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28th Amendment: Where Do CSS Reforms Land?

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Sportswashing Through the FIFA World Cup: From Nazi Propaganda to Trump's \$11 Billion Lie

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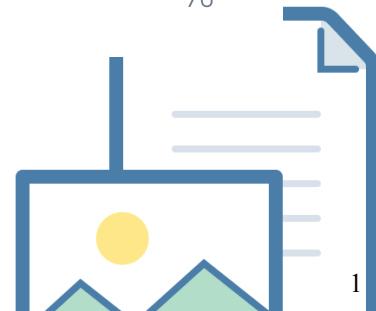


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Foreword

Welcome to the twentieth edition of the Paradigm Shift e-magazine. Since starting Paradigm Shift (www.ParadigmShift.com.pk) on **August 14th, 2020**, we have come a long way.

With **350,000 followers** on social media and unique traffic on our website, we are now able to serve a wider percentage of the Pakistani youth. All our pieces are sent in by brilliant writers and researchers, and our gifted editors constantly ensure the quality of our content.

We aim for, and work towards three major goals:

1. To become a comprehensive library with high-quality content on **international relations, current affairs, global politics, and Pakistan**.
2. To provide a **free medium** where individuals can access research from across the globe - and can send in their own work to share their voice with the world.
3. To **showcase Pakistan** in a **positive and factual manner** through our '**Pakistan Unveiled**' section.

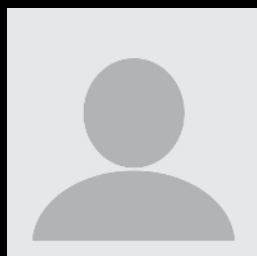
We have handpicked **14 special pieces** from our website for this edition, and we hope that you gain some insights from them. For more content on a variety of topics from across the world, please visit www.ParadigmShift.com.pk

We hope that you consider sharing our website and social media with your friends and family so that we can effectively increase our reach. Thank you again for all your support through the years.



Powerplay to Propaganda: How Hindustan Exploited the Twelve-Day War

About the Author



Mohamin Zeeshan is a scholar of International Relations at the National Defense University, Islamabad.

Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, once lamented, *"In war, truth is the first casualty."* Amidst the chaos of Middle Eastern fire, as missiles flew between Tehran and Tel Aviv, India launched a wave of calculated disinformation exploiting the crisis. Indian lies travelled faster than the Iranian drones but were debunked as swiftly as the Iron Dome faltered in Tel Aviv.

During the 2025 play, frantic news anchors, fueled by online trolls and commentators, did everything possible to suppress the truth. They trampled it, shredded it, chopped it into tiny bits, ignited it, and disposed of the ashes in the Ganga. These perpetual liars didn't just murder the truth but also performed its "Antim Sanskar" (funeral rites) with vulgar pageantry. I wonder if truth were asked for its last wish, what it would be? Surely, it must be seeking accountability from its perpetrators.

The chronicle begins on 13 June 2025, when the genocidal state of Israel launched an offensive against Iran. This triggered a Twelve-Day War, which ended with a ceasefire on 24 June 2025 — a day after Iran's symbolic attacks on US military bases in the Middle East. This war quenched its thirst for blood with around a thousand casualties. These twelve days set the stage for a second wave of jingoism and disinformation in India's bewildering information ecosystem, after the first round of naked lies and international humiliation during the Indo-Pak Four-Day War.



Israeli Air Force fighter jets on their way to attack Iran, June 2025

Licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)



Major Gaurav Arya — a renowned warmonger and pathological liar — blamed Iran for sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir during an interview at Times Now Navbharat dated 20 Jun 2025. He labelled Iran a terrorist state, claiming that its whole leadership must be eliminated swiftly to ensure global peace. Arya further asserted that Israel was not just fighting its own battle, but that of the entire world.

He predicted that Saudi Arabia would soon join the war, the same thing he prophesied about Afghanistan during the Four-Day Indo-Pak War. None of his absurd predictions came true. This

fabulist again distorted the historical facts by claiming that all the nuclear sites attacked during the conflict were originally built by Israel in the post-1979 era. The whole program was a monkey show. Arya also reported that Pakistan's airspace had been used by B-2 bombers during the Fordow strike. Earlier, he referred to the Iranian Foreign Minister as a "son of a pig," which triggered the diplomatic row between Tehran and Delhi.

The torrent of misinformation surged. Dinesh Gautam, the host of the same program, deceitfully claimed that Pakistan had been caught spying for the US through a BACN system. This claim was entirely fabricated.

Sheikh Aamir, a young Congress spokesperson and social activist from Indian-Occupied Kashmir, along with Talha Amir Rashidi, an Indian national, powerfully and effectively debunked the Zionist propaganda and lies spread by India's top mythomaniac, Arnab Goswami, during a debate on Republic World aired on 18 June 2025. It was a moment of utter embarrassment for Goswami.

All the heartless Indian clowns were even seen laughing at the bombing of Iranian media outlets, specifically mocking female journalist Sahar Emami. She was reporting live when an Israeli bomb struck the state news agency building. Regardless of one's stance on the war, it is indubitably terrifying to experience an explosion erupt behind you in real time. Arnab Goswami mocked Emami, ridiculing her for "running away in a cowardly manner" when her station was bombed.

