, and climate-smart development cannot be overstated.

## The Taxation Dilemma: Rebuilding Pakistan's Fiscal Base

The cornerstone of any nation's fiscal policy is its ability to generate revenue, and Pakistan has long struggled with this fundamental issue. Despite having one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world, Pakistan's government has faced an uphill battle to boost tax collections without causing widespread backlash. The budget for FY2025-26 has focused on broadening the tax base, implementing reforms to improve compliance, and restructuring Pakistan's notoriously inefficient tax system.

## Tax Reforms and Fiscal Targets

In FY2024-25, Pakistan's government has set an ambitious revenue target of Rs9.8 trillion, a 30% increase from the previous year. To meet this target, the government plans to enforce stricter measures to combat tax evasion, improve the efficiency of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), and increase the collection from key sectors such as agriculture, services, and construction. This is particularly important in light of the country's growing debt obligations, which continue to consume a disproportionate share of government expenditure.

Pakistan's tax system has long been criticized for its narrow base, with only a small proportion of the population paying



taxes. A significant portion of the economy remains informal, contributing little to the state's coffers. The government has committed to formalizing the informal economy, with the aim of bringing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) into the tax net. Additionally, Pakistan's urban elite has historically enjoyed tax breaks, which the government now intends to address by expanding property taxes and closing loopholes.

## The Political Hurdles of Taxation

However, implementing these reforms will not be easy. The entrenched interests of wealthy elites, landowners, and informal sector businesses present formidable obstacles to tax reform. Additionally, the public's trust in the government's ability to use tax revenues efficiently is low, exacerbated by corruption and mismanagement. There is also significant resistance to the imposition of new taxes, particularly among those who already face high inflation and economic uncertainty.

The government's ability to balance these competing pressures will be crucial. A transparent and efficient tax collection system, coupled with tangible benefits to the general public, could help ease resistance. In this context, the government's efforts to link tax revenues to increased social spending, particularly in healthcare and education, could bolster public support for these reforms.

## Public Sector Performance: Restructuring for Efficiency

Pakistan's public sector, especially in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), has long been a drain on national resources. These organizations are not only inefficient but are often riddled with corruption, which further hinders economic growth. To address these issues, the government is focusing on restructuring and privatizing key SOEs. This move is expected to reduce the fiscal burden, improve operational efficiency, and attract private investment.

One of the most contentious areas of reform

is the energy sector, where state-run companies have accumulated massive debts. Privatization, especially in areas like power generation and distribution, is seen as a necessary step to modernize the sector and reduce financial losses. However, the government's efforts are being met with significant opposition from trade unions and political groups who view privatization as a threat to jobs and workers' rights.

In addition to privatization, the government is also focusing on improving the management of public institutions. Civil service reforms are part of the broader strategy to enhance efficiency and reduce corruption within state institutions. Although these reforms have the potential to improve governance, their success will depend on political will, administrative capacity, and public support for change.



## Climate Change: An Overarching Challenge

Climate change is no longer a distant threat for Pakistan—it is an ongoing crisis with devastating consequences for the economy. The 2022 floods, which caused widespread destruction, displaced millions, and led to economic losses estimated at \$30 billion, serve as a stark reminder of the urgency of climate action. Pakistan's vulnerability to climate-related disasters is compounded by its dependence on agriculture, which accounts for a large portion of national income, but is highly susceptible to extreme weather events.

The government's climate agenda, outlined in the FY2025-26 budget, focuses on adaptation and resilience. Given the country's dependence on agriculture and the heavy toll of climate disasters, climate adaptation is an urgent priority. Pakistan is already one of the world's most water-scarce nations, and its water resources are under increasing stress due to erratic rainfall patterns and poor water management practices.

## Renewable Energy: A Pillar for Sustainable Development

A cornerstone of Pakistan's strategy to address both its energy and climate crises is the transition to renewable energy. Pakistan has immense potential for solar and wind

power, particularly in regions like Balochistan and Sindh, which experience high levels of sunshine and consistent winds. The government's focus on scaling up renewable energy projects, particularly solar power in rural areas, is crucial to diversifying the energy mix and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.

The FY2025-26 budget includes allocations for the solarization of agricultural lands, which will enable farmers to generate their own electricity for irrigation and other needs. This decentralized approach to energy generation could not only reduce the country's carbon footprint but also alleviate the financial burden on farmers who are

often faced with unreliable power supply and escalating energy costs.

Additionally, the government is looking to expand wind and hydropower projects. These initiatives are vital to reducing Pakistan's reliance on thermal power plants, which are costly and environmentally damaging. However, the renewable energy transition will require substantial investment in infrastructure and the development of a regulatory framework to attract private investors.

## International Support: Climate Financing and Aid

To support its climate adaptation and renewable energy initiatives, Pakistan will need significant international support. This support could come in the form of climate financing, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs. The government has emphasized the importance of global cooperation in addressing climate change, and Pakistan has been an active participant in international forums like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

At the recent COP28 summit, Pakistan secured pledges of financial support from international donors to aid in rebuilding efforts following the 2022 floods and to finance climate-resilient infrastructure. In addition, Pakistan has been a strong

advocate for the loss and damage fund, which is designed to provide financial compensation to countries most affected by climate change.

The availability of climate financing, however, is contingent upon Pakistan's ability to demonstrate its commitment to climate action and adopt policies that align with international climate goals. The successful implementation of renewable energy projects and climate-resilient agriculture will be key to securing continued international support

## Conclusion: A Roadmap for Recovery, Resilience, and Long-Term Growth

The Federal Budget for FY 2025–26 reflects a comprehensive approach to navigating Pakistan's economic challenges while laying the groundwork for long-term recovery and growth. With a strong focus on fiscal prudence, strategic investments in infrastructure, social welfare, and climate resilience, the budget represents a bold vision for the country's economic future.

Key allocations in agriculture, healthcare, energy, and social protection aim to address pressing issues while fostering inclusive growth. In particular, the government's commitment to climate-friendly initiatives and the adoption of a carbon fee are steps

toward ensuring that economic development aligns with global sustainability goals. The update in project selection criteria to prioritize climate-sensitive infrastructure is a notable reform aimed at reducing the country's vulnerability to climate change while contributing to its green transition.

However, the path forward is fraught with challenges. External financing remains crucial to meeting Pakistan's fiscal targets, especially with ongoing debt servicing obligations and the need to secure funding for development projects. Tax reforms and improvements in revenue generation are essential to reduce the fiscal deficit, but they require effective implementation to achieve desired results. The success of the budget's proposals will depend heavily on Pakistan's ability to balance social welfare, sustainable infrastructure investments, and climate adaptation with the imperative of maintaining fiscal discipline. Moreover, global economic pressures and the ongoing impact of climate change further complicate the landscape, creating uncertainty about the future trajectory of Pakistan's economy. Nevertheless, if the reforms outlined in the budget are executed effectively, they could provide the foundation for a more sustainable, resilient economy capable of weathering future challenges. Ultimately, the budget for FY 2025–26 is both a reflection of the government's ambition and a call to action for ensuring long-term economic stability and growth in a rapidly changing global environment.





