

Fortnightly

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Balochistan tests the wits of Pakistani Nation

Trump vs Kamala Harris

Battle for the White House intensifies

Suicide Drones

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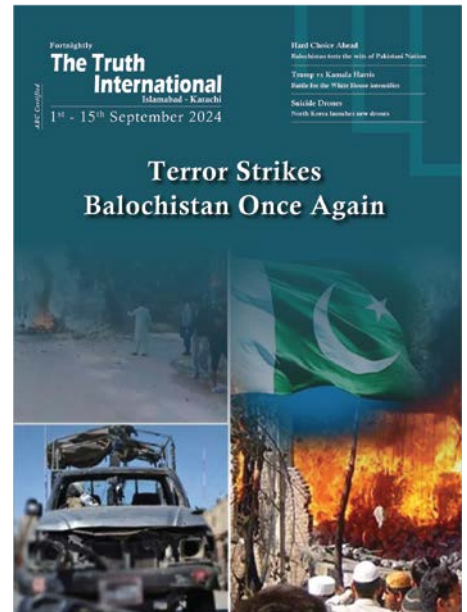
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# Terror strikes Balochistan once again



By Hina Kashif

Balochistan has been struggling with persistent terrorism issues. In the last week of August, militants from the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) carried out attacks in Balochistan that resulted in the deaths of at least 50 people, including 14 security personnel. The militants targeted police stations, damaged railway tracks, and set fire to multiple vehicles.

In Musakhel district, Balochistan, at least 23 people were killed when armed terrorists forcibly removed Punjabi passengers from trucks and buses, checked their identity cards, and targeted those from Punjab. The attackers, after verifying the identities of their victims, opened fire on them.

Meanwhile, At least 10 soldiers from the security forces and four personnel from law enforcement agencies were martyred in Balochistan, while 21 terrorists were killed during clearance operations following a series of militant attacks in the Musa Khel, Kalat, and Lasbela districts on Sunday night.

The military's media wing, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), released this information on Monday.

According to the ISPR, the terrorists initiated a coordinated series of attacks late Sunday night, which persisted into the early hours of Monday.

These acts of terrorism were described as attempts by hostile forces to disrupt the peace and development in Balochistan, with a particular focus on targeting innocent civilians in the Musa Khel, Kalat, and Lasbela districts. Assistant Commissioner Najeeb Kakar reported that the assailants blocked the inter-provincial highway in the Rarasham area, offloading passengers from their vehicles. The victims were primarily from Punjab. The attackers also set fire to ten vehicles.

Qadeer Aslam For 15 years, a pick-up truck driver, had been transporting goods throughout Pakistan, frequently traveling to Balochistan, about 400 km (250 miles) west of his village near Burewala in southern Punjab.

Over time, Aslam, 32, managed to save enough to purchase his own truck, a Hyundai Shahzore. He used it to transport fruit, vegetables, and other goods to cities in Balochistan—a vast, mineral-rich province with a long history of violent separatist activity. On

Sunday night, while en route to the province, Aslam's truck was intercepted by armed fighters from the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), one of the prominent separatist groups, who killed him.

Muhammad Tanveer, Aslam's friend, shared that Aslam had recently made his final payment on the truck and was looking forward to enhancing his family's living conditions.

"He was dedicated to providing for his wife, two children, and elderly parents. Despite traveling to Balochistan for years, he never felt threatened," said Tanveer, who runs a grocery store in Burewala.

Tanveer noted that Aslam was the only person from their village who sought economic opportunities in Balochistan, which offered more work compared to other regions. "He worked all over Pakistan, but Balochistan provided better opportunities," he said.

That night, 22 other men were also forcibly removed from their vehicles, targeted for being ethnic Punjabis, and shot dead on the highways.



Within 24 hours, at least 70 people were killed in six similar attacks across Balochistan, including 35 civilians, 14 security personnel, and 21 BLA fighters.

## Five more terrorists were killed in IBOs

Five terrorists have been killed and three others injured in intelligence-based operations conducted by security forces across several districts in Balochistan, the military's media affairs wing reported on Friday. The recent escalation in violence saw militants from the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) launching multiple attacks on Sunday night. These attacks targeted both security personnel and civilians, resulting in significant casualties and destruction.

In reaction to these attacks, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that extensive IBOs are underway to track down those responsible. During operations on the night of August 29/30 in the districts of Kech, Panjgur, and Zhob, security forces eliminated five terrorists and injured three others in intense firefights. The ISPR emphasized that operations would continue until all those involved in these acts of violence are brought to justice, reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to maintaining peace, stability, and progress in Balochistan.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari have both stressed the need for a strong response to terrorism. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has pledged support to the Balochistan government, and PM Sharif recently visited the region to evaluate the security situation.

There has been a notable rise in terror attacks recently. On August 19, security forces eliminated three terrorists responsible for the death of Panjgur's deputy commissioner in Mastung. Additionally, an infiltration attempt at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in Bajaur district resulted in the deaths of three soldiers and five terrorists.

Since August 20, extensive IBOs in Khyber have resulted in the neutralization of 25 terrorists and injuries to 11 others. The surge in attacks, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, follows the

TTP's breach of a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2022. According to a recent security report, Pakistan experienced 1,524 fatalities and 1,463 injuries from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations in 2023, the highest in six years. Islamabad has accused Kabul of allowing the TTP to operate from Afghan territory, though the Taliban administration has denied these allegations.

## PM for zero tolerance against terrorism

On Thursday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif described the recent deadly terrorist attacks in Balochistan as a "malevolent plot" orchestrated by militants. He made

PM Shehbaz condemned the attacks, calling them a product of a "corrupt scheme" by terrorist organizations and enemies of Pakistan. He expressed profound concern over the violence and emphasized the need to eradicate terrorism in Balochistan through unified effort and determination decisively.

The Prime Minister underscored the importance of Balochistan and the necessity to remove obstacles to its progress. He pledged that the sacrifices of law enforcement officers, Levies, Frontier Constabulary personnel, and civilians would not be in vain.

PM Shehbaz reaffirmed the federal government's commitment to combat



this statement while visiting the province to evaluate the security situation.

The violence erupted on Sunday night when militants from the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched coordinated attacks across the province, targeting both security personnel and civilians. The assaults resulted in the deaths of at least 50 individuals, including 14 security personnel. Upon arriving in Quetta, PM Shehbaz convened a high-level meeting with the National Action Plan's provincial apex committee. Attendees included Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir, Deputy PM Ishaq Dar, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, and other senior government and security officials.

terrorism alongside General Munir and Chief Minister Bugti, aiming to eliminate terrorism not only in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but across the entire country.

State-run Radio Pakistan reported that Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar, Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan, and other officials accompanied the Prime Minister. At Quetta Airport, PM Shehbaz was received by Chief Minister Bugti, Balochistan Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir, and newly appointed provincial police chief Moazzam Jah Ansari. Balochistan Assembly Speaker Abdul Khaliq Achakzai and Provincial Minister for Communication and Works Abdul Rehman Khetran were



also present.

Earlier, Interior Minister Naqvi had pledged support for the Balochistan government's anti-terrorism efforts, while President Asif Ali Zardari had called for effective measures to completely eradicate terrorism.

## Pentagon condemns Balochistan terror attacks

The Pentagon has issued a strong condemnation of the recent terrorist attack in Balochistan, Pakistan. During a press conference, Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh denounced the violence and

In addition to addressing the situation in Pakistan, Singh announced that US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has approved an increase in military support for the Secret Service. This additional support is intended to bolster the protection of presidential and vice-presidential candidates during the upcoming elections. While specifics about the support were not detailed, Singh indicated that Austin's Northern Command has ordered nationwide Secret Service support to ensure the security of the candidates.

This enhanced protection will remain in effect until after the elections on November 5 and will continue through the inauguration of the new president and vice

Islamabad in its counter-terrorism efforts. A spokesperson for the Chinese foreign ministry stated that Beijing strongly condemns the attacks and will continue to back Pakistan's anti-terrorism measures. "China stands firm against all forms of terrorism," said Lin Jian. "We will provide staunch support to Pakistan in advancing counter-terrorism operations, maintaining social solidarity and stability, and ensuring the safety of its people." China also expressed readiness to enhance security and counter-terrorism cooperation with Pakistan.

The United States also expressed condolences and solidarity with Pakistan. The US embassy in Islamabad posted on X, stating, "Our hearts go out to the families and loved ones of those killed in yesterday's attacks. The United States will continue to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with Pakistan in its fight against terrorism." The European Union similarly condemned the attacks, with EU Commission Spokesperson Nabila Massrali emphasizing that "terrorism and violence in any form have no place" and expressing thoughts with those affected by the violence.

The attacks, carried out by militants associated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), have caused widespread shock and condemnation. In response, Pakistani security forces engaged in operations that resulted in the killing of 21 terrorists and injuries to several others.

The increase in militant violence has been notable since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021, affecting not only Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but also Balochistan. In light of the escalating threat, Pakistan's federal cabinet approved Operation Azm-e-Istehkam in June, a national counter-terrorism campaign aimed at addressing the rising security challenges and implementing the recommendations of the Central Apex Committee under the National Action Plan.

## The IGP of Balochistan changed

In response to the recent escalation of terrorism in Balochistan, the federal government has replaced Abdul Khaliq Sheikh with Moazzam Jah Ansari as the Inspector General of Police (IGP) for the



reaffirmed the United States' commitment to collaborating with Pakistan in the fight against terrorism. Singh stressed that the US and Pakistani governments have a long-standing partnership, which will continue to strengthen in the face of such threats.

When queried about the US's role in assisting Pakistan to eliminate terrorism, Singh underscored Washington's dedication to working closely with Islamabad to address the issue. She confirmed that the US remains firmly committed to joint counterterrorism efforts.

Singh was also asked about a recent meeting between the Indian defense minister and US officials regarding attacks on Sikhs. She chose not to comment on this matter.

president in January 2025. This measure reflects the US government's commitment to maintaining a secure environment for the electoral process and safeguarding its leaders.

## China and US extend support to Pakistan after the attacks

In response to the recent surge in terrorist attacks in Balochistan, which resulted in over 50 deaths including civilians, police, and military personnel, both China and the United States have expressed strong support for Pakistan and condemned the violence.

China, a long-time ally of Pakistan, has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting



province. The announcement, made on Wednesday, details the reassignment of Abdul Khalique Sheikh, a BS-21 officer from the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP), to the Establishment Division.

The Establishment Division has issued notifications confirming that BS-21 officer Abdul Khalique Sheikh has been replaced by BS-22 officer Moazzam Jah Ansari. Sheikh has been instructed to report to the Establishment Division immediately until further notice.

According to the appointment notification for Ansari, with federal approval, he is being transferred from his current role as Commandant of the Frontier Constabulary (FC) to serve as Provincial Police Officer (PPO) for the Government of Balochistan, effective immediately.

Later in the day, the new IGP met with President Asif Ali Zardari, who emphasized the importance of improving law and order in Balochistan. The president extended his best wishes to Ansari in his new position.

## Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), also known as the Baloch Liberation Army, is a Baloch ethnonationalist militant and terrorist organization based in Afghanistan. The BLA operates from safe havens in Southern Afghanistan and frequently launches attacks into Pakistan's largest province, Balochistan, targeting the Pakistan Armed Forces, civilians, and foreign nationals.

On February 10, 1973, Pakistani police and paramilitary forces conducted a raid on the Iraqi embassy in Islamabad without authorization from the Iraqi government. During the operation, they discovered a substantial stockpile of small arms, ammunition, grenades, and other supplies in crates labeled 'Foreign Ministry, Baghdad,' which they suspected were intended for Baloch rebels. In response, Pakistan expelled the Iraqi Ambassador, Hikmat Sulaiman, and other consular staff, declaring them persona non grata. On February 14, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto wrote to President Nixon, accusing India, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Soviet Union, of being involved in

"conspiracy subversive and irredentist elements" aimed at destabilizing Pakistan's integrity.

The BLA's first notable activity occurred in the summer of 2000 when it claimed responsibility for a series of bombing attacks against Pakistani authorities. The organization is designated as a terrorist group by Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In 2004, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) launched a violent campaign seeking self-determination for the Baloch people and the secession of Balochistan from Pakistan. This movement has involved conducting terror attacks against non-Baloch minorities in the region.



## Economic growth in the region

Nearly a decade ago, China unveiled the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure project as a key element of its Belt and Road Initiative. At the heart of this initiative is Gwadar deep-sea port in Balochistan, the project's centerpiece.

The influx of Chinese investment led to job creation and economic growth in the region, attracting workers from various parts of Pakistan, including Punjab, as well as traders from neighboring Iran. This migration has faced resistance from Baloch separatists, who have targeted Chinese professionals, Pakistani law enforcement, and civilians.

Despite the risks associated with working in Balochistan, people—including traders, masons, and barbers—continue to come to the province in search of employment opportunities.

Imtiaz Baloch, a researcher with The Khorasan Diary—a nonpartisan platform managed by journalists—explained that major projects in Balochistan, such as the CPEC and mining operations, are highly labor-intensive.

"These projects draw workers seeking to support their families, but they also become primary targets for Baloch separatist groups. These groups view the projects as exploitation of their resources without

consent, which leads to attacks," he said.

Baloch rights activist Sammi Deen Baloch, whose father has been missing for 15 years, noted that the recent violence has created a climate of uncertainty in the province, especially for those advocating for peaceful protests against the federal government. Deen also expressed concern about a potential heavy-handed response from the government, citing past instances where operations led to human rights abuses. "In the wake of major attacks, the state has often responded with fake encounters, claiming that detainees were terrorists. This approach exacerbates the situation, pushing Balochistan's people into deeper hardship," he warned.



# Hard Choices Ahead: Baluchistan tests the wits of Pakistani Nation State

*The usual package for dealing with such situation has been a carrot-and-stick policy. A bit of appeasement and a bit of state power. Over the years, central power has learnt the need to engage in dialogue instead of use of the state power relentlessly. In the neighboring states of India and Iran, there has been a mix of carrot and stick, but even then, the weight has been accorded to dialogue and adjustment.*



By Naqi Akbar

By the time this piece is posted on the website, there might be a comprehensive operation in offing or in process to root out what the Pakistani nation state would call the seeds of Baloch separatism. The offensive might be a decisive one for both sides and can also degenerate into another episode of attrition between the largest yet the most sparsely populated federating unit and the center.

States across the region have been faced with these hard choices when it comes to embracing within its fold divergent nationalities and ethnicities. The usual package for dealing with such situation has been a carrot-and-stick policy. A bit of appeasement and a bit of state power. Over the years, central power has learnt the need to engage in dialogue instead of use of the state power relentlessly. In the neighboring states of India and Iran, there has been a mix of carrot and stick, but even then, the weight has been accorded to dialogue and adjustment. Despite the bad blood between the Indian state and the Sikhs of Punjab;

bitter memories of 1984 to 1987 operation in Indian Punjab; the state since then has been careful in dealing with the federating unit and the religious identity. Many political analysts feel that the farmer movement amicable settlement with Delhi has been partly motivated by the fact that the Indian state did not want to hit the raw nerve, the farmer movement being centered in Punjab and dominated by the Sikhs by denying them what was their demand.

In the case of Kashmir, despite all the efforts post august 5, 2019, the Indian state still tries to play with various political groups in a bid that the arrangement does not goes waste. Likewise, in other parts of the country, small time arrangements are preferred over the blatant use of the state power.

In the case of Iran; with a history of conflict in Kurdistan since 1979, the theocracy has been careful not to hit the hornet nest. The Mahsa Amini episode in 2021; a Kurdish girl killed under mysterious circumstances

in Tehran, which triggered anti Hijab riots; had a clear separatist angle. One of the ring leaders of the protest happened to be an old Kurdish militant hand. Yet the Iranian nation state acted prudently and it mended its approach towards the Iranian society altogether. Its recent adjustment can be gauged the way reformists were allowed a free reign and similarly, the supreme leader threw his weight with the new president in a clear bid that the clerical establishment wanted to be in line with aspirations of the Iranian sentiments on the street. It may be pointed out here that the reformist staffed cabinet did not faced any usual hiccups from the Majlis in its confirmation process.

In the backdrop of the experiences of the two hostile neighbors namely India and Iran as described in Pakistani LEA press releases from time to time, what are the lessons and insights for the Pakistani nation state? A very cursory look at the treatment of the February 2024 elections in Pakistan and June elections in Iran illustrate a hard fact that the Pakistani establishment went



by its whims, while in the case of Iran; the theocracy willingly ceded its space for the appeasement of the Iranian masses. In a way, without a devastating regime change, the Iranian establishment tried to find a common cause with Iranians, who might not be agreeing with the goals of the leadership. The assassination of Ismael Hania was one such incident, which had all the ingredients to break that arrangement between the theocracy and the street, but it was managed somehow or another.

Coming back to Pakistan, the troubled relations between the federating units and the center leave much to be desired at. In 1973, soon after the 1971 debacle in former East Pakistan, Pakistanis found their army and air force deployed in Baluchistan to crush what the official media called a separatist movement. That deployment which was supported by the late Shah of Iran with Iranian Army aviation Cobra Gunships, supplemented the strafing runs over the heads of bewildered Balochi tribesmen by French Built Mirages of PAF. The Pakistani establishment looked a bit like the Arab regimes, who had the temptation to deploy their assets in the scenarios which could have been dealt easily with dialogue.

After the operation, there has been a sense of alienation in that province from the center at the street level. However there seems to have been no concentrated efforts to win over the disgruntled element. Generally, what has been observed has been

finding few favorites among the dissident ranks to get the show running; meaning not going for a solution, rather only managing a situation.

Things could have been corrected, if the state has tried dialogue. Yet the inevitable happened on August 26, 2006, when a respected Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti was hit by missiles, much to the resentment across the restive province. Practically, the province has been on fire ever since for the last 18 years.