Perhaps she should have learnt courage from Goswami — the wimp who moaned, cried, and clung to his chair like a child denied candy when Mumbai Police arrived to arrest him. However, Emami returned to the broadcast shortly afterward and has since become a powerful symbol of resilience — hailed as the "lioness of Iranian media."

The whole *Godi Media* — including Arnab Goswami (Republic TV), Anjana Om Kashyap (Aaj Tak), Navika Kumar (Times Now), Rahul Shivshankar (CNN-News18), Amish Devgan, Rubika Liyaquat (News18 India), Rajat Sharma (India TV), Gaurav Sawant (India Today), and Sushant Sinha (Times Now Navbharat) — were all in line and worked overtime to spread disinformation. Republic Bharat had flashy graphics, and there was a competition among channels over fighter jets, warships, death, destruction, and blood-soaked fonts. TV9 Bharatvarsh was far ahead in this visual jingoism. Air raid sirens dominated the warmongering media, even though the government had advised them to stop using such sounds.

Islamabad supported Tehran diplomatically against the aggressor, Israel, on all international forums while maintaining strategic balance. The country strongly condemned both Israeli and US attacks on Iran and adopted a clear stance: Iran has a right to self-defense. Meanwhile, Indian media and propaganda networks launched perfidious, hypocritical campaigns. After the success of Operation Bunyan al-Marsous, India faced global humiliation. The President of the United States invited COAS Asim Munir to lunch at the White House.



File:P20250925DT-0907 President Donald Trump meets with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir of Pakistan.jpg - Wikimedia Commons

Anxious about Islamabad's growing ties with Washington, Indian propaganda first accused Pakistan of providing military support to Iran. When that failed, these pathological disinformation machines spread the manipulative lie that Islamabad would nuke Israel. Pakistan's defense minister swiftly issued an official statement debunking all such false claims. When all else failed, they turned 360 degrees and began propagating that Pakistan was offering military bases and airspace to the US against Iran. What hypocrisy! All their lies lived no life — and truth prevailed.

Reports from Al Jazeera, The New Arab, and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) in 2023 have highlighted that Hindu nationalist and right-wing accounts, often linked to the BJP's IT Cell, have been major sources of Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian misinformation on social media platforms, particularly X (formerly Twitter), during the Israel-Gaza conflict.

These accounts reportedly aimed to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment and reinforce India's pro-Israel diplomatic stance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration. Fact-checkers such as Alt News estimate that approximately two-thirds of such disinformation is produced by Hindu nationalists, who employ emotionally charged narratives to drive engagement or profit from X Premium subscriptions.

According to Grok and multiple Community Notes on X, a significant number of fake or anonymous pro-Zionist accounts — including handles like @VividProwess, @InevitableWest, @CherylWroteIt, @NiohBerg, @TheMossadIL, @WarMonitors, @IsraelWarRoom, @MOSSADil, @JoeTruzman, @Israelkicksass, @EliAfriatISR, @AfgZoroastrian, @JesvinGeo, among others — are allegedly operated by individuals based in India while posing as Western or Israeli users. These accounts often disseminate disinformation, amplify Islamophobic tropes, and present themselves as authentic voices from the Global North or Israel to enhance credibility and reach.

In the end, the cameras will cut, the studios will go murky, and the Hawks who screamed for war from behind glass desks will elapse, but the truth they tried to bury never left; it waits in the rubble for someone to dig it out. *"You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."* That's the real case here.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article/paper are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the editorial position of Paradigm Shift.

You may like: [Indian Disinformation Against Pakistan: Propaganda and Fake News](#)

Also read: [Use of Propaganda and AI in Indian News](#)

Article



The Weaponization of Trade: How Tariffs Became Geopolitical Tools

About the Author



Kainat Farooq is a passionate International Relations student with a strong interest in diplomacy, policy, and global affairs. She is dedicated to contributing thoughtful analysis and research on international issues.

The topic of tariffs was once largely seen as dull and technical. They were the kind of policy detail discussed by finance ministries, included in trade negotiations, and buried in customs forms or economics textbooks, not something that made headline news. That has changed dramatically. Over the past two years, tariffs have emerged as one of the most visible tools of foreign policy, used not only to restrict imports but also to pressure entire countries, often for reasons that

extend well beyond trade itself.

India faced a 50 percent tariff in August 2025, not because of unfair trade practices, but because it continued buying discounted Russian oil. Mexico and Canada, meanwhile, were threatened with tariffs over concerns related to fentanyl trafficking and border security rather than traditional trade disputes such as steel dumping.

China has spent much of the past two years in a tariff confrontation with Washington that has affected everything from soybeans and rare earth magnets

to semiconductor equipment. At its core, this is about far more than economics; it is about leverage.



mint

What's Happening?

- **Trump imposes additional 25% tariffs, taking total duties on Indian goods to 50%**
- **Penalty over India's Russian oil purchases**
- **New tariffs apply only to India, not to China or Turkey**

This is the story of how the tariff, a tool that used to live quietly in trade policy, became a frontline weapon in a much larger contest over global power.