# Pakistan's Path to Stability: Leveraging Remittances and Tackling Trade Deficits Amid Global Pressure



By Romana Afsheen

In recent months, Pakistan has faced a challenging economic situation, exacerbated by external factors such as trade tariffs imposed by the United States. The imposition of reciprocal tariffs on Pakistani goods by former U.S. President Donald Trump has been a point of concern for Pakistan's export sector, particularly its textile industry, which is heavily reliant on access to the U.S. market. However, the drop in global oil prices has emerged as a potential cushion for Pakistan, softening the adverse impact of these tariffs.

In this article, we will explore the measures taken by Pakistan's economic authorities, particularly the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), to mitigate the economic blow. We will also delve into the potential economic consequences of Trump's tariffs, with a specific focus on the textile sector, and discuss the projections for Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, current account balance, and remittances considering these developments.

## SBP Governor's Insights on the U.S. Tariffs and Economic Forecast

Jameel Ahmad, the Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), has been at the forefront of addressing the economic challenges facing Pakistan. Speaking on a Geo News program, Ahmad acknowledged the negative impact of U.S. tariffs on Pakistan's exports but reassured the public that the overall impact on Pakistan's economy would be contained.

"The total export to the U.S. is \$5.2 billion, out of which \$4.2 billion is related to textiles," Ahmad explained. This highlights how crucial the textile sector is for Pakistan's export revenue, as it comprises nearly 81% of the country's exports to the U.S.

Trump's decision to impose a 29% tariff on Pakistani exports has been a significant

blow. However, the SBP Governor emphasized that the textile sector, which stands to be the hardest hit, would be able to weather the storm. Ahmad expressed his belief that the overall impact on the economy would be mitigated by favorable global oil prices.

"Falling oil prices will have a more significant positive impact than the negative effects of U.S. tariffs," Ahmad said. He further assured that both the government and the SBP were prepared to provide support to the industries most affected by the tariffs. This support would include policy measures aimed at sustaining industrial output and minimizing job losses.

## The Role of Falling Oil Prices in Cushioning Economic Losses

One of the most significant factors that could alleviate the adverse effects of U.S. tariffs on Pakistan's economy is the recent

drop in global oil prices. The reduction in oil prices is expected to ease the pressure on Pakistan's import bill, which has traditionally been a major concern for the country's trade balance.

Oil is one of Pakistan's largest imports, and fluctuations in global oil prices can have a profound impact on the country's overall economic stability. The current global oil price downturn, therefore, has a positive side effect: it helps Pakistan to reduce its import costs, thereby easing pressure on its foreign exchange reserves.



The SBP Governor pointed out that, despite the tariff imposition by the U.S., the drop in oil prices would help cushion the impact of these tariffs, resulting in a net positive effect on the economy. While the textile industry will undoubtedly face challenges, the reduction in oil prices will ensure that Pakistan's trade deficit remains manageable, and foreign exchange reserves are preserved.

## Pakistan's Export and Remittance Outlook Amidst Tariff Imposition

In addition to tariffs, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have been under pressure due to fluctuating export revenues and remittance inflows. The SBP Governor's forecast suggests that the country's reserves are expected to reach \$14 billion by June 2025, which would mark a positive shift compared to previous years.

Despite the tariff imposition, Pakistan is expected to see an improvement in its current account balance by March 2025, owing to an uptick in exports and remit-

tances. Ahmad confirmed that the current account, which had been a cause for concern, is likely to remain surplus, contrary to previous predictions that it would be marginally negative. "Exports and remittances are expected to keep growing. We are confident that by the end of FY25, the current account will be in surplus, which will be a good sign for the country's macroeconomic stability," said Ahmad. Total remittances are projected to reach \$38 billion by the end of FY25, a significant increase that will further bolster Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

## SBP's Role in Stabilizing Pakistan's Economy: Financial Inclusion and Remittance Channels

The SBP has been actively involved in fostering economic stability through various initiatives. One of the most important initiatives is the promotion of financial inclusion, as part of Pakistan's National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS) for 2024-2028. The aim is to increase financial inclusion from 64% to 75% by 2028, with a focus on reducing the gender gap in access to financial services.

"Reducing the gender gap in financial services is a key priority for us," stated Ahmad. "We aim to reduce the gender gap from 34% to 25% by 2028, ensuring that financial services are accessible to all segments of society."

In addition to financial inclusion, the SBP has been instrumental in encouraging the use of formal channels for remittance transfers, which has resulted in a

record-high remittance inflow of \$4.1 billion in March 2025. This growth in remittances, driven by both government incentives and the improved functioning of the domestic foreign exchange market, has had a direct positive impact on Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves.

## The Economic Threat of Trump's Tariffs: A Closer Look at the PIDE Study

While the SBP remains optimistic about mitigating the impact of U.S. tariffs, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has painted a more alarming picture. According to a policy note released by PIDE, the 29% tariff, when added to the existing 8.6% Most Favored Nation (MFN) tariff, could result in a total duty of 37.6%. This would likely lead to a 20-25% decline in Pakistan's exports to the U.S., resulting in an annual loss of \$1.1 to \$1.4 billion.

The study, conducted by Dr. Muhammad Zeshan, Dr. Shujaat Farooq, and Dr. Usman Qadir, warns that these tariffs could have devastating effects on Pakistan's export sector, especially textiles. "The textile sector is particularly vulnerable to these tariffs, and it could lose substantial market share to regional competitors like India and Bangladesh," the study notes. PIDE also highlights the potential for job losses in the export-oriented sectors and a critical reduction in foreign exchange earnings. The warning from PIDE underscores the serious macroeconomic instability that could arise if the tariffs are implemented as planned.

## Long-term Strategies and Pakistan's Response to External Economic Pressures

In the face of rising external economic pressures, particularly from U.S. trade tariffs, Pakistan's government and economic institutions must adapt to ensure long-term stability. While short-term measures like adjusting to fluctuating oil prices and maintaining remittance growth are important, the country needs a comprehensive strategy to reduce its reliance on



exports to a single market and minimize vulnerabilities to such tariffs.

In this section, we will explore the longer-term economic strategies Pakistan can adopt to mitigate the effects of global trade disruptions, diversify its export markets, strengthen its manufacturing sector, and foster resilience in its economy. Additionally, we will consider the role of economic diplomacy, foreign investment, and regional cooperation in bolstering Pakistan's trade relations and economic performance.

## Diversification of Export Markets: A Necessity for Stability

The impact of Trump's tariffs underscores the vulnerability of Pakistan's export sector, especially its heavy reliance on the U.S. market. As of recent data, the U.S. accounts for a significant share of Pakistan's textile exports, and any disruption to this trade channel can have disastrous effects on the country's economic health. Therefore, diversifying export markets is no longer just an option but a necessity.