In the backdrop of the history, the mutual mistrust and the general mood of the dominant powers, there are ample chances that the establishment would go for few favorites being cultivated and manage the rest with the use of the state might.

Here it is pertinent to note that there has been much bad blood due to the fact that the unbridled disregard for the constitutional provisions on human rights by the law enforcing agencies has caused a situation where middle income groups to poor sections of the Balochi society have borne the brunt of disappearances or possible killing by the LEA, with judiciary and the social media acting in complete meek way; not showing the will to reign in the powerful sections of the establishment as per the dictates of the 1973 constitution.

If the disregard has been restricted to core militants; things were different, however

any educated Baloch living in Lahore and Karachi being picked up at will has meant that the cream of the Balochi society is at war with the establishment.

The current situation as developed after the incidents of August 26, 2024 in Baluchistan and the consequent follow up by the administrative face of the powers in control again suggests that the trust for the solution still lies in use of brute force, than any dialogue of appeasement of the disgruntled sections of the Balochi society.

For the Pakistani establishment, the choices are very clear; whether it goes for a calculated carrot and stick; carrot for favorites and stick for the militants. If that is the case, the situation might improve superficially. On the count that the causes of the unrest and resentment have not been addressed, rather pushed beneath the rugs. Given the fact that economic growth is nowhere to be sensed, political stability at the federal level is fragile; in the backdrop a federating unit afflicted with a guerilla war is not a favorable proposition for the Pakistani nation state.

Conclusively; until the root causes of resentment are not addressed, blaming the hostile states and intelligence agencies might not do the needful, being superficially hoped. Without doubt, hard decisions need to be taken; hard in a sense that a radical shift in approach is needed to correct the situation.



# Delay in rollover of foreign debt puts on hold IMF loan



By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: An official report on the disbursement of foreign loans revealed that the government failed to secure \$9 billion in debt rollovers last month. The Ministry of Economic Affairs released its monthly disbursement report, showing that no loans were obtained from foreign commercial banks or bilateral creditors. The government urgently needs to tap for essential foreign funding to stay solvent. The rollover of cash deposits from China, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, along with raising new loans from foreign commercial banks, are critical prerequisites for the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) approval of a \$7 billion bailout package for Pakistan.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs has included \$5 billion in Saudi Arabian debt and \$4 billion in Chinese debt as part of the federal government's rollover plan. However, the \$3 billion UAE deposit is accounted for on the central bank's balance sheet. The report confirmed that no disbursements were made against these loans last month. The IMF had initially planned to approve the \$7 billion program on August 30 but postponed the decision due to the government's

inability to secure the necessary rollovers. This report marks the first official acknowledgment of the failure to complete these transactions.

The IMF's new Extended Fund Facility (EFF) assumes that Pakistan will remain current on its external and domestic debt repayments. The \$12 billion cash deposit rollover and \$4 billion commercial loan are central to the IMF's debt sustainability plans, yet both the IMF and the government have avoided addressing the urgent need for debt restructuring.

Sources indicated that if Pakistan and Saudi Arabia finalize the sale of 15% shares in the Reko-Diq mining project by early September, Saudi Arabia might expedite Pakistan's \$5 billion rollover request and approve an additional \$1.2 billion oil financing facility.

For the current fiscal year, the government has not included the \$1.2 billion oil financing facility in its annual \$19.2 billion total borrowing plan. However, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has already requested the facility from Saudi Finance Minister Muhammad Al-Jadaan.

Last week, the finance minister mentioned that the IMF might approve the new package in September, though he did not provide a specific date.

Any further delay in the \$7 billion IMF deal approval could complicate matters for the federal government. Despite imposing a record Rs1.8 trillion in new taxes, the government now faces the additional challenge of a projected shortfall in Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) tax collection.

If the IMF approval is delayed until October, the lender might demand a mini-budget before approving the loan package to address any tax collection shortfalls. The government has set a Rs 898 billion tax collection target for the FBR this month. As of Tuesday, the FBR has collected only Rs575 billion, leaving Rs323 billion to be collected in just four days—an average of Rs81 billion per day.

Internal FBR assessments suggest a potential shortfall of around Rs80 billion, which the FBR is now attempting to cover by taking advances from commercial banks, according to sources. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has appointed his trusted officer, Rashid Langrial, as the new FBR chairman.

This will be Langrial's first major test in meeting the target and fulfilling the expectations of the PM's Office.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs report also noted that the World Bank provided a \$132.4 million loan last month, with \$11 million allocated to the National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC), \$80 million for two flood-related projects in Sindh, and \$26 million for a Punjab agriculture project.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) disbursed \$52 million for multiple projects, while China provided \$97 million for the Pakistan Multi-Mission Satellite project. Additionally, the country received \$128 million from the Naya Pakistan Certificates, which come at a high cost.

However, there were no disbursements against the annual projected budget estimates of \$3.8 billion from foreign commercial banks. Pakistan also plans to borrow \$1 billion through sovereign bonds this fiscal year, including \$300 million through Chinese Panda bonds and \$700 million through Green bonds.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has decided to generate \$4 billion in commercial loans from banks in the Gulf region, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Jameel Ahmad. He expressed confidence in the government's ongoing efforts to secure rollovers of \$12 billion in loans from China, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In a wide-ranging interview with Reuters, the SBP governor also revealed that Pakistan is in the "advanced stages" of securing an additional \$2 billion in external financing, which is crucial for the IMF's approval of a \$7 billion bailout program. Moreover, the government has requested an extra \$1.2 billion loan from Saudi Arabia to help bridge a \$2 billion financing gap. Pakistan and the IMF reached a preliminary agreement on the bailout program in July, contingent on the IMF's executive board approval and "timely confirmation of necessary financing assurances from Pakistan's development and bilateral partners."

However, the IMF's schedule of Executive Board meetings, released on August 26,

does not include Pakistan until September 4, 2024. When asked about monetary policy, SBP Governor noted that recent interest rate cuts in Pakistan have had the intended effect, with inflation continuing to slow and the current account remaining stable despite the rate reductions. Pakistan's annual consumer price index inflation dropped to 11.1% in July, down from over 30% in 2023.

"The Monetary Policy Committee will review all these developments," Ahmad said, emphasizing that future rate decisions



cannot be predetermined. The central bank has cut interest rates in two consecutive meetings, reducing them from a historic high of 22% to 19.5%. The next review of monetary policy is scheduled for September 12. "Now we have to focus on growth and other related areas because those are equally important for job creation and other socioeconomic issues," Ahmad stated. He added that the central bank's primary mandate is to ensure price and financial stability before shifting its focus toward promoting economic growth.

## Pakistan seeks commercial loans from Gulf banks

As Pakistan begins seeking commercial loans from Middle Eastern banks to bridge a \$2 billion external financing gap, the government informed a Senate panel on Thursday that borrowing costs from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have now exceeded 5%, making it a more expensive option. Finance Minister Muhammad

Aurangzeb urged Dubai Islamic Bank to seek a commercial loan. This was his second meeting with a Gulf bank within a week, following earlier talks with Mashreq Bank for financing.

In a virtual meeting with Dr. Adnan Chilwan, Group CEO of Dubai Islamic Bank, Aurangzeb discussed Pakistan's economic outlook and explored potential avenues for increased investment in the country, according to the finance ministry. Dr. Chilwan expressed the bank's interest in playing a larger role in Pakistan's financial

development, particularly in sectors like Islamic banking, infrastructure, and SMEs.

The finance minister invited Dubai Islamic Bank to boost its investments in Pakistan and reaffirmed the government's commitment to maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment and implementing necessary measures to attract foreign investment, the ministry stated. Following these initial meetings, finance ministry officials are scheduled to meet with foreign bankers next week to discuss loan amounts and interest rates.

On August 6th, Aurangzeb revealed that the government had received a commercial loan offer from a European bank but was waiting for IMF board approval to secure lower interest rates. The European bank had offered double-digit interest rates, which were considered politically and economically unfeasible. However, the IMF has indefinitely postponed the approval of a \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) after Pakistan failed to secure the additional \$2 billion in financing and the

rollover of \$12 billion in cash deposits from Saudi Arabia, China, and the UAE.

The finance minister now hopes that the IMF may approve the new EFF in September. Despite the delays, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves currently stand at \$9.3 billion, bolstered by significant purchases from the domestic market by the central bank. Pakistan has intensified its engagement with foreign commercial banks, though high financing costs and a low credit rating from international agencies remain significant hurdles.

global interest rates decline. The IMF interest rate is determined by the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket price, plus a 1% base rate and two additional surcharges linked to loan volume and duration. Bakhsh further explained that if a country borrows more than 187.5% of its IMF quota, a 2% surcharge applies, and an additional 1% surcharge is levied if the borrowing period exceeds three years.

Traditionally, lending from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the IMF was considered affordable.

## IMF and Pakistan sign a staff-level agreement for a \$7 billion loan

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has announced a staff-level agreement with Pakistan for a 37-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) of around \$7 billion. This announcement was made early Saturday morning, Pakistan time, with the IMF praising Pakistan for adhering to the terms set out in the Stand-by Arrangement (SBA) signed by the Shehbaz Sharif-led PDM government in 2023.

Under this agreement, Pakistan will receive the funds over the next three years, provided it meets the commitments made to the IMF. These commitments include broadening the tax base to ensure more comprehensive taxation and privatizing state-owned enterprises to enhance efficiency. Additionally, Pakistan must secure further loans from its key allies, including China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The IMF's statement noted that the new EFF program builds on the economic stability achieved under the 2023 SBA. The agreement is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board. The primary objective of this program is to improve macroeconomic stability and create conditions for stronger, more inclusive, and resilient economic growth in Pakistan.

The key measures under the program include strengthening fiscal and monetary policies, broadening the tax base, improving the management of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), enhancing competition, and ensuring a level playing field for investment. Additionally, the program aims to improve human capital and scale-up social protection through increased generosity and coverage in the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP).

The IMF emphasized the importance of continued strong financial support from Pakistan's development and bilateral partners, stating that this support will be critical for achieving the program's objectives. The program is designed to foster economic reforms leading to a more robust and stable financial environment in Pakistan.



Sources indicate that Dubai Islamic Bank has expressed interest in providing syndicated financing facilities to Pakistan. The bank also referenced the IMF program, as foreign lenders are closely monitoring whether the IMF will continue to support Pakistan. With a current credit rating of CCC+, which is below investment grade, Pakistan faces higher interest rate demands from commercial banks. However, the finance minister remains optimistic that international credit rating agencies may upgrade Pakistan to investment grade by the next fiscal year.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) briefed the Senate Standing Committee on Economic Affairs about Pakistan's engagements with the IMF since 1958. Qader Bakhsh, an SBP executive, informed the parliamentary forum that Pakistan's last Stand-By Arrangement with the IMF had an average interest rate of 5.1%, making it a costly deal. He also noted that the new IMF loan is expected to carry similar rates unless

However, due to Pakistan's increasing borrowing needs and limited capacity to sustain such debt, the WB and ADB have also raised their interest rates. Data from the finance ministry showed that Pakistan's interest costs on IMF loans have steadily risen since 2008. That year, Pakistan borrowed from the IMF at an interest rate of 1.6%, which increased to 2.4% in 2013. The 2019 IMF program was secured at an average interest rate of 3.41%. Maryum Kayani, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Finance responsible for IMF affairs, stated that since 1958, Pakistan has entered into 24 IMF programs and four special one-time facilities. Under these 28 agreements, Pakistan signed loans worth 28.3 billion SDRs (approximately \$40.5 billion), receiving 21.3 billion SDRs (about \$28.6 billion), with the remaining amounts undisbursed. Contrary to popular belief that Pakistan has only completed two of its 24 IMF programs, the finance ministry informed the standing committee that the country completed nine programs from 1965-66 to 2023-24.

# Economic Synergy: The Potential of UAE-Pakistan Trade Relations

*Over the past two decades, the UAE has been a cornerstone investor in Pakistan, injecting billions into diverse sectors such as communications, services, tourism, information technology, oil and gas, housing, banking, and real estate. This extensive investment portfolio includes prominent Emirati entities like Etisalat, Emirates, Emaar, and Dubai Islamic Bank.*



In a significant boost to economic diplomacy, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has committed substantial investments into Pakistan's burgeoning sectors, marking a timely intervention for a country grappling with economic volatility. This pledge, announced during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to the UAE, signifies more than just financial aid; it symbolizes a deepening of strategic economic partnerships that could reshape the future of both nations.

The infusion of capital comes at a critical juncture for Pakistan, which is navigating the turbulent waters of high inflation, low growth, and stringent reforms mandated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). With its \$350 billion economy in dire need of stabilization, foreign investment is pivotal. The UAE's commitment, articulated by President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, underscores a robust

bilateral relationship poised for exponential growth.

Over the past two decades, the UAE has been a cornerstone investor in Pakistan, injecting billions into diverse sectors such as communications, services, tourism, information technology, oil and gas, housing, banking, and real estate. This extensive investment portfolio includes prominent Emirati entities like Etisalat, Emirates, Emaar, and Dubai Islamic Bank. Their presence in Pakistan has not only bolstered economic activity but also enhanced the UAE's image among the Pakistani populace. The trade dynamics between the two nations are equally robust. Pakistan's imports from the UAE include crude oil, gold, and machinery, while its exports to the UAE encompass petroleum products, textiles, rice, leather, fruits, vegetables, sports equipment, and construction materials. This exchange underscores

the complementarity of their economies and the potential for deeper integration.

The investment pledge is expected to target pivotal sectors such as information technology, renewable energy, and tourism. These sectors represent the future of Pakistan's economic landscape, offering sustainable growth opportunities and significant returns on investment. With a burgeoning tech ecosystem, Pakistan is ripe for investment in IT infrastructure and services. The infusion of capital from the UAE can accelerate digital transformation, enhance cybersecurity frameworks, and foster innovation hubs that could position Pakistan as a regional tech leader. Pakistan's energy sector has long struggled with inefficiencies and shortages. Investment in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power can mitigate these challenges, reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels, and promote

environmental sustainability. The tourism sector, with its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, remains underexploited. Strategic investments can develop infrastructure, promote eco-tourism, and attract international visitors, thereby generating substantial revenue and employment opportunities.

From a financial perspective, the UAE's investment can significantly bolster Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves, providing much-needed liquidity to meet external repayment obligations. This is particularly crucial as Pakistan seeks to secure an \$8 billion bailout from the IMF, which requires demonstrating economic stability and growth potential. Economically, the synergy created by UAE investments can catalyze growth through several mechanisms: Investment in high-growth sectors will create numerous employment opportunities, reducing unemployment and fostering economic inclusivity. Enhanced focus on IT and renewable energy can drive technological innovation, improve productivity, and promote sustainable practices. By boosting export-oriented industries, the trade deficit can be reduced, improving the overall balance of payments position.

The UAE's strategic investments across various countries have consistently led to enhanced economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development. In India, for example, investments in infrastructure, energy, and retail sectors have enhanced logistics, ensured energy security, and created numerous jobs. Similarly, in Egypt, UAE investments in real estate and telecommunications have stimulated economic growth, modernized infrastructure, and boosted tourism. In Indonesia, investments in renewable energy and port infrastructure have contributed to sustainable energy goals and improved trade capabilities. In Morocco, UAE investments in tourism infrastructure and renewable energy initiatives have advanced the country's renewable energy agenda and created significant employment opportunities. These successes underscore the UAE's commitment to fostering long-term, mutually beneficial relationships. By comparing these outcomes with the investments made in Pakistan, it becomes evident that the UAE's involvement typically brings substantial benefits and fosters long-term partnerships. This positive track record can reassure stakeholders in Pakistan of the potential for similar success and economic

upliftment, reinforcing the UAE Government's role as a reliable and impactful investor on the global stage.

The UAE-Pakistan economic relationship, fortified by historical ties and contemporary investments, is poised for a transformative journey. The UAE's commitment is not merely a financial transaction but a testament to the mutual trust and strategic vision shared by the two nations. As Pakistan navigates its economic challenges, the support from the UAE could prove to be a linchpin for sustainable growth and development. For both countries, this partnership offers a win-win scenario: Pakistan benefits from capital inflows and economic diversification, while the UAE strengthens its strategic foothold in South Asia, paving the way for a prosperous and integrated future. The road ahead, marked by cooperation and shared goals, promises to unlock unprecedented economic potential and usher in a new era of economic synergy.

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# Harris vs. Trump: The Battle for the White House Intensifies Amid Key Voters and the Rising Influence of Muslim-American Communities



By Romana Afsheen

On November 5th, Americans will head to the polls to elect their next president. Until late June, it appeared that the 2024 race would be a rematch between President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump. However, a disastrous debate performance by Biden on June 27th triggered widespread concerns among Democrats about his ability to continue. Under mounting pressure, Biden withdrew from the race on July 21st, endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris as the Democratic candidate.

Recent national polling averages indicate that Harris now has enough delegate support to secure the Democratic nomination at the convention. With limited time before the general election, Harris faces the challenge of defining herself to voters and countering Trump's campaign. Despite her connection to Biden's administration, which has been criticized for issues like inflation and foreign policy struggles, Harris has a key advantage—her age. At 59, she is over two decades younger than Biden and 18 years younger than Trump.

The race, however, is far from straightforward. Trump's campaign is clouded by controversy, including his supporters' attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss and ongoing federal charges related to that effort. On July 13th, a gunman at a Pennsylvania rally shot at Trump, grazing his ear and fatally wounding a bystander. While the incident briefly tempered Trump's rhetoric, he quickly returned to his usual divisive speeches.

As Harris prepares for the Democratic National Convention on August 19th, where she will be officially nominated, the race heats up. The second presidential debate on September 10th will be a crucial moment, as Harris aims to avoid the pitfalls that led to Biden's downfall and present a stronger opposition to Trump.

With the election set for November 5th and the results to be certified by Congress on January 6th, 2025, the stakes could not be higher. The next president's inauguration on January 20th, 2025, will mark the culmination of a highly charged political season.