From Protecting Industries to Punishing Behavior

A tariff is, in simple terms, a tax placed on imported goods. Governments have used tariffs for centuries for two main purposes: to generate revenue and to shield domestic industries from cheaper foreign competition. Steel tariffs are meant to protect steel producers and workers. Agricultural tariffs are designed to support farmers. That is the traditional textbook explanation, and to some extent, it still holds today.

What has changed is the second use, which has grown until it sometimes swallows the first. Tariffs are now being used explicitly to change a foreign government's behavior on matters that have nothing to do with trade imbalances: oil purchases, immigration enforcement, drug trafficking, military alliances, and rare earth exports. They are functioning less like a finance ministry tool and more like a sanction.

It is easy to understand once you see it from the perspective of a president or a prime minister. A tariff can be imposed by executive order, often overnight, without needing congressional approval or a coalition of allies. It does not require troops, and unlike a financial sanction, it does not require freezing anyone's assets or excluding a bank from a payments system. It just raises a number on a customs form. And because the cost shows up gradually, in slightly higher prices on store shelves, it is far easier to sell domestically than a war or even a full sanctions regime would be.

That is the trade-off baked into the tool from the start. Cheap to deploy, politically satisfying to announce, and as the past two years have shown, pretty clearly often disconnected from whether it actually works.

The US-China Tariff War: A Case Study in Escalation and Exhaustion

The perfect example of how trade can be turned into a political weapon is the US-China relationship since early 2025. By now, the pattern is familiar: one side raises tariffs, the other retaliates, both sides pause briefly, and then the cycle begins again.

The escalation started quickly. On February 1, 2025, President Trump signed an order imposing a 10 percent tariff on Chinese imports, citing concerns over fentanyl trafficking. China responded within days with tariffs on American coal, liquefied natural gas, and agricultural equipment. By March, the US tariff had doubled to 20 percent, while China imposed additional duties on products such as chicken, pork, soybeans, and beef, alongside new restrictions affecting business with American companies.

The conflict intensified even further in April. By early April 2025, US tariffs on Chinese goods had



climbed to 145 percent, while China responded with tariffs of 125 percent on American exports. These are not the kinds of figures normally associated with trade policy. They are levels designed to severely restrict, if not effectively halt, trade between the world's two largest economies.

What followed was a long series of truces, each one buying a few more months of calm before the next deadline loomed. The two sides agreed in May 2025 to bring tariffs down to a more survivable 30 percent on Chinese goods and 10 percent on American exports, and have spent the time since extending that arrangement again and again, on [August 12](#) and then on November 10, rather than letting the whole structure collapse back toward triple digits. The most recent high-profile moment came at a May 2026 summit in Beijing, where Trump and Xi discussed everything from agricultural purchases to rare earths to Taiwan against the backdrop of the war in Iran. The summit produced headlines but, as with most of these meetings, fairly little in the way of binding commitments.

Here is the part that should give pause to anyone who thinks the tariffs are working as intended. Despite two years of escalating duties aimed explicitly at shrinking the US trade deficit with China and pressuring Beijing on everything from intellectual property to Taiwan, China posted a record [\\$1.189 trillion trade surplus in 2025](#), with exports still growing even as the US share of them shrank. Chinese exporters simply rerouted toward the EU and Southeast Asia. The tariffs changed where China sells, not really whether it can sell.

Meanwhile, in February 2026, the US Supreme Court ruled the legal basis for many of these tariffs unlawful, forcing the administration to scramble toward narrower legal authorities — Section 122,

Section 301, Section 232 investigations — to keep a version of the policy alive. The Tax Foundation, tracking the whole mess, describes the result as the largest US tax increase as a share of GDP since 1993.



Beyond China: Tariffs as Leverage for Almost Anything

The China relationship gets the headlines, but it is the use of tariffs against countries with no real trade grievance against the US that best shows how far the tool has drifted from its original purpose.

India is the clearest example. In August 2025, Washington imposed a 25 percent tariff on Indian goods, then doubled it to 50 percent within weeks, not because of anything India was doing in its trade relationship with the US, but specifically because India kept buying discounted [Russian oil](#). This made India's tariff rate, for a period, the highest of any US trading partner anywhere in the world. A New Delhi-based trade research group estimated the move would hit [\\$48 billion worth of exports](#), threatening jobs in textiles, gems, jewelry, and leather goods sectors that had nothing to do with the Ukraine war that supposedly justified the punishment. A retired Indian security official called it what it was, describing the US as having chosen to "weaponize trade tariffs in a unilateral and abrasive manner."

The standoff eventually eased. By February 2026, after India agreed to scale back its Russian oil purchases, [Trump cut the tariff rate from 50 percent to 18 percent](#). Whether that was a tariff success story or simply a costly six-month detour that India would have preferred to avoid entirely depends a great deal on who you ask. Either way, the tariff did the job a sanction would normally do: it pressured a third country over its relationship with a sanctioned state, without the US ever having to call it a sanction.