Pakistan must look beyond traditional markets like the U.S. and focus on emerging economies that have seen strong growth in the past decade. Countries in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia offer promising opportunities, especially given the growing demand for textiles and other manufactured goods.

To facilitate this diversification, Pakistan's economic policymakers should engage in active economic diplomacy and establish trade agreements that grant preferential market access in these regions. The Pakistan-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a good example of how trade agreements can help reduce tariff barriers and open new markets for Pakistan's exports.

Moreover, expanding the scope of trade within the South Asian region itself—especially with neighboring countries such as India, Afghanistan, and Iran—could further cushion Pakistan from the blow of tariffs in Western markets. Regional cooperation and trade facilitation would

help lower costs and improve market access, driving economic growth in Pakistan.

## Strengthening Pakistan's Manufacturing Sector

To compete in global markets, Pakistan must strengthen its manufacturing sector, particularly in high-value industries like textiles, electronics, and machinery. A key component of this strategy would involve increasing productivity and upgrading manufacturing technologies to enhance the country's price competitiveness.



One way to achieve this is by fostering innovation through research and development (R&D). Pakistan's textile industry, for example, could benefit from introducing advanced textile manufacturing technologies, which would improve both product quality and efficiency. This, in turn, could help Pakistan maintain its competitiveness even in the face of rising tariffs.

The government should also focus on improving the ease of doing business for manufacturers, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the country's industrial sector. Streamlining the regulatory environment, offering fiscal incentives for technological upgrades, and enhancing access to finance would provide a boost to these businesses.

Additionally, the government should create training programs to upskill the workforce in manufacturing industries. As automation and digitalization become integral parts of global production chains, ensuring that Pakistan's labor force is prepared for these changes is essential for staying

competitive in the international market.

## Enhancing Foreign Investment and Economic Diplomacy

Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) is another key strategy for reducing Pakistan's vulnerability to external trade disruptions. The country has vast untapped potential in sectors such as information technology (IT), renewable energy, agriculture, and infrastructure, which can appeal to global investors.

To make Pakistan an attractive destination for FDI, the government needs to address key barriers, including political instability, security concerns, and corruption. Improving Pakistan's business climate—by enhancing the ease of doing business, ensuring transparency in government dealings, and providing incentives for foreign investors—will be crucial to attracting more foreign capital.

Economic diplomacy also plays an important role in strengthening trade relations and securing investment. Pakistan's diplomatic corps should actively engage with potential investors and trade partners to promote the country's economic strengths and explore investment opportunities in emerging sectors. The expansion of economic ties with countries in the Middle East, China, and Europe should be a priority for the government.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a prime example of successful economic diplomacy and foreign investment. CPEC has already brought substantial infrastructure investments into

Pakistan, and continued development under this initiative can help Pakistan modernize its transport and energy sectors, creating a more favorable environment for foreign investments.

## Strengthening Pakistan's Financial Sector

A robust financial sector is crucial for any economy, especially in a country like Pakistan, where external pressures and internal financial challenges are prevalent. The SBP's efforts to stabilize the currency and manage inflation through monetary policies are important, but Pakistan must also focus on strengthening its broader financial system.

The financial inclusion strategy mentioned by SBP Governor Jameel Ahmad is a step in the right direction. Expanding access to banking services, particularly in rural areas, will provide greater economic opportunities and allow more people to participate in the formal economy. Digital banking and mobile money services, which have grown globally, could offer a low-cost way to reach underserved populations in Pakistan, especially women, who have traditionally been excluded from financial services.

Additionally, increasing transparency and reducing non-performing loans in the banking sector would build confidence among local and international investors. This would enhance Pakistan's financial system's stability and ensure that credit is more readily available for businesses to expand and invest in future growth.

## Addressing Pakistan's Structural Economic Challenges

Despite the external pressures, Pakistan's economic growth has been hindered by several internal structural challenges, including a reliance on traditional industries, weak infrastructure, and insufficient education and healthcare systems. To build long-term economic resilience, Pakistan must address these structural issues through comprehensive reforms.

A critical area that requires urgent attention is the energy sector. High electricity and gas prices, coupled with frequent power

outages, have hurt industrial output in Pakistan. A shift towards renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power can reduce dependence on expensive imported oil and lower production costs for businesses.

Additionally, improving Pakistan's education system is paramount to ensuring that the workforce is well-equipped for the challenges of the 21st century. Investments in education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, would help Pakistan build a knowledge-based economy capable of competing in the global marketplace.



## Navigating Economic Pressures with Strategic Adaptation and Resilience

The imposition of U.S. tariffs on Pakistan's exports, particularly the textile sector, presents a significant challenge that has the potential to disrupt the country's economic landscape. While short-term factors, such as the recent drop in global oil prices, provide some relief and benefit other sectors, the long-term economic stability of Pakistan hinges on the ability to adapt strategically to these external pressures.

The efforts by Pakistan's government and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to mitigate the immediate impact of these tariffs, such as managing oil price fluctuations and maintaining remittance inflows, are vital for providing short-term cushioning. However, the looming risk highlighted by institutions like the Pakistan Institute of

Development Economics (PIDE)—that full implementation of these tariffs could result in a significant loss of export revenue and decreased price competitiveness—cannot be ignored. As such, a strategic pivot toward diversifying export markets and strengthening trade relationships with both traditional and emerging economies is necessary to safeguard Pakistan's future growth.

Beyond immediate adjustments, the long-term solution lies in comprehensive reforms aimed at building a resilient, diversified economy. Strengthening Pakistan's manufacturing sector, fostering

innovation and technological upgrades, and creating an environment conducive to foreign investment are crucial steps. Additionally, addressing internal structural challenges—such as improving education, infrastructure, and energy systems—will equip Pakistan with the necessary tools to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

In conclusion, while the external pressures posed by U.S. tariffs and global trade dynamics are substantial, Pakistan has the potential to navigate these challenges successfully. Through strategic long-term planning, focused diversification, and structural reforms, the country can not only mitigate the impact of such disruptions but also build a more resilient and prosperous economy. With these proactive measures, Pakistan can reduce its dependence on a few export markets, strengthen its position in the global economy, and chart a path toward sustained economic growth and stability.



# Cryptocurrency in Pakistan: A New Era with Pakistan Crypto Council

By Saad Khan Jadoon

Pakistan's relationship with cryptocurrency has been evolving through phases of skepticism, informal adoption, and now potential regulation. In March 2025, a significant milestone was achieved with the formation of the Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC), signaling the government's intent to formalize the country's position in the digital asset economy. This development, coupled with the high-profile involvement of Binance's founder, marks a pivotal shift in Pakistan's approach to blockchain technology and cryptocurrency.

## Pakistan's Cryptocurrency Journey: From Resistance to Regulation

Pakistan's relationship with cryptocurrency has been marked by a complex interplay of government caution and public enthusiasm. For nearly a decade, digital assets existed in a regulatory gray area, with authorities struggling to balance innovation with financial stability concerns.