## The Candidates

Kamala Harris, the current Vice President, steps into the spotlight with a complex political history. Born to immigrant parents—a mother from India and a father from Jamaica—Harris built her career in California, where she gained a reputation as a tough prosecutor and later served as the state's attorney general. Despite her previous struggles on the national stage, Harris's sharp debate skills and political experience could prove advantageous as she takes on Trump.

Donald Trump, at 78, remains a formidable force in American politics. His campaign combines familiar culture-war themes with new grievances, particularly against the legal system pursuing cases against him. The recent assassination attempt has not significantly altered his combative style, though it momentarily cast him in a different light. As Trump seeks to reclaim the presidency, his past record and legal challenges will be central to the narrative of the 2024 election.

With both candidates bringing contrasting styles and visions to the race, the 2024 election promises to be a defining moment in American history.

The Muslim-Americans are an important voting bloc in the United States

As the United States presidential election approaches, the race to attract voters has intensified. Among the different constituencies the Democrats and Republicans are battling over, there is one that stands out: the Muslim community.

Although Muslims constitute roughly 1 percent of the American population, they are an important voting bloc because they are concentrated in swing states, which are often narrowly won in elections.

In this election cycle, the Muslim community seems more united than ever over a single political issue: the war in Gaza. Any candidate hoping to win over large segments of Muslim voters would have to address community demands for an end to the bloodshed in Palestine.

This is according to a new study published by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) in partnership with Emgage and Change Research. It is based on a survey conducted in late June and early July focused on how Muslims in three swing states – Georgia, Pennsylvania and Michigan – intend to vote in the 2024 presidential election.

What we found is that President Joe Biden's handling of the war in Gaza has turned Muslims, who in 2020 were some of his biggest supporters, into his sharpest detractors. In 2020, about 65 percent of Muslim voters in these states showed up to cast their ballots for Biden. This support was vital to his electoral victory because he won key swing states by small margins. He won Georgia by just 12,000 votes, a state where more than 61,000 Muslims voted, and Pennsylvania by 81,000 votes, where 125,000 Muslims voted.

By contrast, in our survey, conducted before Biden dropped out of the presidential race, only 12 percent of respondents said they would vote for him, marking a dramatic drop in support not seen among any other group studied. While this impacts the presidential race, it has also manifested

in a broader disillusionment with the establishment of the Democratic Party.

The war on Gaza has unified Muslim voters in a way that no other issue has in recent memory. According to the 2020 American Muslim Poll conducted by ISPU, healthcare (19 percent), the economy (14 percent) and social justice (13 percent) were the top voting issues for Muslim voters.

Compare that with 2024: Across the partisan spectrum, the top priority of Muslim voters in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Michigan is the war in Gaza (61 percent), followed by keeping the US out of foreign wars (22 percent).

Reduction of military aid to Israel also garnered the support of the vast majority of Muslim voters in our study, who, regardless of partisan sentiments, all overwhelmingly see this policy as a reason to vote for a candidate. While a war overseas may seem far from the daily concerns of American Muslim voters, many see the US role – providing unconditional aid and diplomatic cover to Israel – as complicity in the continued oppression of Palestinians.

The importance of the war in Gaza for Muslim voters was made clear months before we conducted our survey. The Muslim community played a leading role in the Uncommitted National Movement, which urged Democratic voters to vote “uncommitted” in presidential primaries in their states. The initiative managed to get more than 700,000 Democrats to do so, making clear their demand for a change in the Biden administration's tone and policy on Israel and Palestine.

This dramatic Muslim migration away from Biden is not a wholesale leap to the other side of the aisle, however. Muslim support for Trump inched up from 18 percent in 2020 to 22 percent in 2024 in Georgia, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

Overwhelmingly, former Muslim supporters of Biden are moving to third parties or are still undecided. Our study found that nearly a third of Muslim voters will either vote a third-party candidate (27 percent) or write in a candidate (3 percent). About 17 percent of Muslims said they have yet to decide on a candidate compared with 6 percent of the general public.

This means there is still room and time for candidates to win over this vital constituency. And it seems they are trying.

Not only has Biden pulled out of the race, but Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris has signalled she is distancing herself from his unflinching support for Israel's war on Gaza. In July, the vice president did not attend Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's address to Congress, said she will not be silent about the suffering in Gaza and made clear her support for a ceasefire.

In August, she picked as her running mate Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, who is widely regarded as more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause than short-listed Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro. This year, Walz praised uncommitted voters in Minnesota, calling them “civically engaged” and saying, “This issue is a humanitarian crisis. They have every right to be heard.”

And while Muslims were cautiously optimistic at best, the Harris campaign's refusal to allow a Palestinian American to speak at the Democratic National Convention last week has soured this hope.

Third-party candidates Jill Stein and Cornel West have both been vocal in their support for the people of Gaza. West chose Melina Abdullah, a Black Muslim woman as his running mate. Stein chose Muslim activist and academic Rudolph “Butch” Ware.

Even Republican candidate Donald Trump's campaign is reaching out to Arab American voters – a surprise given the anti-Muslim rhetoric he used when campaigning in 2016. People associated with his campaign have been trying to woo Arab voters in swing states. Trump's youngest daughter, Tiffany, married the son of a Lebanese American businessman, Massad Boulous, who has been trying to persuade Arabs in Michigan to vote for the former president due to the current administration's failed policy in Gaza.

The Muslim community's mobilisation on Palestine has come at a heavy cost for many. The Council on American Islamic Relations reported an unprecedented spike in incidents of bias: a 56 percent increase in reports of Islamophobia in 2023. Anti-Pal-

estinian racism has also skyrocketed, a worrying trend reflected in the shooting of three Palestinian students in Vermont who were wearing the keffiyeh scarf. Thousands – many of them Muslim students – were arrested at campus protests, and many were threatened with expulsion or faced criminal charges for their pro-Palestinian activism at colleges and universities across the US.

And yet even with the consequences of taking a public stance on Palestine, Muslim voters appear to be undeterred this time around. Solidarity with the people of Gaza has emerged as the single most important issue for American Muslim voters, a group no candidate can afford to ignore.

Meanwhile, the Muslim population in the United States is diverse and growing, with significant communities across various states. As of 2024, here's a look at the top ten states with the largest Muslim populations, along with insights into their cultural, political and economic contributions:

**New York:** Home to the largest Muslim population in the U.S. with 724,475 Muslims. New York's Muslim community is richly diverse, with significant numbers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Egypt. Despite facing challenges like hate crimes, especially post-9/11, the community has a strong presence with many mosques and Islamic cultural institutions.

**California:** The second-largest Muslim population in the U.S. is in California, with 504,056 Muslims. The state's community is also diverse, contributing significantly to the cultural and economic fabric of the region.

**Illinois:** Illinois has 473,792 Muslims, with Chicago being a major center. This city reflects a rich immigrant history with a varied Muslim population from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa.

**New Jersey:** With 321,652 Muslims, New Jersey's Muslim community comprises Arab, South Asian, and African American Muslims. The first mosque in New Jersey was established in the early 20th century, and since then, the state has seen the growth of Islamic institutions.

**Texas:** Texas hosts 313,209 Muslims. The community here is notable for its diversity, including African American, Arab, South Asian, and Latino Muslims.

**Michigan:** Michigan's Muslim population stands at 241,828. The state, especially areas like Dearborn and Hamtramck, has seen significant Arab-American populations from the early 20th century, contributing greatly to Michigan's culture and economy.

**Maryland:** Maryland has a Muslim population of 188,914. The state's community is recognized for its engagement in various cultural and interfaith activities.

**Virginia:** With a Muslim population of 169,371, Virginia's community is known for its diversity and dynamic cultural contributions. The proximity to Washington, D.C., has been a factor in its growth.



**Pennsylvania:** Home to 149,561 Muslims, Pennsylvania's community has also been a vital part of the state's cultural diversity.

**Massachusetts:** Massachusetts has a Muslim population of 131,749, contributing significantly to the state's cultural and religious diversity.

These communities not only contribute to the cultural and religious tapestry of their respective states but also play a significant role in various sectors like medicine, law, education, and business. Despite facing challenges such as discrimination and hate crimes, especially in the aftermath of events like 9/11, these communities have shown resilience and have continued to promote mutual understanding and respect across different cultural and religious groups.

A walk down the main street in Hamtramck, Michigan, feels like a tour

around the world. A Polish sausage store and an Eastern European bakery sit alongside a Yemeni department store and a Bengali clothing shop. Church bells ring out along with the Islamic call to prayer.

"The world in two square miles" - Hamtramck lives up to its slogan, with around 30 languages spoken within its 5 sq km area. This month, the Midwestern city of 28,000 has reached a milestone. Hamtramck has elected an all-Muslim City Council and a Muslim mayor, becoming the first in the US to have a Muslim-American government.

Once faced with discrimination, Muslim residents have become integral to this

multicultural city, and now make up more than half its population. And despite economic challenges and intense cultural debates, residents in Hamtramck from different religious and cultural backgrounds coexist in harmony, making the city a meaningful case study for America's future of rising diversity.

But will Hamtramck be an exception or a rule?

The arc of Hamtramck's history from beginnings as a town of German settlers to the modern day - it was America's first majority-Muslim city - is etched in its streets.

Storefronts display signs in Arabic and Bengali, embroidered Bangladeshi garments and Jambiyas, a type of short curved blade from Yemen, are seen in store windows. Muslim residents queue up to buy paczki, a kind of custard-filled Polish

doughnut.

"It's not unusual to see some with miniskirts and tattoos and some in burqas walking on the same street. This is all about us," said Zlatan Sadikovic, a Bosnian immigrant who owns a café in downtown Hamtramck.

A stone's throw outside central Detroit, which largely envelops the city, Hamtramck was once part of the epicentre of America's automotive industry, dominated by the General Motors plant that straddled its border with 'Motor City'. The first Cadillac Eldorado rolled off the assembly line in Hamtramck in the 1980s.

Over the course of the 20th Century, it became known as "Little Warsaw", as Polish immigrants flocked in for blue-collar jobs. The city was one of the stops of Polish-born Pope John Paul II's US tour in 1987. In 1970, as much as 90% of the city was of Polish origin.

However, that decade saw the beginning of the long decline of US car manufacturing, and younger, wealthier Polish Americans began moving to the suburbs. The change made Hamtramck one of Michigan's poorest cities, but the affordability attracted immigrants.

Over the last 30 years, Hamtramck transformed again, to become a landing pad for Arab and Asian immigrants, notably those from Yemen and Bangladesh. A significant portion of the city's residents today - 42% - are foreign born. More than half are believed to be practising Muslims.

The newly elected government's makeup reflects the changing demographics in

Hamtramck. The city council will include two Bengali Americans, three Yemeni Americans and a Polish-American convert to Islam.

Winning 68% of the vote, Amer Ghalib will be the first Yemeni-American mayor in the US.

"I feel honoured and proud, but I know it's a big responsibility," Mr Ghalib, 41, said.

Born in a village in Yemen, he moved to the US when he was 17, first working in a factory making plastic car parts near Hamtramck. He later learned English and received medical training, and now works as a healthcare professional.

Rather than being a "melting pot" or "salad bowl", Hamtramck is more like a "seven-layer cake" where different groups retain their distinct cultures while closely co-existing with each other, said city councilmember-elect Amanda Jaczkowski. "People are still proud of their culture specifically, whereas if it's assimilation, we would lose the uniqueness."

"When you live this close to each other, you are forced to overcome those differences," Ms Jaczkowski, 29, said.

But Hamtramck "is not Disneyland", said Karen Majewski, the outgoing mayor who will have served in office for 15 years before stepping down. "It's just a small place. And we do have conflicts."

Friction arose in 2004 following a vote to broadcast the Islamic call to prayer in public. Some residents have argued that a ban on bars near mosques hurts the local

economy. Courtesy of Amanda Jaczkowski  
Amanda Jaczkowski, a newly elected city councilmember in Hamtramck, poses in front of murals honouring the city's Polish heritage. Courtesy of Amanda Jaczkowski  
Amanda Jaczkowski, a newly elected city councilmember in Hamtramck

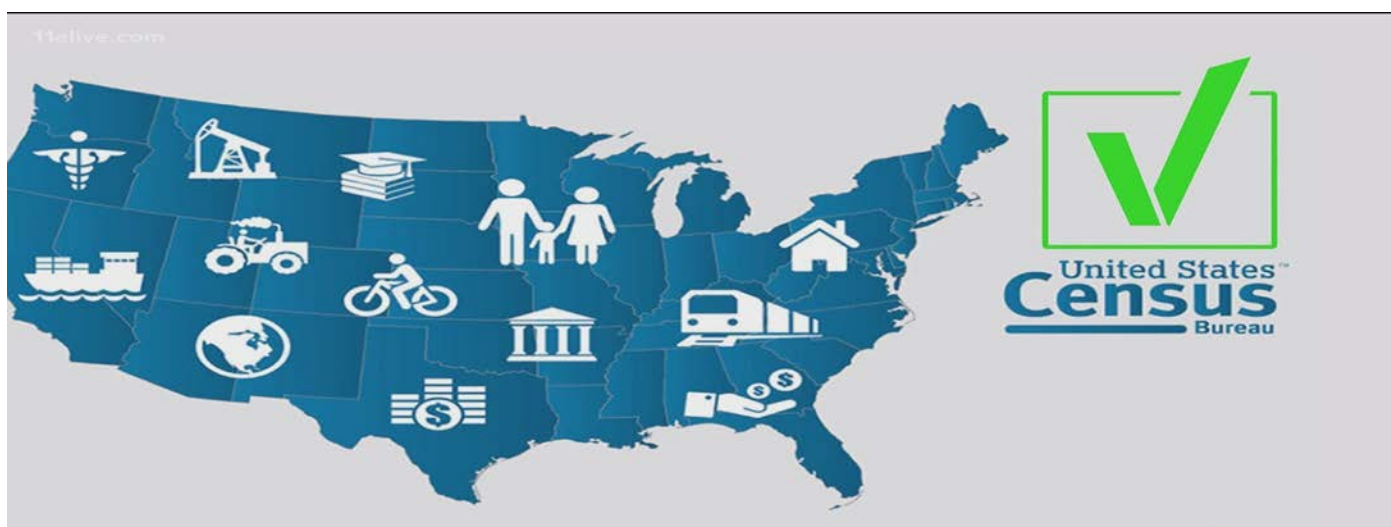
Six years ago, when it became the first American city to elect a Muslim-majority government, press from all over the world descended upon Hamtramck. Some media reports at the time painted a picture of a "tense" town with an influx of Muslims. A national TV anchor asked whether Ms Majewski was afraid of being mayor.

There was even speculation from some that a Muslim-controlled city council might impose Shariah law.

"In Hamtramck, people roll their eyes at that kind of talk," said Ms Majewski.

She was "gratified" that Hamtramck has been a welcoming community, she said, and it's "natural" for new residents to vote for those who understand their experience and their languages.

The US Census Bureau does not collect information about religion, but the Pew Research Center think tank estimates that there were about 3.85 million Muslims living in the US in 2020, making up about 1.1% of the total population. By 2040, Muslims are projected to become the second largest religious group in the US, after Christians. Despite their growing presence, Muslims in America have often been subjected to prejudice.



# North Korea launches new Suicide Drones: How they hit the target?

*KCNA reported that North Korea's expanding drone fleet is intended for use across various striking ranges to target enemies on both land and sea. After following predetermined routes, the drones tested on August 24 successfully identified and destroyed their targets.*



By J. Choudhry

North Korea has unveiled a new “suicide drone,” with leader Kim Jong Un personally overseeing a performance test of the weapon, which experts believe may have originated from Russia. Kim, wearing a cream-colored baker boy hat, was seen smiling as he watched the test, using high-powered binoculars to observe the drones as they struck and destroyed targets. State media released the images on Monday.

According to the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), Kim emphasized the need to “develop and produce more suicide drones,” alongside “strategic reconnaissance and multi-purpose attack drones.”

Suicide drones are unmanned aerial vehicles equipped with explosives, designed to crash into enemy targets, effectively functioning as guided missiles.

KCNA reported that North Korea's expanding drone fleet is intended for use across various striking ranges to target enemies on both land and sea. After following predetermined routes, the drones tested

on August 24 successfully identified and destroyed their targets. Kim also stated that North Korea aims to “proactively introduce artificial intelligence technology into the development of drones.”

Experts noted that the drones featured in state media images resemble the Israeli-made “HAROP” suicide drone, the Russian-made “Lancet-3,” and the Israeli “HERO 30.” They suggested that North Korea might have obtained this technology from Russia, which in turn could have acquired it from Iran—possibly through hacking or theft from Israel.

“The suicide drone, which resembles the HAROP, can fly over 1,000 kilometers (600 miles),” said Cho Sang-keun, a professor at South Korea's Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. He warned that this development significantly threatens South Korea's national security and critical infrastructure.

“They are demonstrating their capability to strike targets ranging from the tactical to the strategic level,” Cho added. “In the event of a provocation or international conflict, the

South Korean military could suffer considerable damage from these suicide drones.”

In 2022, North Korea sent drones across the border, which South Korea's military failed to intercept due to their small size. In response, South Korea established a drone operation command in 2023 to better address the growing threat. North Korea and Russia, allies since North Korea's founding after World War II, have strengthened their ties further since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The United States and South Korea have accused North Korea of supplying ammunition and missiles to Russia for use in the conflict.

## What are these 'suicide drones'?

Unlike predator drones that can be remote-controlled and drop ammunition loads and fly off, the Shahed drones are programmed with coordinates ahead of time and rely on GPS to hit their targets.

Farzin Nadimi is an associate fellow with The Washington Institute who specializes

in the security and defense affairs of Iran. Nadimi said these drones are "fairly accurate," decently resistant to signal jamming, and difficult to detect and track using radar, but they are not without weaknesses.

"I think the most vulnerable aspect of these drones is it's a very loud noise that they make," Nadimi said.