Canada and Mexico went through a similar experience earlier, in February 2025, when Trump used emergency economic powers to impose 25 percent tariffs on both countries, explicitly framed around fentanyl trafficking and border security, well outside the renegotiated terms of their own trade agreement with Washington. The message in all these cases is consistent: tariffs are no longer reserved for trade disputes. They are now a general-purpose pressure tool, used whenever a government wants leverage over another country's foreign policy, energy choices, or border enforcement, and does not want to go through the slower, more multilateral process that a formal sanctions regime usually requires.

Who Actually Pays for All This

What often gets overlooked in the geopolitical debate is a basic fact: tariffs are taxes, and someone has to pay them. In most cases, a large share of that cost falls on American businesses and consumers. The New York Federal Reserve found in February 2026 that US consumers and companies were absorbing nearly 90 percent of tariff costs, not foreign exporters, as the political rhetoric around tariffs often implies. The Tax Foundation calculated that 2025's tariffs amounted to roughly a \$1,000 tax increase for the average American household, easing slightly to around [\\$700 in 2026](#) as some measures expired or were struck down. A separate March 2026 analysis from Yale's Budget Lab put the 2026 household cost closer to [\\$570](#), with economists noting that lower-income households tend to feel the pinch more, since they spend a larger share of their income on the kinds of goods, furniture, electronics, and car parts that have been hit hardest.



90%

The percentage of Trump's tariff burden that falls on American consumers and companies.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of N.Y.

The inflation effects are real, if a bit slower to show up than headline coverage sometimes suggests. The Dallas Fed found that core inflation in March 2026 would have been roughly 0.8 percentage points lower without tariffs, and St. Louis Fed researchers found companies were passing through about 35 percent of tariff costs to consumers in mid-2025, with Goldman Sachs projecting that figure could eventually climb to 55 percent as firms run out of room to absorb the costs through their own margins. Not every economist agrees on exactly how much of the broader inflation picture tariffs explain, and the Minneapolis Fed has pushed back on claims that tariffs are the dominant driver of the recent inflation overshoot. But almost nobody disputes the basic mechanism: someone pays more, and it is rarely the government imposing the tariff.

And it is worth being honest about how scattered the awareness of this actually is. A consumer survey from [Simon-Kucher](#) found that only about a third of Americans report a strong understanding of how tariffs actually affect the prices they pay. People notice prices going up. Few connect it to a specific tariff announcement made eighteen months earlier over an unrelated foreign policy dispute. That gap between cause and perceived cause is, in its own quiet way, part of what makes the tool politically convenient.

The Rest of the World Is Not Waiting Around

Perhaps the most interesting development of the past year is not anything Washington has done, but how everyone else has responded. Rather than simply absorbing the tariffs and hoping for a better deal, much of the world has spent 2025 and 2026 quietly building an alternative.

The clearest symbol of this shift is the EU-Mercosur trade agreement, which finally crossed the finish line in January 2026 after roughly twenty-five years of on-and-off negotiation. The deal creates one of the largest free-trade zones in the world, covering more than 700 million people and roughly 20 percent of global GDP, and it gives the EU somewhere to go besides Washington or Beijing. Brazil, one of the bloc's members, posted record exports of \$348.7 billion in 2025 despite a 6.6 percent drop in shipments specifically to the United States, about as clean an illustration as one will find of a country routing around a tariff wall instead of waiting for it to come down.

The EU has not stopped there. According to the [Cato Institute's tracking of global trade activity](#), Brussels has also concluded new agreements with Mexico, Indonesia, and Switzerland, and is pushing toward a deal with India. The UK-India trade agreement, signed in May 2025, cut Indian tariffs on most British goods and slashed auto tariffs from over 100 percent to 10 percent. The UK has also joined the CPTPP, the Pacific trade pact, giving it tariff-free access to members including Japan, Vietnam, and Chile.

A 2026 analysis from the Policy Center for the New South describes the result as a fragmentation of the old, single global trading system into what it calls three overlapping regimes, with most of the world, everyone except the US and China, increasingly trading more with each other and now accounting for as much as 75 percent of world trade among themselves. This represents a genuine shift from a decade ago, when American and Chinese markets sat much closer to the center of everyone else's trade strategy.

None of this means the tariffs have failed to hurt their targets. China's surplus with the US specifically did shrink, even as its overall surplus grew. India did feel real pain during its six months at a 50 percent tariff rate. But the broader trend is unmistakable: the tool is accelerating exactly the kind of trade diversification that reduces its own future effectiveness. Every country that signs a new trade deal with someone other than the US has one less reason to fear the next round of tariffs.

Conclusion

If the goal was to extract specific, narrow concessions, the record is mixed but not empty. India did scale back its Russian oil purchases. China did agree, at various points, to buy more US agricultural products and ease some rare earth restrictions, even if those commitments have a habit of being vaguer in practice than in the headlines announcing them. Tariffs, like sanctions, can sometimes move the needle on a specific, bounded task, especially against a country with a single major export market.

If the goal was to reshape the broader balance of economic power, to bring manufacturing home, shrink trade deficits, or force China into fundamental behavioral change, the results look considerably weaker. China's trade surplus reached a record in the very year it was supposedly being squeezed hardest. The structural reliance on Chinese processing capacity for things like rare earths has not meaningfully changed. And the tariffs have visibly accelerated a global hedging strategy that leaves the US a little more on the outside of new trade architecture than it was three years ago.