The turning point came in 2018 when the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) issued a circular effectively prohibiting financial institutions from processing cryptocurrency transactions. This move, motivated by concerns over money laundering and terror financing following FATF scrutiny, created significant barriers to formal crypto adoption. Banks began closing accounts tied to crypto activities, forcing traders and investors underground.

Despite these restrictions, Pakistan's crypto economy flourished through informal channels. Peer-to-peer (P2P) trading volumes skyrocketed, with industry analysts estimating over \$20 billion in transactions between 2021-2023. Platforms like LocalBitcoins and Paxful became household names among tech-savvy Pakistanis, while Telegram groups and private networks facilitated large over-the-counter (OTC) trades.



This underground boom came with significant challenges:

### 1. Security and Fraud Risks

The unregulated environment became fertile ground for scams. From Ponzi schemes disguised as mining operations to fake exchange platforms, Pakistani investors lost millions. The 2022 "Binance Pakistan" scam alone defrauded thousands by impersonating the legitimate exchange.

### 2. Missed Economic Opportunities

While the public embraced crypto's potential as:

- An inflation hedge (with PKR losing 50%+ value since 2018)
- A remittance solution (bypassing 10-15% traditional transfer fees)
- An employment generator in blockchain development

The lack of regulation prevented institutional participation and foreign investment that could have formalized these benefits.

### 3. Technological Paradox

Pakistan's young, digitally-native population (64% under 30) naturally gravitated toward crypto. Universities saw surging interest in blockchain courses, while developer communities like the Pakistan Blockchain Association grew exponentially. Yet without regulatory clarity, this talent either operated in legal limbo or migrated abroad.

The turning point came in 2024 when:

- Pakistan completed its FATF action plans
- SBP digital currency research highlighted blockchain's potential
- Neighboring India's crypto taxation model demonstrated regulatory possibilities

This set the stage for the landmark 2025 PCC formation, marking Pakistan's transition from crypto resistance to structured regulation. The journey reflects a global pattern - initial skepticism giving way to recognition of digital assets' inevitable role in modern finance.

## The Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC): A New Regulatory Framework

The establishment of the Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC) in March 2025 marked a watershed moment in the country's approach to digital assets. Recognizing both the risks and opportunities presented by cryptocurrency, the government created this specialized regulatory body to bring much-needed structure to Pakistan's rapidly growing crypto ecosystem. The PCC represents Pakistan's commitment to fostering innovation while implementing safeguards to protect investors and maintain financial stability.

At its core, the PCC has been tasked with developing a comprehensive regulatory framework tailored to Pakistan's unique economic and technological landscape. This involves crafting clear legislation that balances the need for innovation with robust consumer protections, ensuring that Pakistan's crypto market can grow responsibly. A key focus area is establishing fair taxation policies for cryptocurrency transactions and mining operations, which will provide much-needed clarity for both individual investors and businesses operating in this space.

Beyond regulation, the PCC plays a vital role in promoting blockchain technology adoption across various sectors. The council actively works to integrate blockchain solutions into both public and private sector operations, with particular emphasis on enhancing transparency and operational efficiency. This includes supporting the burgeoning fintech startup ecosystem and facilitating the development of decentralized finance (DeFi) applications that could revolutionize financial services in Pakistan.

Investor protection forms another critical pillar of the PCC's mandate. The council has implemented stringent measures to combat fraud and market manipulation, while simultaneously launching nationwide education campaigns to improve public understanding of cryptocurrency risks and best practices. These initiatives aim to create a safer environment for both novice and experienced crypto participants.

Recognizing the global nature of cryptocur-

rency markets, the PCC places strong emphasis on international collaboration. The council actively engages with regulatory bodies worldwide to align Pakistan's policies with emerging global standards, while also working to attract foreign investment into the country's blockchain and crypto sectors. This international approach helps position Pakistan as a serious player in the digital asset space.

Perhaps one of the PCC's most challenging responsibilities is facilitating integration between traditional banking systems and cryptocurrency businesses. The council works closely with the State Bank of Pakistan to develop frameworks that allow regulated financial institutions to safely interact with crypto enterprises, bridging the gap between conventional finance and the new digital economy. This delicate balancing act requires navigating complex issues around risk management and compliance while enabling innovation to flourish.

Through these multifaceted efforts, the PCC aims to transform Pakistan's crypto landscape from its current state of informal adoption to a properly regulated, thriving digital asset ecosystem that contributes meaningfully to the nation's economic development.

## Pakistan Brings on Binance Founder CZ to Shape Crypto Future

The appointment of Changpeng Zhao (CZ), founder and former CEO of Binance, as a key advisor to Pakistan's Crypto Council (PCC) marked a pivotal moment in the nation's digital asset journey. The high-profile signing ceremony, with CZ standing before Pakistan's national flags, sent a powerful message about the country's serious intentions to become a regional blockchain hub. This strategic partnership represents more than just symbolic support - it brings the technical expertise and global perspective of the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange to Pakistan's regulatory development process.

Binance's involvement is expected to accelerate several critical areas of Pakistan's crypto ecosystem development. The exchange's technical capabilities could

prove invaluable in helping establish a secure, institutional-grade trading infrastructure to move activity away from informal peer-to-peer markets. This transition is crucial for improving market transparency and reducing fraud risks. Additionally, Binance's experience navigating complex regulatory environments worldwide positions it well to assist Pakistan in developing compliance frameworks that meet international anti-money laundering (AML) and counter-terrorism financing (CTF) standards - a key requirement for gaining global legitimacy.

Perhaps most significantly, Binance has committed to supporting education initiatives to build local blockchain talent. This includes potential collaborations with Pakistani universities to develop specialized curricula and training programs that prepare the workforce for high-value jobs in blockchain development, crypto compliance, and related fields. Such knowledge transfer could help Pakistan capitalize on its young, tech-savvy demographic dividend.

However, this promising partnership faces notable challenges. The fundamental question of regulatory clarity remains unresolved - will Pakistan follow an embracing approach like Dubai or take a more restrictive stance? Public trust presents another hurdle, as many Pakistanis remain skeptical after experiencing crypto scams and fraudulent schemes. The PCC and Binance will need to demonstrate tangible benefits to overcome this skepticism.

Moreover, Binance's own global regulatory challenges - including its \$4.3 billion settlement with U.S. authorities in 2023 - create potential complications. While CZ's advisory role is personal rather than corporate, Pakistan's regulators will need to carefully navigate perceptions about working with figures associated with past compliance issues. The success of this partnership will depend on maintaining transparent operations that satisfy both domestic concerns and international regulatory expectations.

Ultimately, this collaboration represents a calculated risk for both parties - an opportunity for Pakistan to leapfrog into blockchain leadership with world-class



expertise, and a chance for Binance to demonstrate its value as a responsible industry partner in emerging markets. How these stakeholders manage the inherent challenges will determine whether this becomes a model for crypto adoption in developing economies.