Another disadvantage of the Shahed drones is their speed, said Ret. Marine Col. Mark Cancian, who now serves as a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "The problem with

ment and working relationship with Russia.

"One of the reasons that Russia obtained or purchased weapons from Iran was that they have been using their own stocks of cruise and ballistic missiles pretty quickly, and they have not been able to replenish those stocks," Nadimi said. "So [they have] resorted to much cheaper Iranian options."

Iran's government has blatantly denied supplying Russia with the drones used in Ukraine.

"Iran has time and again declared that it is siding with no side in the Russia-Ukraine

but I think from a military point of view that is a mistake," Cancian said. "The Ukrainians are very unlikely to break. The morale is very unlikely to break."

By focusing on the cities, Cancian added, Ukraine's military would likely have more time to recover on the front lines, similar to Britain's recovery in WWII. Nadimi said just as Britain overcame the threats to its capital, he believes Ukraine will be able to do the same.

At the same time, the U.S. has said it is speeding up its delivery of NASAMS, the same ground-based air defense systems that are used to protect the White House in Washington, D.C., and the systems are expected to be in Ukraine in a few weeks.

## What are Kamikaze Drones?

Kamikaze drones, also known as suicide drones or loitering munitions, represent a unique development in the application of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology for warfare. These specialised drones are designed to carry explosive payloads and deliberately crash into enemy targets, functioning as guided missiles. Ranging from small, commercial-grade quadcopters to larger, fixed-wing designs, kamikaze drones come in a variety of sizes and capabilities. Some feature advanced features like GPS guidance, automated target recognition, and even the ability to loiter for extended periods before striking. While their explosive payloads may vary, these kamikaze drones are being utilised as a tactic to deliver a concentrated, precision strike while removing the pilot from direct harm's way. The concept of a "kamikaze drone" refers to the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as suicide attack weapons, similar to the historical Japanese kamikaze tactics of World War II. Kamikaze drones are essentially explosive-laden drones that are deliberately crashed into enemy targets, acting as guided missiles. This tactic aims to deliver a payload of explosives to a specific location, sacrificing the drone itself in the process. As this technology has proliferated, various state and non-state actors have explored the use of kamikaze drone swarms as a component of modern military operations.



them is that they're slow," Cancian said. "They're propeller-driven and you know, like all propeller-driven drones, they're just not very fast so they're susceptible to being shot down by either missiles or by aircraft guns."

Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities, including the capital Kyiv, left at least four people dead on Monday. The attacks were carried out by what are called Shahed drones — also known as suicide or kamikaze drones. The drone attacks do not change the war itself, but their use and how Russia came to have them is a topic of international interest.

## Where did Russia get them?

U.S. officials have confirmed to NPR that the drones used in these attacks are Iranian, but Iran has continued to deny its involve-

ment. Iran has not given arms to either warring side," Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Twitter. Despite the denial from Iran, Ukraine's government estimates that Russia has ordered 2,400 of these drones.

A police expert holds a fragment of a drone with a handwritten inscription reading "For Belgorod. For Luch" after a drone attack in Kyiv on Monday.

## Can Ukraine withstand these attacks?

Both Nadimi and Cancian compared the Russian decision to target cities as it is losing on the frontlines to The Blitz — the German bombing campaign that targeted London in World War II. "It seems like the Russians are using these the way they use their cruise missiles — that is to strike at the major cities likely with the intention of intimidating the Ukrainian population ...

## The Rationale behind Kamikaze drones

The use of kamikaze drones, or suicide aerial vehicles, in modern military conflicts stems from several strategic considerations. Firstly, these drones provide a cost-effective method of delivering explosive payloads to target locations. Compared to traditional manned aircraft or missile systems, kamikaze drones can be produced and deployed more cheaply, making them an appealing option for parties with limited military budgets. Secondly, the autonomous nature of kamikaze drones removes the pilot from direct harm's way, reducing the risk of

against enemy targets. These unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) can be broadly categorised into two main operational approaches: human-controlled and autonomous.

In the human-controlled variant, the kamikaze drone is typically outfitted with a first-person view (FPV) camera that allows a remote pilot to visually identify and track the intended target. Using a radio control link, the pilot then guides the drone to its destination before triggering the explosive payload upon impact. This method requires a skilled operator with low latency in the control system to execute a successful kamikaze strike.



losing experienced personnel in these high-risk missions. This "human out of the loop" approach also allows for more rapid, coordinated strikes using drone swarms. Additionally, the small size and relatively simple construction of many kamikaze drones make them difficult to detect and intercept using conventional air defence systems. For these reasons, military strategists have viewed kamikaze drone technology as a potentially disruptive capability in modern asymmetric warfare, where the ability to conduct precise, high-impact attacks with minimal risk to one's own forces can provide a tactical advantage.

## The Mechanics of Kamikaze Drones

Kamikaze drones, by design, leverage a diverse array of technologies to enable their unique mission of self-destructive strikes

On the other hand, autonomous kamikaze drones leverage advanced sensors and target recognition algorithms to independently locate, identify and engage enemy targets. These drones may be equipped with electro-optical cameras, thermal imagers or even radar systems to detect and classify potential objectives. Once a valid target is confirmed, the drone's on-board flight control system can then autonomously navigate the drone to the target location without direct human intervention and initiate the explosive detonation sequence once action is triggered by humans. Thus autonomy in navigation of the drone and detecting object or target points.

Regardless of the control method, kamikaze drones often utilise fixed-wing or vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) designs to maximise their payload capacity and

reduce their radar cross-section for improved stealth. Whereas some of these drones are also multicopters. The explosive payload itself can vary, ranging from small fragmentation warheads to larger shaped charges optimised for armour penetration. Some kamikaze drones may even incorporate multiple warheads or the ability to disperse submunitions over the target area.

Through this fusion of guidance, targeting and explosive lethality, kamikaze drones present a unique application in modern warfare - providing an affordable, easily deployable means of delivering a precise, high-impact attack while removing the pilot from immediate danger.

## The Emergence of Kamikaze Drones

The term "kamikaze" is a Japanese word that translates to "divine wind." It originates from the legendary typhoons that are said to have saved Japan from Mongol invasions in the 13th century by destroying the invading Mongol fleets. This "divine wind" was seen as a divine intervention that protected Japan. During World War II, the term "kamikaze" took on a new, more sinister meaning when it was applied to the Japanese suicide bombing attacks involving pilots deliberately crashing their explosive-laden aircraft into enemy targets. These kamikaze attacks, though devastating, were viewed by the Japanese as an honorable sacrifice in service of their country. While the historical meaning of "kamikaze" evokes notions of a powerful, mystical protective force, the modern usage of the term is strongly associated with these tragic, intentional suicide attacks that defined a dark chapter of Japan's wartime history.

In the years that followed, the development and use of kamikaze drone technology have proliferated globally. State actors like Iran, North Korea, and Turkey have all unveiled their kamikaze drone programs, while non-state groups like ISIS have also incorporated suicide drone strikes as part of their asymmetric warfare tactics. The advantages of kamikaze drones - their relative affordability, ease of deployment, and ability to deliver precise explosive payloads - have made them an increasingly appealing weapon for both national militaries and terrorist/insurgent organizations.

# The Escalating Israel-Gaza Conflict: A Deepening Crisis



By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

The ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, which began in October 2023, has escalated into a critical and highly volatile phase. This period is marked by intense military actions, with Israeli forces conducting expanded ground operations in Gaza, leading to significant destruction and a worsening humanitarian crisis. The conflict has also exacerbated regional tensions, particularly involving Iran and Hezbollah, which threaten to further destabilize the Middle East. The situation has resulted in widespread displacement, severe shortages of essential supplies, and a mounting death toll, drawing global concern and calls for urgent intervention.

## Historical Context and Initial Triggers

The conflict began on October 7, 2023, when Hamas militants launched a devastating surprise attack on Israeli communities, resulting in the deaths of approximately 1,200 people and the capture of around 250 hostages. This assault, one of the deadliest in recent history, triggered a strong military response from Israel, leading to extensive

destruction in Gaza. The situation rapidly escalated into a full-scale war, causing significant casualties and deepening the humanitarian crisis on both sides, with no immediate end in sight.

## The Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

Gaza, home to about 2.3 million Palestinians, has been the epicenter of the conflict. The Israeli military's intense air and ground operations have displaced nearly all residents, creating a dire humanitarian situation. The destruction of infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and homes, has exacerbated the suffering of civilians. According to Palestinian health authorities, more than 40,000 people have been killed since the conflict began, with many more injured or missing.

The humanitarian crisis is further compounded by a severe shortage of food, water, and medical supplies. The blockade imposed by Israel has restricted the flow of essential goods into Gaza, leaving the population in desperate need. International aid agencies have struggled to provide relief due to the ongoing hostilities, and the situation continues to deteriorate.

## Israel's Military Strategy

Israel's military strategy has focused on dismantling Hamas' military capabilities and eliminating key leaders. The recent expansion of ground operations into central Gaza, particularly in areas like Deir el-Balah, indicates a shift towards more aggressive tactics. Israeli forces have targeted Hamas' underground tunnels, which are used for smuggling weapons and launching attacks, as well as command centers and storage facilities.

However, this strategy has also resulted in significant civilian casualties and widespread destruction. The Israeli government has justified its actions by pointing to the threat posed by Hamas, which it views as a terrorist organization. Nonetheless, the international community has expressed growing concern over the scale of the violence and the impact on civilians.

## Regional Tensions and the Role of Iran

The conflict has also heightened tensions across the Middle East, particularly between Israel and Iran. Iran, a staunch supporter of Hamas, has vowed to retaliate

for the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was reportedly assassinated in Tehran. Although Israel has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement, the incident has escalated the already volatile situation.

Iran's potential response is a significant concern for both Israel and the broader region. The U.S. military has increased its presence in the Middle East, including deploying additional aircraft carrier strike groups and fighter jets, to deter any potential Iranian aggression. The risk of a broader regional conflict remains, though recent exchanges between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah have not escalated into full-scale warfare.

## The Role of the United States

The United States has played a crucial role in the ongoing conflict, both in terms of military support for Israel and diplomatic efforts to prevent a broader war. The Biden administration has been working to contain the fallout from the Gaza conflict, particularly in light of the potential for Iranian involvement. U.S. military leaders have emphasized the need for a measured response to avoid triggering a wider regional conflict.

Despite the U.S.'s efforts, the situation remains precarious. The continued violence in Gaza, coupled with the risk of further escalation with Iran and its allies, poses a significant challenge to regional stability. The U.S. has also been involved in efforts to mediate a ceasefire, although these efforts have so far been unsuccessful.

## Hezbollah and the Northern Front

Another key player in the conflict is Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militant group based in Lebanon. Hezbollah has been involved in border clashes with Israel, launching rockets and drones into Israeli territory. These attacks have been met with Israeli airstrikes, raising fears of a new front opening in the conflict.

Hezbollah's involvement is particularly concerning due to its significant military capabilities, which include a large arsenal

of rockets and missiles. While the recent exchanges have not led to a full-scale confrontation, the situation remains volatile. Any further escalation could draw Lebanon and other neighboring countries into the conflict, with potentially devastating consequences.

## The Human Cost and International Response

The human cost of the conflict has been staggering. In addition to the tens of thousands of deaths, millions of people have been displaced, and the destruction of infrastructure has left Gaza in ruins. The psychological toll on both Israelis and Palestinians has been immense, with entire communities traumatized by the violence.



The international response to the conflict has been mixed. While some countries have expressed strong support for Israel's right to defend itself, others have condemned the scale of the military operations and called for an immediate ceasefire. The United Nations has been particularly vocal in its criticism, urging both sides to end the violence and engage in peace talks.

However, diplomatic efforts have so far failed to produce a lasting solution. The deep-rooted animosities and complex political dynamics in the region make it difficult to achieve a ceasefire, let alone a long-term peace agreement. The ongoing conflict has also strained Israel's relationships with its Arab neighbors, many of whom have condemned the military actions in Gaza.

## Prospects for Peace

The prospects for peace in the Israel-Gaza conflict remain bleak. The deep-seated mistrust between the two sides, coupled with the involvement of regional powers like Iran, complicates any efforts to reach a settlement. While international mediators continue to push for a ceasefire, the likelihood of a lasting peace agreement seems distant.

For Israel, the priority remains neutralizing the threat posed by Hamas and ensuring the security of its citizens. For the Palestinians in Gaza, the immediate concern is survival in the face of overwhelming odds. The international community, meanwhile, is left grappling with the humanitarian fallout

and the broader implications for regional stability.

## Conclusion

The Israel-Gaza conflict, now in its 11th month, starkly illustrates the enduring volatility in the Middle East. The ongoing violence has led to a mounting human toll, with widespread destruction and severe humanitarian consequences in Gaza. Although the immediate risk of a broader regional war has lessened, underlying tensions and unresolved issues continue to fuel instability, making peace increasingly elusive. The international community faces the urgent challenge of addressing the root causes and working toward a sustainable resolution, even as the situation on the ground remains dire and increasingly complex.

# Muslim convert: The US future looks very different as Gen Z will influence political decisions



By Sondos Al-Asaad

**L**arge demonstrations across multiple U.S. cities are showing strong support for Palestine, with protestors calling for a halt to the shipment of American weapons to Israel due to its ongoing war in Gaza.

These protests are taking place alongside the Democratic Party convention in Chicago, where Kamala Harris was officially nominated to run against Republican candidate Donald Trump in the upcoming presidential election. Demonstration organizers and anti-aggression campaigners issued a statement emphasizing the urgent need for the United States to stop arming Israel immediately to facilitate a ceasefire in Gaza.

To discuss this issue, the Tehran Times interviewed Ali Salaam, a Muslim convert living in Iran, who is an independent journalist and the editor-in-chief of Basira Press.

## What follows is the text of the interview:

**Q: We are witnessing an unprecedented scene in the U.S. with these demonstra-**

**tions. What is their significance, especially with the calls to ban arms sales to Israel?**

Ali Salaam: These demonstrations are significant because they reveal the crumbling facade of the Democratic Party, which once portrayed itself as a champion of peace and goodwill. Even just a few years ago, this level of opposition wasn't as visible. Many who previously supported the Democratic Party, despite their stance on Palestine, are now rejecting them due to their complicity in the ongoing conflict.

However, some groups still reduce the Palestinian issue to a mere humanitarian concern that can be solved through negotiations, similar to the Oslo Accords—these groups, often funded by large NGOs, still back the Democrats. Meanwhile, the average person is increasingly aware of the crimes being committed and refuses to support them.

The Democratic Party, despite paying lip service to Palestinian rights, seeks to impose another Oslo-like agreement to suppress Palestinians through non-military

means. They aim to install a puppet government in Gaza, akin to Mahmoud Abbas' regime in the West Bank, and replace Netanyahu with a more liberal Zionist figure to distract from the ongoing genocide.

**Q: Why do you think the demonstrations are taking place near the Democratic convention?**

Ali Salaam: The decision to hold demonstrations near the Democratic convention is strategic, as the Biden administration bears significant responsibility for the current conflict. While U.S. presidents are often seen as puppets of special interests like the Zionist lobby and major banks, this doesn't absolve them of responsibility. Some presidents have shown independence and paid a price, such as John F. Kennedy, who was allegedly targeted for opposing Israel's nuclear weapons program.

The Democrats want to portray Trump as the root of America's problems, but this hypocrisy has shocked many Americans who see the genocide in Gaza being carried out in their name by so-called liberal Democrats.

**Q: Is there a real division within the American Democratic Party?**

Ali Salaam: It's not just a division—it's an exodus. Many Americans are waking up to the reality that neither major political party represents their values. The awakening is both anti-capitalist/anti-globalist and traditionalist, but no political party currently reflects this opposition to liberalism in both economics and social issues. There's a growing trend among Americans to return to traditional Christianity or convert to Islam, but no political force within the U.S. represents this movement. The American system, built on Masonic liberal values, may need to be completely restructured to address the moral corruption at its core.

**Q: Can this movement influence American policies toward Israel?**

Ali Salaam: It's unlikely that any movement within the two major political parties will significantly affect U.S. policy toward Israel, as the foundation of American politics is deeply entwined with Zionist interests. Real change might only come if the American people undergo a spiritual awakening and reject the corrupt system established in the late 18th century.

**Q: How committed is Kamala Harris to**

**her election platform regarding Palestine and the Middle East?**

Ali Salaam: Harris is committed to maintaining American dominance through soft power. While Republicans prefer overt hostility, Democrats like Harris use diplomacy as a facade while continuing aggressive policies behind the scenes. For example, Obama negotiated the JCPOA with Iran while simultaneously supporting ISIS. The resistance in the region is already strong, and Harris' administration may continue to fail in its attempts to weaken it.

**Q: Why do American police suppress demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause?**

Ali Salaam: The suppression of pro-Palestinian demonstrations by American police is deeply rooted in the country's ideological support for Zionism. This is partly due to the influence of Freemasonry and Protestantism, both of which hold Jews in high regard for their historical and religious significance. Additionally, American police are often part of the Fraternal Order of Police, a Masonic fraternity, which fosters a sense of elitism and brutality.

**Q: Could we see a decline in Israeli**

**influence within the White House?**

Ali Salaam: Only if the U.S. repents, turns to God, and completely removes the Zionist "deep state" from power, establishing a new system based on divine values. America's current foundation is flawed, and without a significant shift, Israeli influence in Washington will likely persist.

**Q: How long can Israeli leaders ignore global outrage over the crimes in Gaza?**

Ali Salaam: Israeli leaders are blinded by arrogance, but the resistance will eventually lead to their defeat and humiliation. They will one day face justice for their crimes.