What is harder to dispute is who bears the most immediate cost while these larger questions get sorted out. It is the American household paying a few hundred dollars more a year without fully understanding why. It is the Indian garment worker whose factory lost orders during a six-month tariff spike triggered by a dispute over oil purchases an ocean away. It is the small importer trying to plan a year when the rules can change with a single executive order and a press conference.

Tariffs have become geopolitical tools because they are fast, visible, and politically rewarding to deploy. Whether they are effective tools of geopolitics, as opposed to effective tools of domestic political theater, is a separate question. On the evidence of the past two years, the honest answer leans toward theater.

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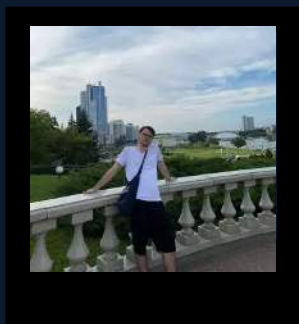
You may like: [The Tariff Pressure](#)

Also read: [Understanding the US-China Tariffs, Tensions and Trade-offs](#)



Is the Declaration of Belarus' Independence, by China, a Signal to Moscow?

About the Author



Eljanos Kasaj is a student from Albania currently enrolled at the Institute of Political Science and World Politics. He is specializing in Global Security at the University of Wrocław (Poland).

On June 29, 2026, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenka (Аляксандр Лукашэнка) met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing during an unannounced visit to the People's Republic of China.

This was his first visit to the People's Republic of China since September of the previous year, when President Lukashenko took part in the Chinese military parade in Beijing to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japanese aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, and in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Tianjin.

At the same time, this was also the second visit of the Belarusian head of state to East Asia, after he visited the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea), on March 25-26, 2026, where he met with the President of the State Affairs of the DPRK, Kim Jong Un.

Meanwhile, another notable feature of this visit was that it came immediately after the Belarusian President met with the special envoys of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, which was followed by a meeting *tête-à-tête* with Russian President Vladimir Putin at his private residence in Valdai, in the Novgorod Oblast.



As *The Wall Street Journal* has lately reported, by citing current and former European and Russian officials, Moscow is significantly increasing direct and indirect pressure on Minsk, seeking to draw Belarus into more active participation in the Russia's ongoing armed conflict with Ukraine, including threatening to cut off Russian financial support for Minsk, which is much needed for the Belarusian government currently still isolated from the Western markets or Western economic assistance.

Thus, it is natural that, while facing this critical geopolitical and economic situation, Minsk would turn to its last remaining major ally and the only one wielding significant political influence over the Kremlin: the People's Republic of China (PRC).

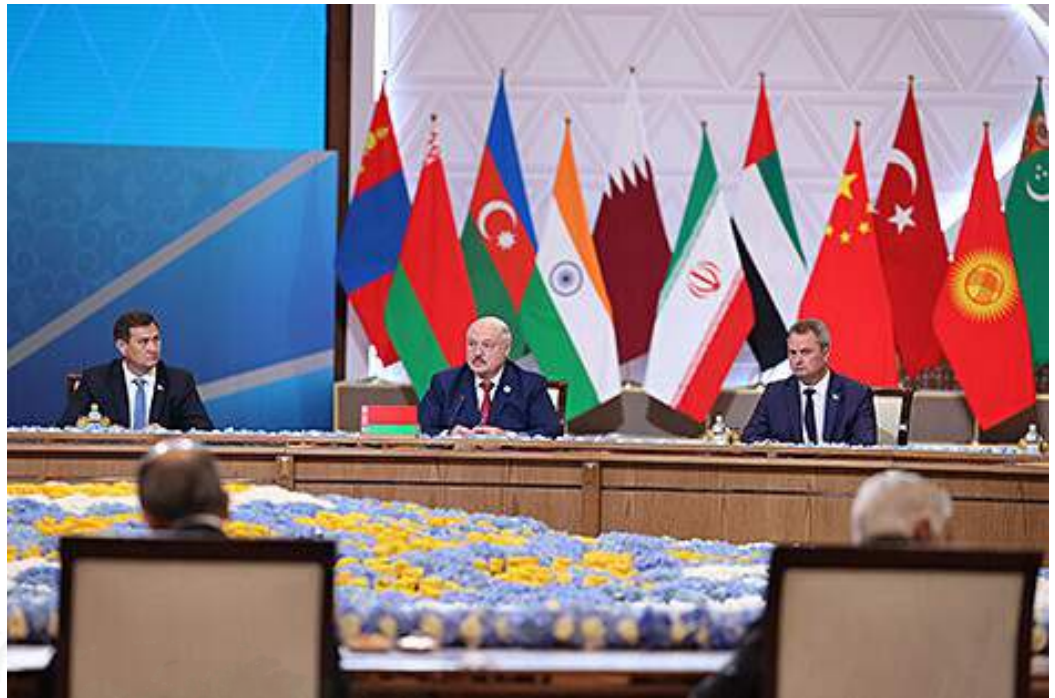
Why Is Belarus So Important To China?