## Global Perspective: Donald Trump's Crypto Policies

As Pakistan charts its course in cryptocurrency regulation, parallel developments in the United States under President Donald Trump's second administration are reshaping the global digital asset landscape. The American approach to crypto has undergone a remarkable transformation since Trump's first term, when he famously dismissed Bitcoin as a facilitator of "unlawful behavior." This evolution reflects both changing political realities and the growing maturity of cryptocurrency markets.

The turning point came during the 2024 election cycle, when Trump's campaign made history by becoming the first major presidential campaign to accept cryptocurrency donations. This strategic move not only tapped into a growing base of crypto-enthusiastic voters but also signaled a broader political realignment, with digital assets becoming a wedge issue between pro-innovation and more cautious policymakers. The administration's subsequent appointments to key financial regulatory bodies, including the SEC and CFTC, brought in officials with more nuanced understandings of blockchain technology, marking a departure from the adversarial stance of previous years.

Several consequential policy developments have emerged from this shift. The U.S. Treasury has advanced comprehensive stablecoin legislation, providing much-needed clarity for dollar-pegged cryptocurrencies and creating a more predictable environment for companies like Circle (USDC) to operate. Simultaneously, the government's substantial Bitcoin holdings—accumulated primarily through seizures from criminal cases—have positioned the U.S. as an unexpected but influential player in crypto markets. These holdings now exceed 200,000 BTC, giving the government direct exposure to the asset

class it once viewed with suspicion.

Perhaps most significantly, the administration's approach to a potential digital dollar represents a careful balancing act. While continuing research into central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), Trump's team has emphasized private-sector solutions over a fully government-controlled system. This philosophy aligns with broader efforts to maintain American technological leadership while addressing concerns about financial privacy and government overreach.

The geopolitical ramifications of these policies are profound. As the U.S. clarifies its regulatory framework, it is actively competing with China's digital yuan



initiative and the European Union's Markets in Crypto-Assets (MiCA) regulations to set de facto global standards. Wall Street's accelerating embrace of crypto products—from Bitcoin ETFs to blockchain-based settlement systems—has added financial heft to this competition. Moreover, with cryptocurrency policy emerging as a persistent theme in U.S. elections, decisions made in Washington now carry immediate consequences for markets worldwide, creating new layers of interconnection between American politics and the global digital economy.

This evolving U.S. stance creates both opportunities and challenges for countries like Pakistan as they develop their own regulatory approaches. The American experience demonstrates how quickly

political attitudes toward crypto can change, while also highlighting the complex interplay between innovation, regulation, and geopolitical competition that now defines this space. As Pakistan's PCC formulates its policies, these international developments provide valuable case studies in the risks and rewards of cryptocurrency integration at the national level.

## Pakistan's Crypto Future in a Shifting Global Landscape

The Pakistan Crypto Council (PCC), established in March 2025, represents a turning point for the country's digital

economy. The high-profile involvement of Binance's founder adds significant weight to Pakistan's crypto ambitions. If the PCC succeeds in creating a balanced regulatory framework, Pakistan could emerge as a regional hub for blockchain innovation.

Meanwhile, global trends, such as Trump's pro-crypto policies, highlight how digital assets are reshaping finance and governance worldwide. For Pakistan, the challenge lies in harnessing crypto's potential while mitigating risks—a task that will define its economic trajectory in the coming years.

The PCC's next moves will be crucial. Will Pakistan become a leader in crypto adoption, or will regulatory hurdles slow its progress? The world is watching.

# Future of Fulbright Program in Doubt as U.S. State Department Freezes Funding for Exchange Initiatives



By Hina Kashif

The Fulbright Program, established in 1946, has long stood as a beacon of international educational exchange, fostering mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other nations. In Pakistan, this program has been instrumental in shaping the academic and professional trajectories of thousands of students and scholars. However, recent developments, notably a funding freeze imposed by the U.S. State Department, have cast a shadow over the future of the Fulbright Program and other exchange initiatives.

## Historical Context of the Fulbright Program in Pakistan

Since its inception, the Fulbright Program has aimed to increase mutual understanding through the exchange of students, scholars, and professionals. In Pakistan, the program is admin-

istered by the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP), established in 1950. Over the decades, the Fulbright Program has awarded scholarships to over 3,200 Pakistani citizens, enabling them to pursue graduate studies in the United States across various disciplines, including energy, water, agriculture, health, education, environmental science, and climate change.

## The Impact of the Fulbright Program

The Fulbright Program's impact in Pakistan extends beyond individual academic achievements. Returnees have significantly contributed to the country's development, applying their acquired knowledge and skills in sectors such as education, healthcare, and public policy. The program has also fostered enduring ties between the U.S. and Pakistan, promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

## Recent Challenges: Funding Freeze and Its Implications

In February 2025, the U.S. State Department implemented a 15-day pause on all grant disbursements under its Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), which oversees programs like Fulbright. This pause was part of a broader initiative to reevaluate and realign U.S. foreign aid, as outlined in Executive Order 14169. The order mandated a 90-day suspension of all foreign development assistance programs to conduct a comprehensive review. While certain exemptions were made for life-saving assistance, many educational and cultural exchange programs were affected.

The funding freeze has led to significant disruptions. Scholars currently abroad have reported abrupt cessation of stipend payments, leaving them in



precarious financial situations. For instance, Aubrey Lay, a teaching assistant in Estonia, received only a partial payment and has been left uncertain about future funds. Similarly, Nigora Jabborova, an MBA student and Fulbright Scholar, faced abrupt termination of her contract, leaving her struggling to cover basic necessities.

The lack of clear communication from U.S. officials has exacerbated the situation, leaving scholars and host institutions in a state of confusion regarding the future of these programs. The pause affects over 12,500 individuals, including American students and foreign participants, raising concerns about the long-term viability of international exchange initiatives.

## The Termination of the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD)

Compounding the challenges, the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD), which annually allowed over 100 Pakistani students to attend U.S. colleges for non-degree academic studies, has been discontinued. The exact reasons for this shutdown remain unclear, but it has left many aspiring students disheartened and seeking alternative opportunities.

## Government and Institutional Responses

In response to the funding uncertainties, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Chairman, Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, expressed disappointment over the termination of programs like UGRAD. He emphasized that students currently studying in the U.S. should be allowed to complete their degrees without disruption. The United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP) has continued to accept applications for the 2026 Fulbright cycle, although insiders remain skeptical about the program's resumption given the current funding climate.

## Broader Implications for U.S.-Pakistan Educational Exchanges

The uncertainty surrounding the Fulbright

Program and other exchange initiatives has broader implications for U.S.-Pakistan relations. Educational exchanges have long been a cornerstone of bilateral ties, fostering goodwill and mutual understanding. The current disruptions risk undermining these relationships and may have long-term effects on perceptions of the U.S. in Pakistan.