**Q: How will the growing opposition to Israel among American youth impact future U.S. political decisions?**

Ali Salaam: The younger generation in America is increasingly disillusioned with the economic and social realities they face, and they see no benefit in supporting Israel's actions. As they become more influential, this could lead to significant changes in U.S. policy, despite efforts to silence dissenting voices. The future of American politics may look very different as these young people begin to challenge the status quo. Courtesy: Tehran Times



# COVID-19 Pandemic triggered extreme poverty



## TTI Staff Report

**G**lobal poverty estimates have been updated on the Poverty and Inequality Platform (PIP) today. According to the update, which added over 100 new surveys to the database, the total number of surveys now exceeds 2,300. This March 2024 update is the first to provide a global poverty estimate for 2020-2022, covering the COVID-19 pandemic period. It reveals that the pandemic increased extreme poverty worldwide, as measured by the international poverty line of \$2.15, from 8.9% in 2019 to 9.7% in 2020. This marks the first rise in global poverty in decades and aligns with earlier projections based on limited survey data and GDP growth forecasts.

The 2020 increase in global extreme poverty was primarily driven by South Asia, where extreme poverty rose by 2.4 percentage points to 13% between 2019 and 2020. In contrast, Latin America and the Caribbean saw a continued decline in extreme poverty during the same period, largely due to Brazil's fiscal policies mitigating the economic impact of COVID-19. Poverty also decreased in 2020 at the higher poverty lines of \$3.65 and \$6.85 in regions like Latin America, the Caribbean, East Asia, the Pacific, Europe,

Central Asia, and advanced economies. However, due to limited survey coverage, post-2019 poverty estimates for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa are not available.

Following the global recession in 2020, economies began to recover in 2021. By 2022, extreme poverty levels had dropped below pre-pandemic levels in more prosperous regions, such as East Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, Central Asia, South Asia, and advanced countries. However, global poverty overall remained slightly above pre-pandemic levels, although on a declining trend. The updated estimates indicate that an additional 23 million people were living in extreme poverty in 2022 compared to 2019.

The slower and uneven economic recovery, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where more than half of the world's extreme poor reside, highlights regional disparities. The year 2022 also brought another global shock—Russia's invasion of Ukraine—which fueled inflation across low-, middle-, and high-income countries. At the \$3.65 and \$6.85 poverty lines, global poverty rates in 2022 were lower than

in 2019, reflecting the faster recovery in more affluent regions.

This March 2024 update from the World Bank also incorporates updated consumer price index (CPI), national accounts, and population data, and revises previous global and regional poverty estimates from 1981 to 2022. Additionally, methodological changes have led to minor adjustments in poverty estimates. For example, global extreme poverty in 2019 has been revised down slightly by 0.1 percentage points to 8.9%, reducing the number of people living in extreme poverty from 701 million to 689 million. This reduction occurred despite an upward revision in Sub-Saharan Africa (by 14 million people) and was driven by new data from Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa.

At the \$3.65 and \$6.85 poverty lines, global poverty rates for 2019 have been revised down by 0.7 and 0.6 percentage points, respectively, translating to a reduction in global poverty by 52 million and 44 million people. These downward revisions at higher poverty thresholds are primarily due to updated survey data from Europe, Central Asia, and South Asia.

# What is the digital afterlife industry?



By Ayesha Shaeban

## The Digital Afterlife Industry: Navigating the Frontier of Virtual Immortality

In recent years, advancements in Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence have led to the emergence of a niche but rapidly growing industry known as the digital afterlife. This industry explores the potential of technology to preserve the presence of loved ones who have passed away, creating virtual reconstructions that can interact with the living. Companies in this field utilize a range of data sources—including social media posts, emails, text messages, and voice recordings—to craft digital personas capable of engaging with those still alive. Though still in its early stages, the digital afterlife industry is expanding and evolving, raising both possibilities and concerns about how we remember and interact with the deceased.

### Companies Leading the Charge

Several innovative companies are at the forefront of the digital afterlife industry, each offering unique approaches to preserving and interacting with the memory of the deceased:

**HereAfter:** This service allows users to record personal stories and messages

during their lifetime. These recordings are then accessible to loved ones after the user has passed away, providing a form of digital legacy that can offer comfort and connection.

**MyWishes:** MyWishes enables individuals to schedule messages to be sent posthumously. This service allows users to maintain a presence in the lives of their loved ones even after death, delivering pre-arranged messages that can continue to provide guidance and support.

**Hanson Robotics:** Known for their advanced robotics, Hanson Robotics has created robotic busts that use the memories and personality traits of the deceased to interact with people. These robotic representations can engage in conversations and offer a physical form of the digital persona.

**Project December:** This project utilizes advanced AI technology to create text-based interactions with the deceased. Through deep AI models, users can engage in conversations with digital recreations of loved ones, providing a unique and often poignant way to reconnect with those who have passed.

**Generative AI:** This technology plays a crucial role in the creation of highly realistic and interactive digital personas. Generative AI enables the development of digital avatars that closely mimic the deceased's appear-

ance, voice, and mannerisms, though this high level of realism can blur the line between reality and simulation, potentially causing emotional and psychological distress.

### The Potential Benefits

Digital afterlife technologies have the potential to significantly impact the grieving process. For many, the ability to hear a loved one's voice or see their likeness can provide solace and aid in coping with loss. These digital reconstructions can serve as therapeutic tools, preserving positive memories and maintaining a sense of closeness with those who have departed.

**Emotional Comfort:** For those struggling with grief, interacting with a digital persona of a loved one can offer a form of emotional comfort and continuity. This can be particularly meaningful in helping individuals process their loss and feel connected to the deceased.

**Memory Preservation:** Digital afterlife technologies enable the preservation of personal stories and memories, allowing future generations to learn about and remember their ancestors in a more dynamic and interactive way.

**Therapeutic Potential:** These technologies might also be used in therapeutic settings to help individuals work through their grief. By engaging with a digital representation of a loved one,

individuals may find a way to express unresolved emotions and gain closure.

## The Ethical and Emotional Risks

Despite the potential benefits, digital afterlife technologies also raise significant ethical and emotional concerns. The line between comfort and distress can be thin, and the impact of interacting with digital recreations of loved ones is not universally positive.



**Emotional Distress:** For some, engaging with a digital version of a loved one may exacerbate grief rather than alleviate it. The experience of interacting with a digital persona could be unsettling or distressing, particularly if the interaction does not meet the user's expectations or if it evokes feelings of loss rather than healing.

**Consent and Privacy:** One of the major ethical issues surrounding digital afterlife technologies is consent. The deceased may not have explicitly agreed to their data being used to create a digital persona. This raises questions about the autonomy and privacy of individuals in the digital realm.

**Misuse and Manipulation:** There is a risk that digital personas could be exploited for commercial gain. Companies might use these technologies to promote products or services, or alter digital personas to convey messages or behaviors that the deceased would not have endorsed. This potential for misuse highlights the need for strict ethical guidelines and regulations.

## The Need for Regulation

As the digital afterlife industry continues to grow, it is essential to develop and imple-

ment regulations to address the ethical and legal issues associated with these technologies. The current legal frameworks are often inadequate to handle the complexities of digital afterlife scenarios.

**Legal Frameworks:** Updating legal frameworks to address digital estate planning is crucial. This includes determining who inherits the digital personas of the deceased, and how digital memory ownership is managed. Ensuring that the rights of the deceased and their families are protected requires a reevaluation of existing laws and

the creation of new regulations.

**GDPR and Privacy:** The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) recognizes post-mortem privacy rights, but its effectiveness is limited by challenges in enforcement. Social media platforms often control access to deceased users' data, sometimes contrary to the wishes of heirs. There is a need to enhance the GDPR's protections and align them with human rights to ensure comprehensive privacy and data security.

**Ethical Guidelines:** Establishing ethical guidelines is essential for guiding the development and use of digital afterlife technologies. Recommendations include obtaining informed consent from individuals before creating digital personas, implementing age restrictions to protect vulnerable groups, and ensuring transparency and strong data privacy measures.

## Recommendations for Ethical Development

Researchers and ethicists have proposed several guidelines to ensure the responsible development of digital afterlife technologies:

**Informed Consent:** Obtain clear and documented consent from individuals before using their data to create digital personas. This ensures that the deceased's wishes are respected and that their data is used appropriately.

**Age Restrictions:** Implement age restrictions to protect vulnerable groups, such as minors or individuals who may not fully understand the implications of digital immortality.

**Transparency:** Provide clear disclaimers and information about how digital personas will be used, ensuring that users are fully aware of the nature of these technologies and their potential impact.

**Data Privacy and Security:** Enforce strong data privacy and security measures to protect the personal information of both the living and the deceased. This includes safeguarding against unauthorized access and misuse of digital data.

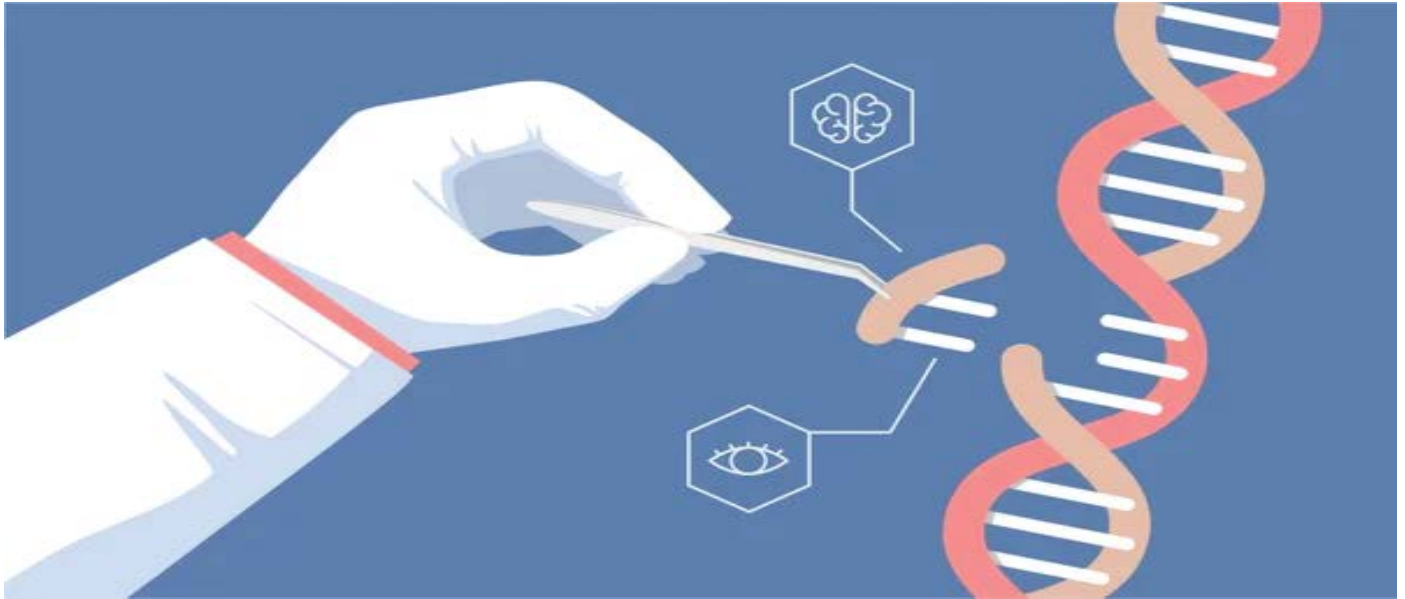
**Respectful Termination:** Offer mechanisms for users to respectfully terminate their interactions with digital personas if desired. This provides a way for individuals to end their engagement with digital recreations if they find it emotionally distressing.

## The Path Forward

As we navigate the evolving landscape of digital afterlife technologies, it is crucial to balance the benefits of staying connected with our loved ones against the potential risks and ethical dilemmas. By implementing thoughtful regulations and ethical guidelines, we can ensure that the digital afterlife industry develops in a way that honors the memory of the deceased and supports the emotional well-being of the living.

Dialogue between policymakers, industry leaders, and academics is essential for developing effective solutions that address both the opportunities and challenges presented by digital immortality. Through careful, responsible development, we can create a future where digital afterlife technologies meaningfully and respectfully preserve our connections with those who have passed away.

# CRISPR and Gene Editing: Ethical Dilemmas and Future Applications



By Romana Afsheen

CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is a groundbreaking gene-editing technology that has revolutionized the field of genetics. Since its discovery in 2012, CRISPR has been hailed as one of the most significant scientific breakthroughs, offering unprecedented precision in editing DNA. This technology enables scientists to modify the genetic code with remarkable accuracy, opening up possibilities for curing genetic diseases, enhancing agricultural productivity, and even altering the genetic makeup of entire species.

However, the immense power of CRISPR also brings profound ethical dilemmas. The ability to edit the human genome raises questions about the limits of scientific intervention, the potential for unintended consequences, and the moral implications of altering the fundamental building blocks of life. This article explores the potential applications of CRISPR in medicine and agriculture while delving into the ethical challenges that accompany its use.

## CRISPR Technology: How It Works

CRISPR technology is based on a natural defense mechanism found in bacteria. When viruses attack bacteria, they insert

their DNA into the bacterial genome. Bacteria use CRISPR sequences to store snippets of this viral DNA, allowing them to recognize and defend against future attacks. The CRISPR-associated protein 9 (Cas9) acts as molecular scissors, cutting the DNA at specific locations to disable the virus.

In the laboratory, scientists have harnessed this mechanism to edit genes in a wide range of organisms. The CRISPR-Cas9 system can be programmed to target specific DNA sequences, making it possible to add, delete, or modify genes with unprecedented precision. This ability to edit the genome at the molecular level has far-reaching implications for medicine, agriculture, and beyond.

## CRISPR in Medicine: Curing Genetic Diseases

One of the most promising applications of CRISPR technology is in the treatment of genetic diseases. Many inherited conditions, such as cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, and Huntington's disease, are caused by specific genetic mutations. By using CRISPR to correct these mutations, scientists aim to cure or prevent these diseases.

### 1. Cystic Fibrosis:

Cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening genetic disorder that affects the lungs and digestive system. It is caused by a mutation in the CFTR gene, which leads to the production of thick, sticky mucus that clogs the airways. Researchers have demonstrated that CRISPR can be used to correct this mutation in human cells, offering hope for a potential cure.

### 2. Sickle Cell Anemia:

Sickle cell anemia is another genetic disorder that results from a mutation in the hemoglobin gene. This mutation causes red blood cells to become misshapen, leading to severe pain, organ damage, and reduced life expectancy. Clinical trials are currently underway to test the use of CRISPR to modify the gene responsible for sickle cell anemia, with early results showing promise.

### 3. Huntington's Disease:

Huntington's disease is a neurodegenerative disorder caused by a mutation in the HTT gene. This mutation leads to the production of a toxic protein that gradually destroys brain cells. CRISPR has the potential to target and disable the mutant gene, poten-

tially halting the progression of the disease.

While these applications are still in the experimental stage, the potential for CRISPR to cure genetic diseases is immense. However, the use of gene editing in humans also raises significant ethical concerns.

## Ethical Dilemmas in Gene Editing

The ability to edit the human genome presents profound ethical challenges. These challenges revolve around issues of consent, equity, unintended consequences, and the potential for misuse.

### 1. Germline Editing and the Question of Consent:

One of the most controversial aspects of CRISPR is its potential for germline editing. Germline editing involves making changes to the DNA in eggs, sperm, or embryos, which are then passed on to future generations. This means that the genetic modifications made using CRISPR could be inherited by offspring, affecting not just individuals but entire lineages.

The ethical dilemma here is that future generations cannot consent to the changes made to their genomes. This raises questions about the right of individuals to alter the genetic makeup of their descendants and the potential long-term effects of such changes. Additionally, germline editing could lead to unintended consequences, such as off-target effects or unforeseen health issues that may not become apparent until generations later.

### 2. Equity and Access to Gene Editing Technologies:

Another significant ethical concern is the issue of equity and access. The cost of developing and implementing CRISPR-based therapies is high, and there is a risk that these treatments could be accessible only to the wealthy, exacerbating existing inequalities in healthcare. If gene editing becomes a tool for enhancing human traits, such as intelligence or physical appearance, it could lead to a new form of genetic inequality, where only those who can afford it have access to these enhancements.

This raises the question of whether society should allow gene editing to be used for enhancement purposes and, if so, how to ensure that these technologies are accessible to all, rather than creating a genetic divide between the rich and the poor.

### 3. The Potential for Unintended Consequences:

CRISPR technology, while powerful, is not without its risks. One of the primary concerns is the potential for off-target effects, where the CRISPR-Cas9 system inadvertently edits DNA at unintended locations. This could lead to unforeseen health issues, such as the development of new diseases or the disruption of important genes.

Moreover, the long-term effects of gene editing are still unknown. The changes made using CRISPR are permanent and heritable, meaning that any mistakes could be passed on to future generations. The possibility of unintended consequences underscores the need for caution and thorough ethical consideration before proceeding with gene editing in humans.

### 4. The Risk of Misuse and Genetic Discrimination:

The potential for misuse of CRISPR technology is another major ethical concern. As gene editing becomes more advanced, there is a risk that it could be used for purposes that go beyond therapeutic applications. For example, CRISPR could be used to create so-called "designer babies," where parents select traits such as intelligence, physical appearance, or even personality for their children. This possibility raises troubling questions about the commodification of human life and the societal implications of such practices.

Furthermore, the use of gene editing could lead to genetic discrimination. If certain traits are deemed more desirable, individuals without those traits could be marginalized or discriminated against. This could create a new form of eugenics, where people are judged based on their genetic makeup rather than their abilities or character. The potential for CRISPR to be used in ways that perpetuate inequality and discrimination is a significant ethical challenge that society must address.

## CRISPR in Agriculture: Enhancing Food Security and Sustainability

Beyond medicine, CRISPR technology has vast potential in agriculture. By editing the genomes of crops and livestock, scientists can create organisms that are more resistant to diseases, pests, and environmental stresses. This could lead to higher yields, reduced reliance on chemical pesticides, and improved food security in a world facing the challenges of climate change and a growing population.