Although on the one hand, Beijing appears keen for the armed conflict in Ukraine to continue—a stance that while weakens Russia economically and continues to keep it diplomatically isolated, thus making it possible for the PRC to continue its tactic of keeping Moscow under a politico-economic *controlled dependency*—also helps keep the attention of the West (the European Union, NATO and especially the United States) largely focused on Eastern Europe situation, rather than on Northeast Asia.

On the other hand, of course, Beijing has no interest in Belarus also becoming a battlefield—firstly because this would represent a dangerous escalation of the war, which could even lead to possible NATO intervention, and secondly because Belarus is an important transit territory, through which the *Northern Eurasian Trade Route* passes—a railway trade line that runs from Vladivostok to Brest and from there on to Poland and other European Union countries.

Meanwhile, with Russia's industrial weakening, Chinese industries (especially the telecommunications and automotive industries) are dominating the Belarusian market, which, as we have mentioned above, is currently isolated from the possibility of having access to the Western markets, leaving it with the option of diversifying its trade relations only with a limited number of countries from the Eurasian Economic Union or ASEAN.

At the same time, Minsk, the capital of Belarus, is home to one of China's largest special economic zones in Europe—the Chinese–Belarusian Industrial Park 'Great Stone/Вялікі камень'—which hosts many Chinese-capital companies (such as *China Merchants Group*,



Huawei Technologies, *MAZ-Weichai*, *ZTE Corporation*, etc.) that see Belarus as a gateway to European markets and European consumers. Thus, it is clear that if the conflict were to spread to Belarus, it would cause a major geo-economic and logistical loss for Beijing.

Belarus As Part Of Beijing's Geo-Economic Strategy

Besides its geo-logistic importance, Belarus is also a key geopolitical ally of the PRC.

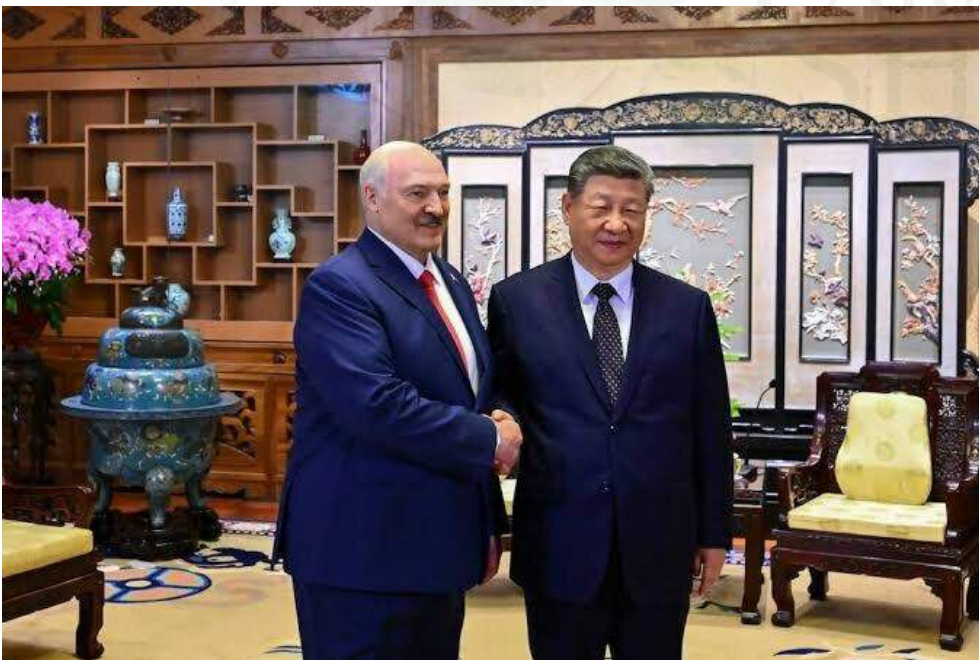
Since December 2013, Belarus has been part of the 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative—an ambitious geo-economic initiative by Beijing aimed at modernizing regional infrastructure and creating a global network of trade corridors linking more than 100 countries in East and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, from July 4, 2024, Belarus has also become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—a Chinese-led politico-economic and security organization, aiming to strengthen stability, security, and economic partnership between countries of Eurasia.

It is worth mentioning here that even though Russia, a country part of both of these Eurasian integration mechanisms, is today engaged in an ongoing brutal armed conflict, its status as one of the world's major superpowers does not undermine Beijing's authority, since every major power has its own geopolitical agenda. However, in the event that the conflict spreads to Belarus, this would demonstrate that the PRC is not capable of serving as a security and stability guarantor for its partners and allies, in the face of the harsh geopolitical realities of post-Soviet space.

A Warning For The Kremlin?

During the meeting on 29 June between Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, President Xi Jinping noted that relations between Minsk and Beijing are at a '*historic high*' and that the People's Republic of China supports Belarus in defending its *sovereignty, independence and national territorial integrity*.



The Belarusian state media have paid particular attention to these words by the Chinese leader, as they represent the first statement by a head of state of a major power in support of Belarus's neutral position in the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine.