## Future Outlook: Navigating Uncertainty

Looking ahead, the future of the Fulbright Program and similar initiatives in Pakistan hinges on several factors:

1. **Resolution of Funding Issues:** The U.S. government will need to address the funding freeze and provide clear communication regarding the status of exchange programs.
2. **Adaptation by Partner Institutions:** Organizations like USEFP may need to explore alternative funding sources and partnerships to sustain exchange opportunities.
3. **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Continuous dialogue among stakeholders, including governments, educational institutions, and participants, will be crucial to navigate the evolving landscape.

The Fulbright Program has played a pivotal role in shaping educational and cultural

exchanges between the U.S. and Pakistan. The recent funding challenges pose significant threats to these exchanges, affecting scholars, students, and the broader bilateral relationship. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from all stakeholders to ensure that the spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration endures.

## Fulbright Scholar Aubrey Lay Faces Financial Uncertainty Amid U.S. Funding Freeze

Aubrey Lay, a Fulbright grant recipient, embarked on what was meant to be a transformative academic and cultural journey in Estonia, where he was appointed as a teaching assistant at a school for Ukrainian refugee children. Under normal circumstances, Lay would have received payment for three full months of work, funded by the U.S. Department of State through the Fulbright Program. However, what followed was a troubling disruption: instead of the full compensation, Lay received just one week's worth of pay—and has since been left in the dark about when, or even if, the remainder of his grant funds will be disbursed.

Lay is not alone. He is one of many scholars and participants around the world who have been caught off guard by an abrupt and sweeping freeze on federal

funding for cultural and academic exchange programs managed by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). These cuts came with minimal warning and little explanation beyond a general notice that programmatic activities were "under review." The sudden halt has thrown long-standing and respected initiatives like the Fulbright Program into disarray, affecting hundreds of individuals who rely on these funds not only for educational purposes but for their daily subsistence while abroad.

their grants—are now becoming sources of anxiety and, in some cases, desperation. The lack of communication from program administrators has only amplified these concerns, with scholars unable to get clear answers about the status of their funding or the future of their academic placements.

"This wasn't just a job or a stipend—it was a commitment made by the U.S. government," one scholar affected by the freeze remarked. "To have that pulled away with no warning, no plan, and no support system in place is devastating."



The freeze appears to be tied directly to the broader fiscal overhaul championed by President Donald Trump, who has directed a significant tightening of federal expenditures. As part of this strategy, agencies across the U.S. government have been instructed to reduce spending sharply and prepare for large-scale staffing reductions, also known as "reductions in force." These planned cutbacks are likely to result in scaled-back operations even at agencies that provide critical public services, including those overseeing international education and diplomacy.

For Fulbright scholars like Lay, the consequences are deeply personal and immediate. Without the financial support that was promised, many are finding themselves stranded in foreign countries, burdened with expenses they can no longer cover. Housing, transportation, food, and other basic needs—previously accounted for in

Many Fulbright participants are also grappling with the emotional toll of this uncertainty. They left their home countries with the belief that they were contributing to global understanding and diplomacy through education—principles at the heart of the Fulbright mission. Now, they feel abandoned by the very system that once upheld them as ambassadors of goodwill.

Lay, like his fellow scholars, is waiting for clarity. With each passing day, the financial and psychological strain grows. Meanwhile, the broader implications for international educational exchange are becoming increasingly evident. If programs like Fulbright cannot guarantee reliability and consistency, the trust and appeal they have built over decades may erode—potentially deterring future scholars from applying and damaging the United States' reputation as a leader in academic diplomacy.

As Washington continues to recalibrate its

budget priorities, the fate of thousands of scholars remains suspended. For Lay and others like him, what was supposed to be a life-changing opportunity has turned into an unexpected struggle for financial survival—and a stark reminder of the fragile link between politics and education in an era of deepening uncertainty.

## The Fulbright Program: Navigating Financial Turbulence Amid Policy Shifts

The Fulbright Program, established in 1946, has long stood as a beacon of international educational exchange, fostering mutual understanding between the people of the United States and those of other nations. Over the decades, it has enabled scholars, students, and professionals to engage in academic and cultural exchanges, enriching societies globally. However, recent policy decisions have cast a shadow over its future, leaving many participants and stakeholders grappling with uncertainty.

## Historical Context and Significance

Named after Senator J. William Fulbright, who championed its creation, the program has facilitated exchanges involving over 400,000 participants from more than 160 countries. Its alumni include numerous Nobel laureates, Pulitzer Prize winners, and leaders across various fields, underscoring its impact on global education and diplomacy.

## Recent Challenges

In January 2025, President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14169, titled "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," which mandated a 90-day pause on all U.S. foreign development assistance programs to allow for comprehensive review. This directive led to the suspension of numerous initiatives, including those under the purview of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), which oversees the Fulbright Program. The immediate consequence was a freeze on grant disbursements, leaving



scholars like Aubrey Lay and Nigora Jabborova without the financial support essential for their academic and living expenses abroad.

## Financial Implications

The funding freeze has precipitated significant financial distress among Fulbright participants. Scholars have reported abrupt suspension of their stipends, compelling many to rely on personal savings or seek alternative funding sources to sustain their endeavors. This uncertainty not only affects the scholars' immediate well-being but also threatens the continuity of their research and cultural exchange objectives.

## Impact on Host Institutions and Global Perception

Beyond the individual hardships, host institutions have felt the ripple effects of the funding cuts. Many universities and organizations that collaborate with Fulbright scholars face challenges in accommodating the sudden changes, potentially straining international partnerships and collaborations. Moreover, the abrupt policy shift has raised concerns about the U.S.'s commit-

ment to international educational exchanges, potentially influencing future participation and applications.

## Looking Ahead: Potential Resolutions and Future Outlook

As the 90-day review period mandated by Executive Order 14169 nears its end, stakeholders await clarity on the future of the Fulbright Program and other cultural exchange initiatives. Advocacy groups, such as the Alliance for International Exchange, have voiced concerns over proposed funding cuts, emphasizing that reductions could hinder U.S. foreign policy objectives and global diplomatic relations. They argue that investing in educational and cultural exchanges is crucial for fostering international goodwill and understanding.

Furthermore, legislative actions have added complexity to the funding landscape. The House Appropriations Subcommittee's proposed 2.7% cut to educational and cultural exchange programs in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget has raised alarms. Such reductions, following a 4.7% cut in the previous fiscal year, could exacerbate

existing challenges and limit opportunities for future scholars.

## The Path Forward

The resolution of the current funding impasse will depend on a confluence of factors, including budgetary decisions, policy reviews, and advocacy efforts. For the Fulbright Program to regain its footing, a concerted effort from all stakeholders—government bodies, educational institutions, alumni, and participants—is essential. Restoring funding and support will not only alleviate the immediate challenges faced by current scholars but also reaffirm the U.S.'s dedication to fostering global educational exchanges.