### 1. Disease-Resistant Crops:

One of the most promising applications of CRISPR in agriculture is the development of disease-resistant crops. For example, researchers have used CRISPR to create rice varieties that are resistant to bacterial blight, a devastating disease that can cause significant crop losses. Similarly, CRISPR has been used to develop wheat varieties that are resistant to powdery mildew, a fungal disease that affects many crops worldwide.

These advancements have the potential to reduce the need for chemical pesticides, which can have harmful environmental effects, and to increase crop yields, contributing to global food security.

### 2. Drought-Resistant Crops:

With climate change leading to more frequent and severe droughts, the development of drought-resistant crops is becoming increasingly important. CRISPR has been used to modify genes in crops such as maize and wheat to enhance their ability to withstand dry conditions. These modifications could help farmers maintain productivity in regions affected by water scarcity, reducing the impact of climate change on agriculture.

### 3. Enhancing Nutritional Content:

CRISPR technology can also be used to enhance the nutritional content of crops. For example, researchers have used CRISPR to increase the levels of vitamins and minerals in crops such as rice and tomatoes. This could have significant implications for combating malnutrition, particularly in developing countries where

nutrient deficiencies are prevalent.

#### 4. Ethical Considerations in Agricultural Gene Editing:

While the potential benefits of CRISPR in agriculture are significant, they also raise ethical questions. One concern is the impact of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on biodiversity. The widespread adoption of genetically modified crops could lead to a reduction in genetic diversity, making crops more vulnerable to diseases and pests in the long term. Additionally, there is the risk that genetically modified crops could cross-pollinate with wild relatives, leading to unintended ecological consequences.

Another ethical issue is the control and ownership of CRISPR-modified crops. The technology is often patented, raising concerns about the concentration of power in the hands of a few large corporations. This could limit the access of small farmers to these technologies and exacerbate existing inequalities in the agricultural sector.

Finally, there is the question of public acceptance. While CRISPR offers a more precise and targeted approach to genetic modification than previous techniques, public skepticism about GMOs remains high in many parts of the world. Ensuring that CRISPR-modified crops are safe and addressing public concerns will be crucial for the widespread adoption of this technology.

## The Future of CRISPR: Balancing Innovation with Ethical Responsibility

As CRISPR technology continues to advance, it holds the promise of transforming medicine, agriculture, and many other fields. However, the ethical dilemmas it presents cannot be ignored. The challenge for society is to find a balance between embracing the potential benefits of CRISPR and ensuring that its use is guided by ethical principles.

#### 1. The Need for Regulation and Oversight:

One of the key steps in addressing the

ethical challenges of CRISPR is the development of robust regulatory frameworks. These frameworks should ensure that gene editing is conducted safely, ethically, and transparently. International cooperation will be essential, as the implications of gene editing extend beyond national borders.

Regulation should also address issues of consent, particularly in the context of germline editing, and ensure that the benefits of CRISPR are accessible to all, regardless of socioeconomic status. Additionally, oversight mechanisms should be in place to monitor the long-term effects of gene editing and to prevent the misuse of the technology.



#### 2. Public Engagement and Education:

Another important aspect of addressing the ethical dilemmas of CRISPR is public engagement and education. As gene editing becomes more prevalent, it is essential that the public is informed about the science behind CRISPR, its potential benefits, and the ethical challenges it presents. Public dialogue should be encouraged to ensure that societal values are reflected in the development and use of gene editing technologies.

#### 3. Ethical Guidelines and Professional Responsibility:

Researchers and practitioners working with CRISPR must adhere to ethical guidelines and uphold professional responsibility. This includes conducting thorough risk assessments, obtaining informed consent, and prioritizing the welfare of patients and the environment. The scientific community has a crucial role to play in ensuring that

CRISPR is used responsibly and for the benefit of society.

#### 4. Ongoing Ethical Debate and Reflection:

Finally, the ethical implications of CRISPR must be the subject of ongoing debate and reflection. As technology evolves, new ethical challenges will emerge, and society must be prepared to address them. This requires a commitment to continuous ethical inquiry and the willingness to adapt policies and practices as our understanding of CRISPR and its consequences deepens.

CRISPR technology represents a monumental leap forward in our ability to manipulate the genetic code. Its potential to

cure genetic diseases, enhance agricultural productivity, and revolutionize numerous other fields is immense. However, the ethical dilemmas it raises are equally significant. As we stand on the brink of a new era in genetic engineering, it is crucial that we navigate the challenges of CRISPR with care, ensuring that the benefits of this powerful technology are realized while minimizing the risks and respecting the ethical boundaries that safeguard human dignity and the integrity of our environment.

The future of CRISPR will depend not only on scientific innovation but also on our collective ability to address the ethical questions it raises. By engaging in thoughtful reflection, fostering public dialogue, and establishing robust regulatory frameworks, we can harness the power of CRISPR for the greater good while safeguarding the ethical principles that underpin our society.

# Moawin Foundation equips the new generation with the education and skills they need to thrive



By Javed Mahmood and Romana Afsheen

**F**ormer Naval Chief Admiral (Retd) Muhammad Asif Sandila highlights the transformative impact of education tailored to meet unique needs and tells us how the Moawin Foundation equips the next generation with the skills they need to thrive in their life and professions. Asif Sandila is the founder and Chairman of Moawin Foundation.

In an interview with Rabia Ali, the YouTube Channel The Truth International (TTI) Host, Mr Sandila sheds light on different aspects of the Foundation's activities, from vocational training to life-changing skills of youngsters. He also shared the success stories of individuals whose lives have been transformed through education.

Mr. Sandila shared how, after retiring from the Pakistan Navy, he became deeply involved in social welfare initiatives. He explained, "I once read a book about an American tourist who fell ill while visiting a village in Pakistan. The villagers cared for him, and once he recovered, he asked what he could do to repay them. The villagers requested that he establish a school

in their village. The book also mentioned the Central Asia Institute, which was carrying out various social welfare projects in countries including Pakistan. This made me think: if foreigners could work for the well-being of our people, we should do the same. So, six months before my retirement, I decided to dedicate myself to social welfare. I believe that educating and equipping young people with skills is the key to their success in life."

Quoting the well-known saying, "Teach them how to catch a fish," Mr. Sandila emphasized that this approach could be transformative for many. He continued, "I gathered with close friends and decided to begin our mission with education. We also chose to adopt some government-run schools to provide quality education to students who lack access to modern learning resources and skills. One chronic issue we noticed is the lack of interest among some teachers in their students' education. Moreover, some teachers are not adequately qualified, which is another challenge."

Mr. Sandila also highlighted the impor-

tance of English, stating, "English is an international language, and it is crucial for gaining knowledge and accessing technology. Therefore, it is essential to learn it. The Chairman of the Moawin Foundation noted that while efforts are being made to teach students in English, we focus on teaching in a way that is accessible to both students and their parents. We've worked hard to incorporate audio and video into our teaching methods."

He added, "After exploring a few international organizations, we eventually partnered with the Sabaq Foundation in Islamabad, which was a significant milestone for our mission. Sabaq Foundation provided us with Urdu-language videos to improve students' conceptual understanding. Since our village lacked sufficient internet facilities, the Sabaq Foundation assisted us in implementing alternative teaching methods using technology. We started with a one-room school, and now we have a vast network of schools. Each classroom is equipped with a TV for video-based learning. Along with the government school syllabus, the

Moawin Foundation uses technology, labs, sports, and activity-based strategies to enhance students' learning experiences."

When the Moawin Foundation took over some government-run schools, they retained the existing teachers, improved their skills, and empowered them to achieve the set goals. "We established terms and conditions with the Punjab Education Department," Mr. Sandila explained. "For example, the department agreed not to transfer any teacher working with us for at least three years. Additionally, the department would only transfer underperforming teachers based on our recommendations."

Mr. Sandila provided a detailed account of the evolution of education in his village, his personal experiences, and the broader implications of education and skills development.

He began by highlighting the significant advancements in his village's education system: "Initially, many parents opted to send their children abroad due to perceived inadequacies of local schools. This trend was common among affluent families. However, the situation began to change with the establishment of a middle school for girls in the village, marking a pivotal moment."

"When the middle school first opened, it enrolled 142 girls. Within six months, enrollment surged to over 500. The number of boys also increased dramatically, from 180 to 370. This growth demonstrated the improving educational environment and the rising trust parents had in local facilities. The rapid rise in student numbers indicated the positive changes brought about by better resources and community support."

Mr. Sandila emphasized that basic facilities are crucial for educational success: "Essential amenities include functional washrooms, reliable drinking water, and infrastructure like computer labs and solar power systems. Without these, schools struggle to create a conducive learning environment. Proper facilities are vital for both students' comfort and educational effectiveness."

He also noted the need for proper furniture and early childhood education systems: "Many schools still face shortages in these

areas, which can hinder the quality of education and limit growth opportunities for students."

Reflecting on his schooling, Mr. Sandila contrasted his experiences with today's education system: "My father attended a government school, which differed significantly from the private 'Tata' schools of that era. Despite lacking resources like furniture and electricity, there was a strong commitment from teachers and the community, which was crucial for educational outcomes."

He observed the current situation of government school teachers: "Today, government school teachers earn competitive salaries, ranging from 38,000 to 80,000-90,000 rupees depending on experience. Despite these salaries, teachers face challenges such as distractions from non-educational duties and insufficient training and supervision. Nonetheless, many remain dedicated and strive to provide quality education despite these hurdles."

Mr. Sandila discussed the growth of their own educational initiatives: "Starting with two schools, our network has expanded to 136, with plans to reach 250. This growth reflects our commitment to improving educational opportunities in regions like Gilgit-Baltistan and Karachi."

A major focus of their initiative is practical skills development: "We aim to equip students with skills that enhance their employability and independence, such as operating cameras, becoming beauticians, and dressmaking. In regions like Gilgit-Baltistan, we also teach apricot fruit drying. This practical skills training complements academic education and prepares students for the job market."

Mr. Sandila shared his journey from a rural background to the Navy: "Coming from a village with limited resources, I secured a place in a cadet college thanks to my family's support. Transitioning from an Urdu medium school to a cadet college, where English was the primary language, was challenging. The initial months were tough as I adapted to a new language and environment."

His experiences continued with his Navy

admission: "Despite limited knowledge about the Navy, I was guided by a supportive principal. My time in the Navy, including training at the Royal Naval College Dartmouth, was transformative, shaping my career and personal growth."

Concluding his reflections, Mr. Sandila emphasized the broader implications of education and skills development: "Education must provide both academic knowledge and practical skills for self-support and employment. In today's evolving job market, practical skills are increasingly valuable. Complementing education with skills training bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application, preparing students for diverse career paths and modern job market challenges."

Mr. Sandila underscored the importance of adaptability, dedication, and community support in achieving success: "My journey from a rural village to a Navy position, alongside efforts to improve local education, reflects a deep commitment to fostering educational and professional growth. My experiences highlight the transformative power of education and the necessity of equipping individuals with skills for a rapidly changing world."

## About Moawin Foundation

Founded in 2014, Moawin Foundation is a not-for-profit organization (NPO) registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) under Section 42 of the Companies Act 2017, with Incorporation No. 0090324 and National Tax Number 4331812-6.

It is an approved NPO under Section 2 (36) of the Income Tax Ordinance 2001 after signing an MOU with the Economic Affairs Division of the Government of Pakistan to receive funding from international donors.

## Message from the Chairman

### Admiral (Retd) Muhammad Asif Sandila

Human development stands as the cornerstone of progress for any nation. Within our

own borders, a burgeoning youth populace is a testament to our potential, yet many dwell in rural areas devoid of essential educational and economic opportunities.

A recent World Bank study unveils a staggering statistic: nearly 23 million Pakistani children aged 5 to 16 are excluded from the educational landscape, making Pakistan home to the world's second-largest out-of-school population. Despite the widespread availability of government schools, the quality of education often falls short of expectations.

At Moawin Foundation, we refuse to accept this status quo. By harnessing existing infrastructure and deploying trained educators, we remain steadfast in

## Empowering Women

The Moawin Foundation believes in the transformative power of education and skills training to uplift communities, especially women and girls. From empowering women to become skilled instructors to nurturing young minds, the Foundation's initiatives aim to foster a culture of empowerment and equality.

Moawin Foundation stands as a beacon of hope, offering relief and rehabilitation initiatives to those in need across Pakistan. Since our inception, we have been committed to supporting communities affected by natural disasters, conflicts, and emergencies.

Amjad Hussain stated this while admiring the aims and ambitions of the Moawin Foundation.

## Annual Report 2023

According to the 2023 Annual Report of the Moawin Foundation, the organization was established in 2014 as a Not-for-Profit (NPO) entity under Section 2(36) of the Income Tax Ordinance, 2001, and has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Economic Affairs Division of the Government of Pakistan, enabling it to receive funding from international donors.

Additionally, MF is certified by the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP) and CAF International, reaffirming its commitment to transparency and accountability. Moawin Foundation expanded its footprint by registering as a charity (1204000) in the UK to build a diverse and committed community of supporters to amplify its impact. Through collaborative efforts and contributions, we envision creating significant change in the underprivileged areas we serve. Its primary goal is to ensure access to quality education, particularly in government schools, and create economic opportunities for women and youth to address the pressing issues of economic instability and poverty.



our belief that significant strides can be made. In 2023, our commitment to action was unwavering. We redoubled our efforts to uplift the standards of primary and secondary education in government schools while also providing skill development opportunities in rural areas, without discrimination of gender, religion, ethnicity, or geographical location. Initiatives like fruit dehydration training for women in Baltistan and IT and digital skills training in Skardu are just a glimpse into our multifaceted approach toward empowerment and progress. To our esteemed Board, dedicated teams, invaluable partners, generous donors, and steadfast supporters, I express profound gratitude for your unwavering commitment. Together, with Moawin Foundation, we are endeavoring for a brighter, more sustainable future for Pakistan. Your continued support remains indispensable in propelling positive change forward.

The collaboration with the Moawin Foundation on projects like the People's Public Schools in Ghotki, Sindh, and Foundation Assisted Schools in Karachi has been highly successful. The foundation's efforts in advancing education in Sindh are commendable and vital for the community, Kabir Kazi, Managing Director of the Sindh Education Foundation said.

"I am delighted to be a contributor to Moawin Foundation's School Project in my ancestral village Dhery Syedan in Chakwal, Pakistan. This rural girls' school desperately needed the Moawin Foundation's expertise, dedication, and determination to improve. I can now see the potential of their plans which are well-considered and being delivered with energy and a sharp focus on results. Empowering young girls through education is an exemplary mission and delivering it effectively and efficiently deserves widespread support." Admiral

By investing in education and skill development, the Foundation aims to empower individuals and communities for financial independence. Currently, the MF has 118 operational schools across Pakistan with an enrolment of more than 30,000 students. Its Skills Development Program served more than 1800 households and empowered youth with marketable skills & entrepreneurship support. Through strategic partnerships and collaborations, we have implemented impactful programs of assisting government and community schools in providing school development opportunities, establishment of Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs), and scholarship programs to provide marginalized youth with the necessary tools and resources for a sustainable future. We also conduct relief efforts during times of crisis, extending assistance to vulnerable communities in need.

# Pakistan's rare wild pheasants are being pushed to the edge

*There have been no detailed surveys recently in Pakistan to ascertain the current population status of wild pheasant species, according to Jamshed Iqbal Choudhry, an official at the World Wide Fund for Nature – Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan).*



By Aamir Latif/Anadolu

Pakistan is fast losing several rare wild pheasant species due to a string of threats including habitat degradation, hunting, climate change, and human intervention, with wildlife experts warning that their extinction would be “disastrous” for ecosystems and biodiversity.

Due to increasing habitat loss driven by climate change, deforestation, and poaching, the population of wild pheasants in Pakistan is under persistent threat, according to Mohebullah Naveed, a wildlife expert in the capital Islamabad.

“Pheasants cannot thrive without their habitat,” Naveed, who is associated with a pheasant conservation project, told Anadolu.

Depletion of forest cover due to climate change and increasing housing and agriculture needs are primary reasons for the wild bird’s dwindling numbers, he said.

While all native pheasant species are protected under local wildlife laws, hunting and poaching are an equally major threat to two main pheasant species in Pakistan, he said.

“Poaching and hunting are mostly done by locals living close to the (pheasant) habitats. They enjoy this as a sport, although hunting pheasants is illegal,” said Naveed, who serves as a wildlife conservation officer with the Himalayan Wildlife Foundation, an Islamabad-based wildlife group.

Another motive behind the poaching and hunting of pheasants is their prized bush meat and beautiful feathers that are used in traditional hats in parts of northern Pakistan, he said.

In addition, disturbances caused during the collection of medicinal plants in the summer are also a factor, he added.

## Endangered and vulnerable

Pakistan is home to six pheasant species: the western horned tragopan (*Tragopan melanocephalus*), Himalayan monal (*Lophura impejanus*), koklass pheasant (*Pucrasia macrolopha*), white-crested kalij (*Lophura leucomelanos*), Indian peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) and cheer pheasant (*Catreus wallichii*).

Sprawling forests in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region are home to wild pheasants.

Cheer pheasants and western horned tragopans are the rarest and most threatened species in Pakistan, while others still have viable populations, Muhammad Naeem Awan, director of research and conservation at the World Pheasant Association’s Pakistan chapter, told Anadolu.

These two species have been classified as “endangered” and “vulnerable” and are on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), according to Awan, who is also a member of the IUCN’s Species Survival Commission.

“The population of these two species is on the decline and the situation demands urgent measures,” he warned, asserting that they should be declared “priority species” by the government to bolster efforts to revive their population.

Public awareness and engagement in conservation efforts are also essential

for “long-term success,” he said. Supporting the argument, Naveed called for habitat preservation and restoration to be a top priority.

“To protect and revive wild pheasant populations, conservation efforts should focus on habitat preservation and restoration, ensuring diverse and natural environments for feeding and breeding,” he said.