On the other hand, they have also been seen by many Western commentators and observers as an indirect warning to Moscow rather than to Kyiv or Brussels, in case the Russian leadership were to try to derail its traditional mechanisms (military provocations or economic pressure) to draw Minsk into joining Russia in its '*special military operation*'.

If this is the case, this would indicate that the political influence of the PRC over Moscow, during these 4 years of the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, has reached levels comparable perhaps only to that of the Mongol khans over the Kyivan Rus.

Lastly, although at the moment there is still no clear information for the general public about the talks in Valdai between the leaders of Belarus and Russia, we can say that President Lukashenko's visit to Beijing and his meeting with President Xi Jinping, marks a highly symbolic movement, which shows that Belarus, like the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia, is gradually emerging from Moscow's orbit towards a more balanced and multi-vectorial geo-political and geo-economic approach to the new challenging global realities.

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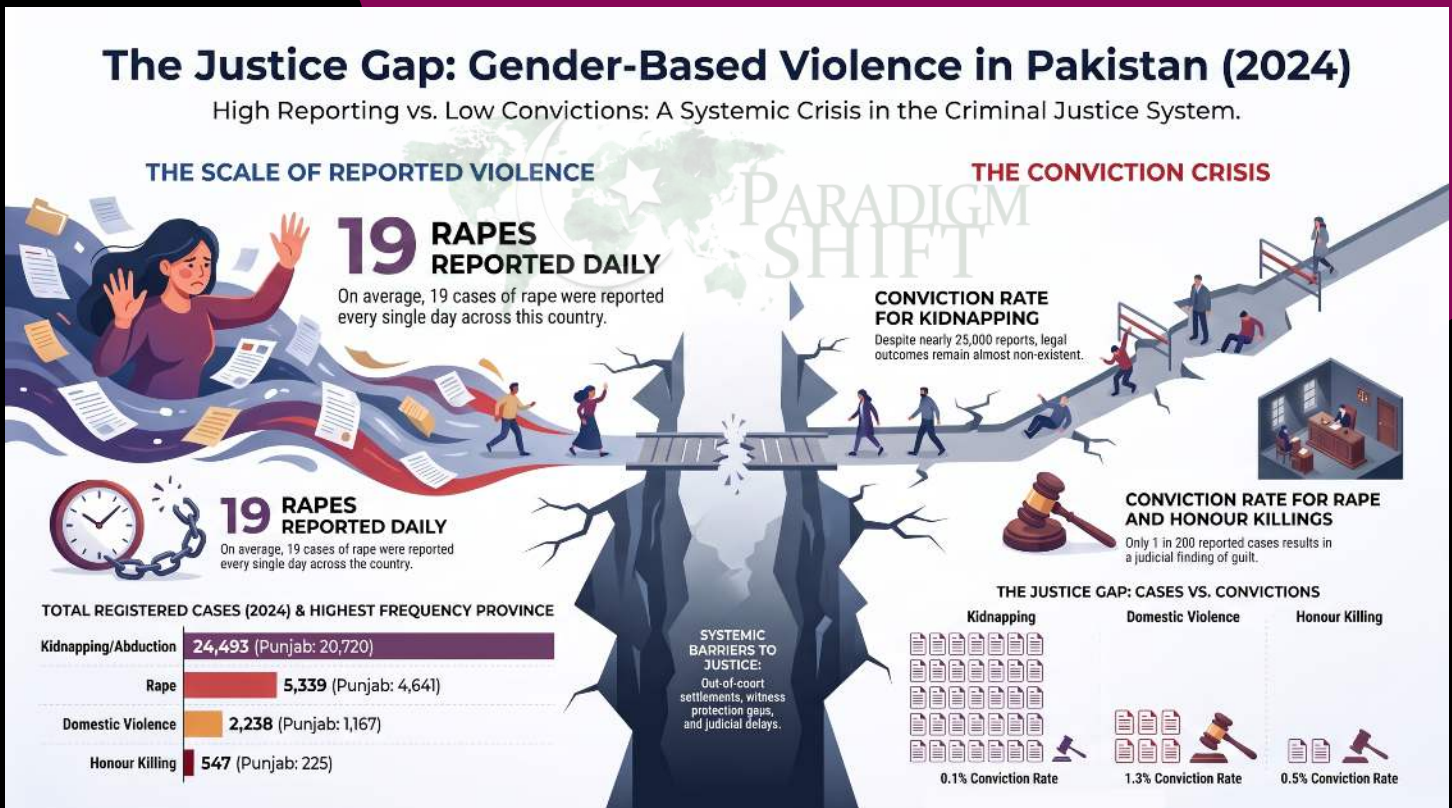
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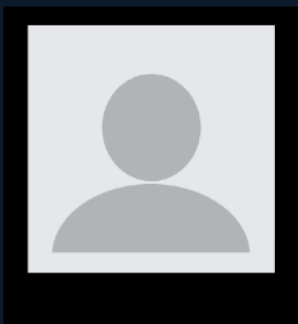
The 2024 report by the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) provides a stark overview of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) across Pakistan, focusing on honor killings, rape, kidnapping/abduction, and domestic violence.