The Fulbright Program's current predicament serves as a poignant reminder of the vulnerabilities inherent in federally funded initiatives, especially when subjected to shifting political and budgetary priorities. As the situation unfolds, the resilience of the program and its community will be tested. However, with unified support and strategic advocacy, there is hope that the Fulbright Program will navigate these turbulent waters and continue its legacy of promoting international understanding and collaboration.





# Cricket's Historic Olympic Return After 128 Years: A New Era Begins



By Saad Khan Jadoon

The International Olympic Committee's landmark decision on April 10, 2025 to include cricket in the 2028 Los Angeles Games has sent shockwaves through the sporting world. After being absent from the Olympic program for 128 years, cricket's return represents one of the most significant developments in the sport's modern history. This inclusion comes at a time when cricket is experiencing unprecedented global growth, fueled by the T20 revolution and the expansion of franchise leagues worldwide. The Olympic stage offers cricket an unparalleled opportunity to showcase its appeal to new audiences and establish itself as a truly global sport. For players, administrators, and fans alike, this decision marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter that could fundamentally transform cricket's place in world sports.

## Cricket's Forgotten Olympic Past

Cricket's Olympic history is surprisingly brief and largely forgotten. The sport made its only previous appearance at the 1900 Paris Games, in what amount-

ed to more of an exhibition than a serious competition. Only two teams participated - Great Britain and France - with the British side (actually a club team called the Devon and Somerset Wanderers) emerging victorious by 158 runs in a 12-a-side match that lasted two days. The French team consisted mainly of British expatriates, making the contest more of a novelty than a genuine international competition. Several factors contributed to cricket's subsequent Olympic exclusion: the sport's limited global reach at the time, the impractical length of matches for the Olympic schedule, and its perception as an exclusively British Empire pastime. The upcoming LA Games will effectively mark cricket's true Olympic debut as a fully-fledged international sport.

## The Road to Reinstatement: How Cricket Won Its Olympic Place

Cricket's journey back to the Olympics has been a long and carefully orchestrated process. The International

Cricket Council (ICC) began serious lobbying efforts in the early 2000s, but several key developments in recent years made the sport's inclusion inevitable. The explosive growth of T20 cricket proved that the game could fit within Olympic time constraints, while the establishment of successful domestic leagues around the world demonstrated its commercial viability. The rise of women's cricket addressed the IOC's emphasis on gender equality, and the sport's expansion into new markets like the United States made it increasingly attractive to Olympic organizers. A crucial turning point came with the success of Major League Cricket in the U.S. and the ICC's willingness to adapt its calendar to accommodate Olympic participation. The final proposal emphasized cricket's potential to bring new audiences to the Olympics, particularly in South Asia where the sport enjoys fanatical following.

## Olympic Cricket Format and Structure

The LA 2028 cricket competition will feature both men's and women's



tournaments using the T20 format, widely recognized as the most television-friendly version of the game. Six teams will compete in each tournament, with a total of 180 athletes (90 men and 90 women) participating. Each team will have a 15-player squad, allowing for tactical flexibility throughout the competition. The tournament structure will likely involve a round-robin group stage followed by knockout matches, though final details are still being confirmed. Qualification pathways are expected to combine direct entries for top-ranked nations with regional qualifying tournaments to ensure broad global representation. The host country (USA) may receive automatic qualification, providing a major boost to cricket development in America. All matches will be played at world-class venues, with temporary cricket facilities likely to be installed at existing Los Angeles sports stadiums.

inclusion may prompt governments in non-traditional cricket countries to fund the sport's development, as Olympic success often translates to national prestige. Countries like China, Germany, and Japan, which have shown sporadic interest in cricket, may now establish proper development pathways with an Olympic goal in mind. The ICC estimates that Olympic participation could lead to a 40% increase in global cricket participation within a decade.

## Official Venue Announcement

The Los Angeles 2028 Olympics Organizing Committee (LA28) has officially confirmed that cricket will make its long-awaited return to the Olympic program at the Pomona Fairplex in Southern California. This marks the sport's

custom-designed cricket field while leveraging existing parking and transportation links. Its location in the heart of Southern California's diverse communities—home to large South Asian, Australian, and Caribbean diasporas—ensures a vibrant atmosphere. Additionally, the Fairplex's post-Olympics potential as a cricket hub aligns with USA Cricket's goal of establishing permanent high-performance facilities.

To meet international standards, the Fairplex will install drop-in pitches, curated by ICC-certified experts, to ensure a competitive playing surface. The stadium layout will feature a modular design with 360-degree seating, mirroring the intimacy of traditional cricket grounds. Adjacent practice ovals will be constructed for team training, while temporary hospitality suites and broadcast zones will cater to media and VIP guests. During the scheduled competition window, the venue's dry, warm October climate is ideal for uninterrupted play, minimizing weather-related disruptions.

## Challenges and Considerations

Despite the overwhelming positivity surrounding cricket's Olympic return, significant challenges remain. Scheduling conflicts with existing international and franchise competitions will require careful negotiation, particularly regarding player availability. The July-August Olympic window traditionally clashes with several major cricket commitments, including the English summer season and the Caribbean Premier League. Adapting American sports venues for cricket presents logistical challenges, particularly regarding pitch preparation and stadium configurations. There are also concerns about maintaining competitive balance, as early rounds could feature lopsided matches between established nations and qualifiers from developing regions. The ICC must also address how Olympic participation affects existing international tournaments - there are already discussions about potentially restructuring the Future Tours Programme to create a dedicated Olympic qualification pathway.



## Global Implications: Winners and Opportunities

The Olympic inclusion stands to benefit cricket nations in various ways. Traditional powerhouses like India, Australia, and England are well-positioned to compete for medals, while emerging nations see this as a chance to accelerate their development programs. The United States cricket program could receive transformative funding and exposure as host nation. Women's cricket particularly stands to gain, with Olympic status likely to drive increased investment and participation worldwide. Perhaps most significantly, Olympic

first appearance in the Games since 1900, ending a 128-year absence. The Fairplex, a sprawling 487-acre multi-purpose venue, was selected for its adaptability, existing infrastructure, and potential to leave a lasting legacy for cricket in the United States. Nestled just 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, the site will undergo temporary modifications to accommodate a world-class cricket oval, complete with drop-in pitches and seating for over 15,000 spectators.

The choice of Pomona Fairplex reflects a strategic effort to balance functionality with fan accessibility. Known for hosting the LA County Fair and major equestrian events, the venue offers ample space for a

## Player Perspectives and Reactions

The cricketing world has responded with overwhelming enthusiasm to the Olympic news. Current stars like Virat Kohli, Babar Azam, and Ellyse Perry have all expressed excitement about the opportunity to compete for Olympic medals. Kohli remarked, "To represent your country at the Olympics would be the ultimate honor - it's something we never thought possible in our careers." Younger players see this as creating new career milestones, with Olympic medals potentially becoming as coveted as World Cup trophies. The women's game

International Olympic Committee has allocated just 90 athlete spots per gender, meaning each qualifying nation will field a 15-member squad. This limited field sets the stage for an intense battle for Olympic qualification among cricket's elite nations.