“Implementing sustainable agricultural practices, creating protected areas and planting native vegetation will support their habitats.”

Additionally, he said, strict control on poaching, managing predator populations, and breeding pheasants in captivity for reintroduction into the wild could help boost their numbers.

## Extinction will be ‘disastrous’

There have been no detailed surveys recently in Pakistan to ascertain the current population status of wild pheasant species, according to Jamshed Iqbal Choudhry, an official at the World Wide Fund for Nature – Pakistan (WWF-Pakistan).

However, he said, four species still have “viable” populations, especially in protected areas such as Ayubia National Park in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Margalla Hills National Park in Islamabad.

“There is a need to conduct detailed surveys in known potential sites and to explore new areas for their conservation,” he said.

Supporting the view, Naveed said some surveys have been carried out in a few selected areas for certain species, but in the context of the whole of Pakistan, “it’s hard to estimate their current numbers.”

The extinction of wild pheasants would be “disastrous” because they play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of ecosystems, he said.

“Pheasants help control insect populations, disperse seeds and provide food for predators. Their loss could lead to imbalances in food webs, reduced biodiversity and altered

vegetation growth, negatively affecting both wildlife and the health of their habitats,” he said.

As part of a larger ecosystem, pheasants help sustain the ecological stability of the areas they inhabit, he added.

How to protect rare wild pheasant species?

Protecting rare wild pheasant species involves a combination of habitat preservation, legal protection, breeding programs, and public awareness. Here are some key strategies:

## Habitat Conservation:

**Protect and Restore Habitats:** Ensure that the natural habitats of pheasants, such as forests, grasslands, and wetlands, are preserved and restored. This includes preventing deforestation, controlling urban expansion, and promoting sustainable land use practices.

**Establish Protected Areas:** Create or expand national parks, wildlife reserves, and conservation areas where pheasants can thrive without the threat of habitat destruction.

## Legal Protection:

**Enforce Anti-Poaching Laws:** Strengthen and enforce laws against hunting and poaching of rare pheasant species. Penalties for illegal hunting should be significant to deter potential poachers.

**Regulate Trade:** Implement and enforce regulations on the trade of pheasant species, particularly those that are endangered, to prevent illegal trafficking and exploitation.

## Breeding and Reintroduction Programs:

**Captive Breeding:** Develop captive breeding programs for rare and endangered pheasant species to increase their populations. These programs should be carefully managed to maintain genetic diversity.

**Reintroduction to the Wild:** Once a stable population is achieved through captive breeding, reintroduce the birds into protect-

ed areas of their natural habitat. Continuous monitoring is essential to ensure their survival.

## Research and Monitoring:

**Conduct Population Studies:** Regularly monitor pheasant populations to assess their status and identify threats. This data can inform conservation strategies and adaptive management.

**Research Habitat Requirements:** Study the specific habitat needs of different pheasant species to better manage and protect their environments.

## Public Awareness and Education:

**Raise Public Awareness:** Educate the public about the importance of protecting rare pheasant species and the threats they face. This can be done through campaigns, documentaries, and community outreach programs.

**Engage Local Communities:** Involve local communities in conservation efforts by promoting sustainable practices and providing incentives for protecting wildlife.

## Collaborate with Conservation Organizations:

**Partner with NGOs and International Organizations:** Collaborate with non-governmental organizations, international conservation groups, and governments to coordinate efforts and share resources for pheasant conservation.

## Sustainable Land Use Practices:

**Promote Agroforestry and Ecotourism:** Encourage sustainable agricultural practices and ecotourism that benefit both local communities and wildlife conservation, providing economic alternatives to habitat destruction. By implementing these strategies, it is possible to protect rare wild pheasant species and help ensure their survival for future generations.

# Tackling the plastics pollution crisis by channeling private capital to projects that reduce plastic waste

*The World Bank is supporting its member countries in their efforts to address this problem, at every stage of the plastic lifecycle: from reducing single-use and problematic plastics to stopping leakages to the environment through improved solid waste management and enabling a circular economy.*



By Harry Javed

Of the nearly 350 million tons of plastics that are produced annually, about 70 percent end up in managed landfills or are incinerated, about 10 percent are recycled and the remaining 20 percent simply escape into the environment. According to the OECD, nearly 1.7 million tons of this plastic ends up in the oceans, and if evenly distributed, would create a wall of plastic waste that one would have to climb over to access the ocean the world over.

This plastic pollution degrades ecosystems and imperils human health and livelihoods. Unmanaged plastic pollution harms marine and terrestrial ecosystems and contaminates soil, fisheries, and livestock creating food insecurity. Ultimately, it's the poorest and most vulnerable at the highest risk since they often live close to where plastics are routinely burned. They also tend to live in marginalized land that is subject to blocked

waterways which lead to flooding with devastating consequences.

The World Bank is supporting its member countries in their efforts to address this problem, at every stage of the plastic lifecycle: from reducing single-use and problematic plastics to stopping leakages to the environment through improved solid waste management and enabling a circular economy. Governments enact laws and policies to enable the transition. The private sector has a key role to play in terms of finance, technology, and circular business models.

Private businesses such as formal recyclers and collection centers are positioned to be part of the solution. These are often powered through the support of informal waste collectors – also known as waste pickers– who account for many more self-created livelihoods in the waste sector. These people earn their income from

collecting, sorting, and aggregating waste found in streets and landfills or sourced directly from households. They then sell recyclable waste, including plastic items, to buyback centers or formal recyclers. Financing for these small and medium-sized enterprises can be challenging, especially in developing countries where the challenges are most acute.

A new tool to measure plastic waste collection and recycling has been developed based on the concept of carbon credits: Plastic Waste Collection Credits and Plastic Waste Recycling Credits (collectively called “plastic credits”). Each plastic credit represents one ton of plastic that has either been collected or recycled. The funds from the sale of plastic credits to businesses that want to be part of the solution often aren't available until the positive outcome is achieved, sometimes years after the initial investment – creating a significant and

often insurmountable timing mismatch.

The new Plastic Waste Reduction-Linked Bond solves the timing mismatch problem by channeling up-front financing from capital market investors looking to support plastic waste collection and recycling activities, through a tradeable, high-grade investment product. Investors in the bond will earn a return that is partly linked to the issuance of plastic and carbon credits from two plastic waste and recycling projects, in Ghana and Indonesia. In Ghana, funds will support a community-based project to expand the number of waste collection and recycling sites in Accra and in Indonesia to scale efforts in Surabaya to reduce ocean-bound plastics.

An amount equal to a portion of the coupons that normally would be paid to Plastic Waste Reduction-Linked Bond investors by the World Bank (approx. \$14 million) is front-loaded and paid in two installments to Plastic Collective by Citi. Plastic Collective in turn channels the financing to the projects in Ghana and Indonesia (FAQ for more details).

“This new bond is emblematic of the strong partnerships that are needed, particularly between investors, governments, financial institutions, and local delivery partners to achieve the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), including efforts to reduce plastics waste,” said Jorge Familiar, Vice President and Treasurer, World Bank.

The two plastic collection and recycling projects in Ghana and Indonesia over the next ten years are expected to collect approximately 230,000 tons of plastic waste out of which 180,000 tons will be recycled. They will support the production of a diverse range of recycled plastic products including electronics, luggage, and reusable bags. A portion of the funding will be used to install a food-grade recycling production line. In addition, the supported projects have important development co-benefits including direct and indirect employment for over a thousand individuals from the neighboring underserved communities, of which half are expected to be women. The projects provide staff and informal waste collectors with full personal protective equipment as well as health and safety training. In addition, the projects have climate co-benefits by reducing new plastic production.

“Plastic pollution wreaks havoc on developing countries by degrading ecosystems on which the wealth of the poor depends, further eroding the possibility for people to get out of poverty. It’s also entering the blue food chain and endanger-

ing fisheries, and the people who depend on fish for their nutrition. This innovative Plastic Waste Reduction-Linked Bond channels funds to finance to support the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises that are on the frontlines of the plastic pollution challenge and poised to make a positive contribution for the environment, human health, and jobs in their communities,” said Valerie Hickey, Global Director, Environment, Natural Resources and Blue Economy, World Bank.

“We’re both proud and excited to see this funding effort come to fruition. For almost a decade, Plastic Collective has been at the forefront of developing innovative and sustainable ways to fund plastic collection and recycling projects in the most disadvantaged communities around the world and to help provide finance to the normally unfinanceable. The funding will enable the expansion of facilities and production lines, plus the implementation of social welfare programs to enhance and protect the livelihood of informal waste pickers who are the foundation of these projects. We hope that this new approach to financing environmental and social impact activities benefits many more in the future,” said Steve Hardman, CEO, Plastic Collective.



# Bangladesh's Historic Test Victory Over Pakistan: A Milestone Win and Its Implications



By Kanwal Munir

## Introduction

In August 2024, Bangladesh achieved a historic milestone by securing their first-ever Test victory against Pakistan. This groundbreaking win not only marked a significant achievement for Bangladesh but also exposed the challenges and scrutiny facing the Pakistani cricket team. The match showcased Bangladesh's remarkable performance and resilience, while also highlighting Pakistan's vulnerabilities and the need for strategic adjustments. The standout performances, including Mushfiquir Rahim's pivotal innings and Mohammad Rizwan's record-setting aggregate, played crucial roles in the outcome. This landmark victory has broader implications for both teams, affecting their standings and future strategies. As the series progresses, both teams will be keenly focused on adapting and improving to achieve their goals.

## Match Overview

The first Test between Pakistan and Bangladesh in August 2024 was a pivotal encounter for both sides. Hosted at the Karachi Cricket Stadium, the match unfolded with surprising outcomes. Historically,

Bangladesh had faced Pakistan in 14 Test matches, suffering defeat in 12 and drawing once. This significant victory marked Bangladesh's inaugural Test win against Pakistan, ending a long period of setbacks and establishing them as a competitive force in international cricket. The match was more than just a win; it represented a shift in the competitive landscape and demonstrated Bangladesh's progress in the sport. This landmark result not only highlighted the team's emerging strength but also altered the historical dynamics between the two cricketing nations.

## Squads

- Pakistan Squad: Shan Masood (captain), Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Imam-ul-Haq, Azhar Ali, Fawad Alam, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Afridi, Hasan Ali, Naseem Shah, and Yasir Shah.
- Bangladesh Squad: Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Mushfiquir Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Mominul Haque, Litton Das, Mahmudullah, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Ebadot Hossain, and Taijul Islam.

## Squad Changes

Ahead of the second Test against Bangladesh, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced key changes:

- Abrar Ahmed and Kamran Ghulam have rejoined the squad after being released for matches against Bangladesh A.
- Shaheen Shah Afridi returns following a family leave.
- Aamir Jamal has been recalled, pending fitness.

Sources indicate that two to three changes are expected in Pakistan's playing XI for the upcoming match.

## Pakistan's Innings

Pakistan, led by captain Shan Masood, started the match with high expectations. The team's first innings saw them declare at a commendable 448/6. This declaration was driven by strong performances from various batsmen, showcasing Pakistan's ability to build a substantial total. Notable contributions came from several players, but it was Mohammad Rizwan who stood out with his crucial knock of 171\*. Despite this impressive innings, Pakistan's

subsequent performance would reveal vulnerabilities that had not been apparent in their initial play.

## Bangladesh's Response

Bangladesh's response to Pakistan's first innings was nothing short of spectacular. Their batting lineup, anchored by the experienced Mushfiquir Rahim, delivered a masterclass in Test cricket. Rahim's innings of 191 was a highlight of Bangladesh's innings, playing a pivotal role in their total of 565 all out. This performance not only provided a solid foundation for Bangladesh but also demonstrated their ability to compete against established cricketing nations.

The innings was marked by resilience and skill, as Bangladesh's batsmen tackled the Pakistani bowlers with determination. The ability to surpass Pakistan's first innings total was a testament to the depth and strength of the Bangladeshi batting lineup.

## Pakistan's Second Innings

Pakistan's second innings was a stark contrast to their earlier performance. Faced with the task of defending a significant deficit, Pakistan struggled against a disciplined Bangladeshi attack. The team was bowled out for just 146, a disappointing collapse that set Bangladesh a modest target of 30 runs to win. The ease with which Bangladesh achieved this target—without losing a wicket—underscored their dominance and ability to seize opportunities.

The second innings collapse highlighted several issues within the Pakistani team. The inability to build on their first innings performance and the failure to counter Bangladesh's bowlers raised questions about the team's strategy and adaptability.

## Significant Individual Performances

While Bangladesh's victory was a collective effort, individual performances were pivotal. Mohammad Rizwan's scores of 171\* and 51 were particularly notable. His aggregate of 222 runs in the match was the highest ever by a Pakistani wicketkeeper in a Test match. Despite Rizwan's exceptional

performance, the overall team effort fell short, illustrating the need for contributions from other players.

On the Bangladeshi side, Mushfiquir Rahim's innings of 191 was a standout performance. Rahim's ability to anchor the innings and provide stability was crucial for Bangladesh's success. His innings not only demonstrated his skill but also his importance in the Bangladeshi lineup.

## Reactions and Criticism

The defeat was a significant blow for Pakistan, marking their fourth consecutive loss under the captaincy of Shan Masood. This losing streak led to considerable criticism, with many pointing fingers at Masood's leadership. The defeat against Bangladesh, in particular, was seen as a failure to capitalize on the team's strengths and an indication of leadership issues.

The criticism was further compounded by the team's inability to perform at home, where they were expected to have an advantage. The match highlighted the need for Pakistan to reassess their strategies and leadership approach to address the challenges they are facing.

## Impact on World Test Championship (WTC) Standings

The repercussions of Pakistan's defeat were reflected in the World Test Championship (WTC) standings. The loss caused Pakistan to drop from sixth to eighth place, impacting their chances of qualifying for the WTC final. This drop in rankings underscored the competitive nature of Test cricket and the importance of consistently strong performances.

The shift in standings highlighted the need for Pakistan to improve their performance and secure victories in upcoming matches to regain their position in the WTC standings. The team's ability to bounce back and make necessary adjustments will be crucial in their pursuit of WTC success.

## Venue Change for the Second Test

The second Test of the series, scheduled to begin on August 30, 2024, will be played at

the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. The change in venue from Karachi was due to ongoing construction work at the Karachi Cricket Stadium, which is being prepared for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025. The Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, known for its favorable playing conditions, will now host this crucial fixture.

The venue change adds an element of uncertainty for both teams, as conditions at Rawalpindi may differ from those at Karachi. This change could impact team strategies and performance, making the upcoming Test an intriguing contest.

## Looking Ahead

As Bangladesh celebrates its historic victory, the focus now shifts to the second Test. For Pakistan, the upcoming match represents an opportunity for redemption and a chance to address the issues that led to their recent failures. The team will need to regroup, analyze their performance, and develop a strategy to counter Bangladesh's improved play.

The second Test will be an important fixture for both teams. Bangladesh will aim to build on their success and secure a series win, while Pakistan will look to turn their fortunes around and regain their competitive edge. The match promises to be a compelling encounter, with both sides eager to make a statement.

## Conclusion

Bangladesh's historic Test victory over Pakistan is a landmark achievement that will be remembered for years to come. The match not only marked a significant milestone for Bangladesh but also highlighted the challenges facing the Pakistani team. As the series progresses, both teams will look to build on their performances and make their mark in international cricket. This victory is a testament to the evolving landscape of international cricket, where teams like Bangladesh are making their presence felt on the global stage. With the second Test on the horizon, cricket fans around the world will be watching with anticipation to see how both teams respond and what the future holds for this exciting series.

# The Arts Council of Pakistan pays tribute to comedian and actor Hanif Raja

*General Manager PTV Amjad Shah thanked the President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah for maintaining the council's vibrancy. He mentioned that Hanif Raja used to perform four different roles at a time and excelled not only as a comedian and artist but also as a dancer, noting that an artist is a complete package, and Hanif Raja has never hurt anyone's feelings.*



By Mirza Iftikhar Baig

KARACHI: Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi's Stage Show Committee paid tribute to the renowned comedian, actor, and host Hanif Raja at Auditorium II. The event was attended by General Manager PTV Amjad Shah, cricketer Moin Khan, Stage Show Committee Chairman Saadat Jafri, famous actor Behroze Sabzwari, Ayaz Khan, Shakeel Siddiqui, Rauf Lala, Ali Hasan, Zakir Mastana, Ahmad Raja, singer Imran Javed, Nazar Hussain, journalist Athar Javed Sufi, Akhtar Ali Akhtar, Saleem Afridi, Irfan Malik, Yawar Chawla, Aslam Sheikh, Naeema Garaj, Faisal Nadeem, Shabana Kausar, singer Saleem Javed, Babar Abbasi, and others.

Many prominent personalities from the showbiz industry attended the event. Meanwhile, Nauman Khan performed the duties of Moderator. Javed Sheikh,

Bushra Ansari, Adnan Siddiqui, and Syed Furqan Akhtar spoke about Hanif Raja's contributions to the arts via video messages. Showreel highlighting Hanif Raja's artistic journey was presented at the beginning of the event. Actor Behroze Sabzwari praised President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Ahmed Shah for elevating the Arts Council to great heights, noting that many artists are alive today because of the Arts Council since the theater has almost vanished.

He expressed pride for the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi, and emphasized the importance of valuing Pakistan as it is like a family to us. He attributed today's challenges to the distinction between halal and haram and praised Hanif Raja as truly deserving of commendation.

Shakeel Siddiqui mentioned that many artists have emerged from PTV and recounted that it took them 15 years to journey from Nazimabad to PTV Bahadurabad. He shared that an artist sacrifices everything, recalling that he was on stage when his father passed away, and noted that being a successful father in addition to being a successful artist is a great achievement. Saleem Afridi reminisced about the days when they were learning together; noting that confidence is the most valuable asset in showbiz, and Hanif Raja is full of it. He added that the glow on Hanif Raja's face indicates that he still has a long way to go, just like the youth.

On this occasion, General Manager PTV Amjad Shah thanked the President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah for maintaining the council's vibrancy. He

mentioned that Hanif Raja used to perform four different roles at a time and excelled not only as a comedian and artist but also as a dancer, noting that an artist is a complete package, and Hanif Raja has never hurt anyone's feelings. Cricketer Moin Khan stated that the large turnout at the event was due to the love people have for Hanif Raja, making him a very fortunate person. He expressed happiness at being among the attendees and thanked the Arts Council for the honor it had given.

Hanif Raja's son, Ahmad Raja, expressed his joy at witnessing a tribute to the son of a laborer. He said that he has learned a lot from his father, whose many roles were stolen by others. Many pranks that circulated on social media were copied, and his father introduced new concepts. Even after the death of his mother, his father took great care of them, provided them with a good education, and showed them the right path. He shared that he had often urged his father to remarry, but his father would reply, "Oh, I am still young." Hanif Raja remarked that the word "tribute" represents years of hard work and sacrifice. He thanked all those who attended, noting that Amjad Shah has the admirable quality of prioritizing merit. He also thanked the President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah for honoring him.



Reflecting on his early career, he mentioned that Umar Sharif and Moin Akhter were at the peak of their careers when he started, and while he was young at the time but he was very enthusiastic. The "Dhannu" item became very popular. He wanted to become a painter, but God blessed him with a lot of respect. He emphasized that as human beings, we should stay connected with each other, and expressed his deep gratitude to Farid Khan for his support, acknowledging that he would not be where he is today without him. Stage Show Committee Chairman Saadat Jafri shared that Moin Akhter had named his daughter Madiha, and expressed

his happiness at cricketer Moin Khan's presence at the event.

He thanked everyone for attending in such large numbers, explaining that the decision to honor artists during their lifetimes was made under the guidance of President Arts Council of Pakistan Karachi Muhammad Ahmed Shah. He described Ahmed Shah as the jewel of the Arts Council and said that the whole world is praising his work. At the end of the ceremony, Stage Show Committee Chairman Saadat Jafri presented a shield and flowers to Hanif Raja on behalf of the Arts Council of Pakistan, Karachi.



# The Taj Mahal, A symbol of beauty

*The Taj Mahal was built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to immortalize his wife Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth in 1631, having been the emperor's inseparable companion since their marriage in 1612.*



By Hina Kashif

The Taj Mahal, an iconic symbol of love and architectural brilliance is a stunning example of Mughal architecture that continues to captivate millions of visitors worldwide. Renowned for its breathtaking beauty and intricate craftsmanship, the Taj Mahal is not just a monument of love but also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, embodying the artistic and architectural achievements of the Mughal era. Its harmonious proportions, elaborate decorations, and the serene reflection of its grandeur in the surrounding gardens make it a masterpiece of art and architecture, and a timeless symbol of India's historical and cultural legacy.

## History

The Taj Mahal was built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan to immortalize his wife Mumtaz Mahal who died in childbirth in 1631, having been the emperor's inseparable companion since their marriage in 1612. Construction started in 1632, and the mausoleum was completed in 1648, while

the surrounding buildings and garden were finished five years later.

## The Love Story of Mumtaz and Shah Jahan

Mumtaz Mahal, originally named Arjumand Banu Begum, and Shah Jahan first crossed paths in 1607 at a Royal Bazaar. At that time, Shah Jahan was just 15 years old, known as Prince Khurram. He saw Mumtaz at one of the stalls and was immediately captivated by her beauty. Although their young age prevented them from marrying immediately, their deep connection endured.

By 1612, the couple was finally able to wed. Despite the prevailing cultural norms of the time, which saw Shah Jahan marry Kandhari Begum before his union with Mumtaz and take another wife in 1617, Arjumand remained his most cherished.

When they married in March 1612, Shah Jahan renamed Arjumand to Mumtaz

Mahal, meaning "Chosen One of the Palace," as a testament to his profound affection for her. Mumtaz Mahal reciprocated his love wholeheartedly, accompanying him on his military campaigns even while pregnant. Her kindness, compassion, and beauty endeared her to Shah Jahan, who regarded her as his true soulmate.

## How Did Mumtaz Mahal Die?

Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan had 14 children together, marking her as the only wife with whom Shah Jahan had offspring, underscoring his deep affection for her. On June 17, 1631, while pregnant with their 14th child, Mumtaz went into labor unexpectedly while accompanying Shah Jahan on a military campaign. Tragically, Mumtaz died the following day, passing away in her husband's arms.

Shah Jahan was profoundly affected by her death, spending several months in mourning and seclusion. When he eventually

emerged, he appeared aged, with grey hair and glasses. Mumtaz's body was transported to Agra for burial. In his profound grief and as a tribute to his beloved wife, Shah Jahan commissioned the Taj Mahal to be built on her burial site, creating one of the world's most iconic monuments to love.

## Construction

The Taj Mahal is located on the right bank of the Yamuna River in a vast Mughal Garden that encompasses nearly 17 hectares, in the Agra District in Uttar Pradesh. The Taj Mahal is considered to be the greatest architectural achievement in the whole range of Indo-Islamic architecture. An area of roughly 1.2 hectares (3 acres) was excavated and filled with dirt to reduce seepage. The tomb complex was built mainly using brick and lime mortar. The external surface of the main tomb building and the interior of the main cenotaph chamber is veneered with white marble. The other interior surfaces and other accessory buildings are lined with red sandstone coated with a red octet for protection. The white marble came from Makrana in Rajasthan, while the red sandstone was quarried from Fatehpur Sikri in Uttar Pradesh. Many precious and semi-precious stones, used for decoration, were imported from across the world, including jade and crystal from China, turquoise from Tibet, Lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, sapphire from Sri Lanka and carnelian from Arabia. 28 types of precious and semi-precious stone were inlaid into the white marble. More than 20,000 artisans, laborers, painters and others were involved in the construction of the building. Construction of the mausoleum was completed in 1648, but work continued on other phases of the project for another five years. The Taj Mahal complex is believed to have been completed in its entirety in 1653 at a cost estimated at the time to be around ₹5 million, which in 2023 would be approximately ₹35 billion or \$77.8 million.

## Architecture

The Taj Mahal incorporates and expands on design traditions of Indo-Islamic and Mughal architecture. Inspirations for the building came from Timurid and Mughal buildings. The mausoleum building is the central structure of the entire complex. It is

a white marble structure standing on a 6-metre-high square plinth with sides measuring 95.5 meters in length. The base structure is a large multi-chambered cube with chamfered corners forming an eight-sided structure that is approximately 57.3 meters long on each of the four long sides.

The building has four identical sides with iwans (arch-shaped doorways), topped by a large dome and "finial". Each side of the iwan is framed with a 33-metre high pishtaq (vaulted archway) with two similarly shaped arched balconies stacked on either side. These archways are replicated on a smaller scale on the chamfered corner areas, making the design completely symmetrical. At the southern side of the platform, facing the garden, there are two flights of stairs on either side which are partly covered and provide the only access from ground level up to the mausoleum building. The onion-shaped dome sits on a 12-metre-high cylindrical drum with an inner diameter of 18.4 meters. The dome is slightly asymmetrical and is topped by a 9.6-metre-high gilded finial. The main dome is surrounded by four smaller domes placed at its corners. Tall spires extend from edges of walls which serve as decorative elements.

The external surfaces of the building are decorated with a number of delicate relief art adorned with various precious and semi-precious stones. The gateway arches are bordered by Arabic calligraphy with passages from the Quran. Much of the calligraphy is composed of florid thuluth script made of jasper or black marble inlaid in white marble panels. The main inner chamber is an octagon with 7.3-metre sides, with the design allowing for entry from each face with the main door facing the garden to the south. The four central upper arches form balconies or viewing areas. The interior walls are about 25 meters high and are topped by a "false" interior dome decorated with a sun motif.

The inlay work is a lapidary of precious and semiprecious gemstones. Each chamber wall is highly decorated with dado bas-relief, intricate lapidary inlay and refined calligraphy panels similar to the design elements seen throughout the exterior of the complex. Situated within the screen in the upper main chamber are the likenesses

of the tombs of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan with the actual burials done below in the lower tomb chamber. From the southern main entrance room, a stairway leads to the lower tomb chamber which is rectangular in shape with walls laid with marble and an undecorated coved ceiling. The calligraphy found on the marble cenotaphs in the tomb is particularly detailed and delicate. While the cenotaphs are similar to the ones from the Mughal era, no other tombs from the era were adorned with such exquisite decoration. On Mumtaz's sarcophagus on the top, the decoration consists of natural plum fruits, buds, and flower blossoms inlaid with Quranic inscriptions.

The complex is set around a large 300 m<sup>2</sup> Charbagh or Mughal Garden. The garden is divided by two main walkways into four quadrants with further raised pathways that divide each of the four-quarters into 16 sunken parterres or flowerbeds. The garden is surrounded by a walkway connecting all the quadrants. The Charbagh garden, a design inspired by Persian gardens, was introduced to India by Babur, the first Mughal emperor, and symbolizes Jannah with four rivers flowing from a central spring or mountain, separating the garden into north, west, south, and east. While most gardens of the era are rectangular with a tomb or pavilion in the center, the Taj Garden is unusual in that the main element, the tomb, is located at the end of the garden.

## Tourism

The Taj Mahal is a major tourist attraction and attracts a large number of domestic and foreign visitors. About five million visitors visited Taj Mahal in the financial year 2022–23. A three-tier pricing system is in place, with a significantly lower entrance fee for Indian citizens and more expensive ones for foreigners. As of 2024, the fee for Indian citizens was ₹50, for citizens of SAARC and BIMSTEC countries, it was ₹540 and for other foreign tourists, it was ₹1,100. Visitors are allowed through three gates and as polluting vehicles are not allowed near the complex, tourists must either walk or take electric buses from the designated parking areas. The complex is open on all days except on Friday from one hour before sunrise to 45 minutes before sunset.

# World's second-largest diamond weighing 2492-carat discovered in Botswana mine

*Photographs released by the company show the diamond is roughly the size of a human palm.*



## TTI Desk Report

The second-largest diamond ever discovered has been unearthed in Botswana, one of the world's top diamond-producing countries, a Canadian mining company announced on Thursday. The enormous 2,492-carat diamond was found at the Karowe Diamond Mine in northeastern Botswana using x-ray detection technology, Lucara Diamond Corp. revealed in a statement.

Lucara did not disclose the diamond's value or its quality. However, in terms of carats, this gem is surpassed only by the 3,016-carat Cullinan Diamond, discovered in South Africa in 1905.

"We are thrilled with the recovery of this extraordinary 2,492-carat diamond," said Lucara president William Lamb in the statement.

Photographs released by the company show the diamond is roughly the size of a human palm. This discovery is described as "one of the largest rough diamonds ever unearthed," and was identified using Lucara's Mega Diamond Recovery X-ray technology, which was installed in 2017 to detect and preserve large, high-value diamonds, the statement added.

Botswana's President Mokgweetsi Masisi was scheduled to view the massive stone later on Thursday. The government also confirmed it as the second-largest diamond ever found worldwide. Tobias Kormind, managing director of Europe's largest online diamond jeweler, 77 Diamonds, confirmed that it is the largest rough diamond discovered since the Cullinan Diamond, parts of which are set in Britain's crown jewels.

"This discovery is largely due to new technology that enables larger diamonds to be extracted from the ground without breaking. We can expect more significant finds like this in the future," Kormind said.

Diamonds are a major source of income for Botswana, accounting for 30 percent of its GDP and 80 percent of its exports. Before this discovery, the largest diamond found in Botswana was a 1,758-carat stone, also mined by Lucara at the Karowe mine in 2019 and named Sewelo. In 2021, Lucara also discovered a 1,174-carat diamond in Botswana using the same x-ray technology.

## The largest diamonds in the world

### 1. The Cullinan Diamond

The largest diamond ever discovered was found in 1905 at the Premier Mine in South Africa. Named after the mine's owner, Thomas Cullinan, the Cullinan Diamond weighed an astounding 3,106 carats—nearly 1.4 pounds. The rough diamond measured about 4 inches long, 2 inches wide, and 2.5 inches high.

Frederick Wells, the mine's superintendent, discovered the diamond near the surface of the mining pit. Initially, he mistook it for a lesser gem, doubting that a diamond of such size could exist.

The Cullinan Diamond was presented as a gift to King Edward VII of England by the government of Transvaal. The renowned diamond cutter Joseph Asscher cut the stone into ten significant

diamonds, many of which are still part of the Crown Jewel collection. The largest of these, the 530.4-carat Great Star of Africa (Cullinan I Diamond), is set in the Sovereign's Scepter with Cross.

The Cullinan I Diamond is estimated to be worth \$150,046,978 and would cost approximately \$2,250,705 annually to insure.



## 2. The Lesedi La Rona Diamond

The Lesedi La Rona Diamond made global headlines in 2015 when it was unearthed at the Karowe Mine in Botswana. This 1,109-carat gem-quality rough diamond is the largest found since the Cullinan Diamond.

"Lesedi La Rona," meaning "Our Light" in Tswana, was named through a nationwide contest. In 2017, the diamond was sold for \$53 million to Graff Diamonds.

After extensive analysis, Graff cut the stone into a 302.37-carat emerald-shaped diamond, the largest of its kind in the world. Additionally, 66 smaller diamonds were created from the remaining rough material. The Lesedi La Rona is of exceptional quality, graded Type IIA and D color by the Gemological Institute of America.

The estimated value of the Graff Lesedi La Rona is \$85,538,659, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$1,283,080.



## 3. The Excelsior Diamond

Discovered in 1893 at the Jagersfontein Mine in South Africa, the 995-carat Excelsior Diamond was the largest diamond in the world at the time. A worker accidentally spotted the stone in a shovel full of gravel.

Unfortunately, the diamond remained unsold in a safe until 1903, when it was sent to Amsterdam and cut into ten smaller pieces. The

largest of these, the Excelsior I, is a 69.68-carat pear-shaped diamond, which was sold in 1996 to Mouwad Jewelers and set in a bracelet.

The estimated value of the Excelsior I Diamond is \$19,712,054, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$295,681.



## 4. The Star of Sierra Leone

The 968.9-carat Star of Sierra Leone was discovered in 1972 in its namesake country. It was purchased by Harry Winston for several million dollars and brought to New York, where it was initially cut into a 143.2-carat emerald shape. Due to a flaw, it was later recut into 17 smaller diamonds, including a 53.96-carat pear-shaped stone. Six of these diamonds were set by Harry Winston into the Star of Sierra Leone Brooch.

The estimated value of the Star of Sierra Leone is \$15,264,960, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$228,974.



## 5. The Lesotho Legend

Discovered in 2018 at the Letseng Mine in Lesotho, the 910-carat Lesotho Legend is the fifth-largest gem-quality diamond ever found. The rough diamond was sold for \$40 million in 2018 to Van Cleef & Arpels, who cut it into 67 diamonds totaling 441.75 carats. The largest of these is a 79.35-carat oval-cut diamond, now set in the Atours Mystérieux necklace.

The estimated value of the Lesotho Legend's largest diamond is \$22,447,639, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$336,715.

## 6. The Incomparable Diamond

The Incomparable Diamond, one of the most uniquely named stones on this list, was found in 1984 by a young girl in the tailings

of the MIBA Mine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The 890-carat diamond was cut into a unique triangular shape weighing 407.38 carats. In 2013, Mouwad Jewelers set it into a 367-carat necklace, which Guinness World Records listed as the world's most expensive necklace at \$55 million.

The estimated value of The Incomparable Diamond is \$6,926,274, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$103,894.



#### 7. The Constellation Diamond

This 813-carat diamond was discovered in 2015 by Lucara Diamond Company at the Karowe Mine, the same year and mine where the Lesedi La Rona was found. It was purchased by de Grisogono for \$63 million. The Constellation Diamond is known for its exceptional color and clarity, though it has not yet been cut into polished stones.

The estimated value of The Constellation Diamond is \$63 million, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$945,000.



#### 8. The Millennium Star Diamond

The 777-carat Millennium Star Diamond was discovered in 1990 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It was found in alluvial deposits and purchased by De Beers at an undisclosed price. The rough diamond was cut down to a 203.04-carat pear-shaped gem, making it the world's second-largest D color, internally flawless diamond. The diamond narrowly escaped theft while on display in 2000.

The estimated value of The Millennium Star Diamond is

\$57,438,798, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$861,582.

#### 9. The Woyie River Diamond

Discovered in 1945 near Koidu, Sierra Leone, the 770-carat Woyie River Diamond was the largest alluvial diamond ever found at the time. The rough diamond showed signs of having broken apart from a larger stone during its journey down the river.

In 1953, the rough diamond was cut into 30 diamonds by the firm Briefel and Lemer. The largest of these, the 31.34-carat Victory Diamond, named after the Allied victory in WWII, sold for \$4.3 million at Christie's in 2015.

The estimated value of The Victory Diamond is \$8,865,898, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$132,988.



#### 10. The Golden Jubilee

Discovered in 1985 in South Africa, this fancy-colored diamond weighed 755.5 carats in its rough form. It was later cut into a 545.67-carat cushion-shaped diamond, making it the largest polished diamond in the world.

In 1997, the diamond was gifted to the King of Thailand. Because brown diamonds are generally less valuable than white diamonds, its value is lower compared to others on this list.

The estimated value of The Golden Jubilee is \$4,566,166, with an annual insurance cost of approximately \$68,492.

### Honorable Mentions

Recent years have seen the discovery of several large diamonds that have yet to be named:

- The 1,758-carat Sewelô diamond, found in 2019
- A 1,174-carat diamond from Karowe, Botswana, found in 2021
- A 1,098.3-carat diamond from Jwaneng, Botswana, found in 2021
- A 998-carat diamond from Karowe, Botswana, found in 2020
- A 1,080-carat diamond from Karowe, Botswana, found in 2023



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