Pakistan's dream of competing in cricket's historic return at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics is under serious threat, with both the men's and women's teams languishing in the T20I rankings (7th and 8th, respectively) amid worrying individual form slumps. The qualification scenario appears increasingly bleak as several key players continue to underperform at critical moments.

while fiery, has been expensive in death overs, leaking runs at nearly 10 an over in recent matches. Spinners Shadab Khan and Imad Wasim have also failed to contain opposition batters, with Shadab averaging just one wicket every 35 balls in 2024.

## Women's Team: Lack of Firepower and Experience Gap

The women's team, ranked 8th, has been hampered by a lack of depth. Captain Bismah Maroof's batting has declined (averaging just 21 in T20Is since 2023), while Muneeba Ali and Sidra Ameen have struggled against top-tier bowling attacks. The bowling lacks a genuine wicket-taker, with Nashra Sandhu and Sadia Iqbal failing to replicate their domestic success at the international level.

With only six teams qualifying per gender (including hosts USA), Pakistan's path looks difficult. The men must overtake either New Zealand (5th) or West Indies (6th), while the women need to surpass Sri Lanka (7th) and close the gap on South Africa (5th). Given their current form, this seems unlikely without immediate improvement. Time is running out. The PCB must urgently reassess player roles, invest in power-hitting coaching, and schedule more T20Is against higher-ranked teams to gain ranking points. If key players don't rediscover their form soon, Pakistan may miss out on cricket's grand Olympic return—a devastating blow for a nation that once dominated the T20 format. However, Pakistan faces an uphill struggle, with their men's team ranked seventh and women's team eighth - positions that could see them miss Olympic qualification entirely unless they improve their rankings before the cut-off.

The United States, as host country, is expected to receive automatic entry in both tournaments, leaving only five coveted spots available for other nations. Current rankings suggest a fierce qualification battle lies ahead. India's men's team, reigning T20 World Cup champions and world number one under Suryakumar Yadav's leadership, appear strong contenders, while their women's team (ranked third behind Australia and England) led by Harmanpreet Kaur will be equally determined.



particularly stands to benefit, with Australian captain Meg Lanning noting that "Olympic inclusion validates years of progress in women's cricket and will inspire a new generation of girls to take up the sport." Player associations are already discussing how to incorporate Olympic bonuses and insurance into contracts, recognizing the unique demands of multi-sport competition.

## Pakistan's T20 Rankings Raise Red Flags - Olympic Cricket Spot at Risk

Cricket will return to the Olympics at the 2028 Los Angeles Games, with a highly competitive six-team tournament in both men's and women's T20 formats. The

## Men's Team Struggles: Batting Collapses and Bowling Inconsistencies

The men's team has been plagued by unreliable performances from its star players. Babar Azam, while still statistically strong, has faced criticism for his conservative strike rate (just 129 in T20Is since 2023), hurting Pakistan's powerplay momentum. Mohammad Rizwan, despite being a consistent run-scorer, has also struggled to accelerate when needed, leaving the middle order under pressure.

The bowling attack, once Pakistan's strength, has lost its edge. Shaheen Afridi's dip in pace and wicket-taking ability (only 12 wickets in his last 10 T20Is at an economy of 8.5) has been alarming. Haris Rauf,



Cricket's inclusion forms part of LA28's five new sports program, joining baseball/softball, flag football, squash and lacrosse (sixes). The IOC specifically targeted cricket to tap into the massive Indian market, anticipating significant broadcast revenue and global audience growth. In a strategic move to maximize Asian viewership, organizers are considering hosting matches in New York rather than Los Angeles. The 9.5-hour time difference between India and New York (compared to 12.5 hours for LA) would allow prime-time broadcasts in cricket's most passionate market. While final venues remain unconfirmed, potential locations include Brooklyn's Marine Park (home of MI New York) or a proposed new 10,000-seat stadium.

## The Future: What Olympic Status Means for Cricket's Growth

Looking beyond LA 2028, Olympic inclusion could fundamentally reshape cricket's global landscape. If successful, cricket may become a permanent Olympic sport, leading to expanded tournaments with more participating nations. The Olympic platform could help cricket break into new markets, much as it did for sports like basketball and volleyball in previous decades. There's already speculation about cricket's potential inclusion in the 2032 Brisbane Games, which would provide a perfect showcase in one of cricket's heartland countries. The long-term dream of cricket becoming a truly global sport, played and followed as widely as football, now seems more achievable than ever. However, much depends on how well the cricket world adapts to Olympic competition and whether the sport can deliver the kind of compelling, competitive matches that capture the Olympic spirit.

## A Transformational Moment

Cricket's return to the Olympic fold after 128 years represents far more than just another tournament added to the calendar. It marks a pivotal moment in the sport's evolution - an opportunity to transcend its traditional boundaries and establish itself as a genuine global game. The LA 2028

Games will write cricket's Olympic history, introducing the sport to billions of potential new fans while providing current followers with unforgettable moments of drama and excellence. As preparations begin, the entire cricket world stands at the threshold of a new era, one that promises to elevate the sport to unprecedented heights. The Olympic rings, long absent from cricket's landscape, may soon become as synonymous with the sport as the familiar sight of stumps and bails. For players, fans, and administrators alike, the countdown to cricket's Olympic renaissance has well and truly begun.



## Expanding Horizons: LA28 Olympics to Showcase Cricket and Four New Sports

The 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will mark a significant expansion of the sporting program, with cricket joining four other new additions - squash, flag football, lacrosse, and baseball/softball. This bold move by the IOC increases the total medal events to 351 (up 22 from Paris 2024) while maintaining the core athlete limit at 10,500 competitors. The inclusion of these five sports adds 698 new athletes to the Olympic roster, carefully balancing expansion with the Games' operational requirements.

Cricket's return after a 128-year absence

dominates headlines, but each new sport brings its own compelling narrative. Squash makes its long-awaited Olympic debut after decades of lobbying, while flag football's inclusion signals the growing global appeal of gridiron's faster-paced variant. Lacrosse returns in its dynamic "sixes" format, and baseball/softball completes the set, continuing their intermittent Olympic presence.

As the qualification races intensify across all new sports, cricket's pathway generates particular intrigue. The limited six-team format ensures only the world's elite will

compete, setting the stage for high-stakes battles in both men's and women's tournaments. With national pride and Olympic immortality at stake, the road to LA28 promises to reshape the landscape of these sports forever. The world will be watching as these new Olympic disciplines take center stage in what could become a defining moment for their global development.

This carefully curated expansion reflects LA28's vision for an innovative, youth-oriented Games that honors tradition while embracing evolution. As athletes across these sports begin their Olympic journeys, one thing is certain: the 2028 Games will introduce unforgettable new chapters to Olympic history.



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