The analysis reveals that the country faces a **severe crisis regarding violence against women**, which is exacerbated by a faltering criminal justice system, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, societal stigma, and systemic barriers to reporting and prosecution



Sportswashing Through the FIFA World Cup: From Nazi Propaganda to Trump's \$11 Billion Lie

About the Author



Mahnoor Gujjar is a student of English literature and linguistics at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Hyderabad Campus.

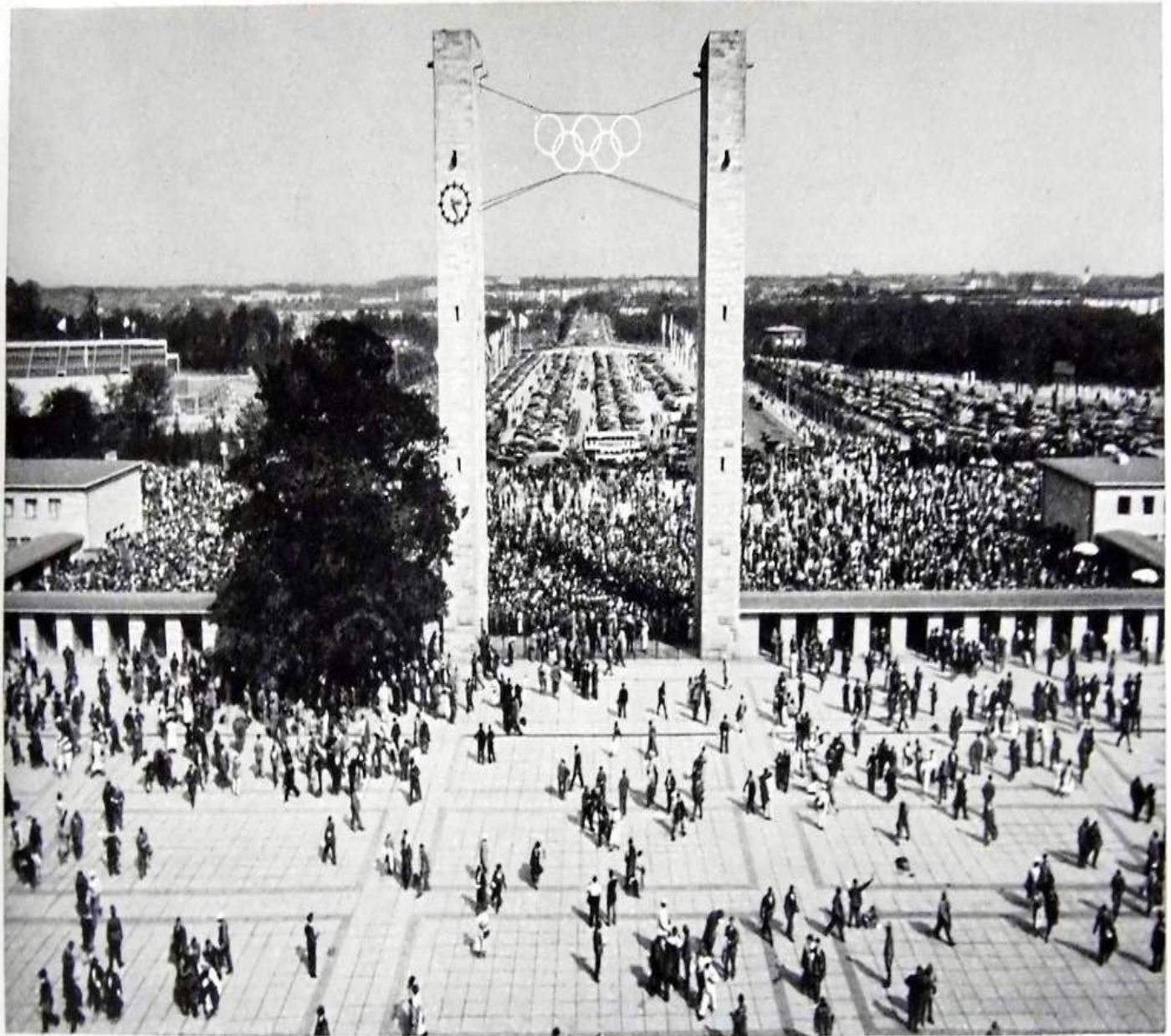
Sportswashing is a common tool used by governments or authoritarian regimes to improve their global image while diverting attention from controversies and human rights abuses. The term was first used in 2015 to describe Azerbaijan's use of the European Games; however, it became prominent when Amnesty International linked it to the major sports events, Sochi 2014 and the 2018 World Cup in Russia. Although the terminology has come into the light recently, the strategy has existed long before it. Throughout history, from the Berlin Olympics in 1936 to contemporary FIFA World Cups, sports have been used by governments to strengthen their image, promote legitimacy, and use them as tools of distraction from misconduct. This article explores the evolution of sportswashing and how it is weaponised to create political influence and shape international perception.

What Is Sportswashing?

Sportswashing is the strategic use of sports by individuals, corporations, governments, or groups to sanitise their crimes while staging an event to boost credibility, enhance global reputation, and hide wrongdoing. The term was coined in 2015 by combining two words, "sports" and "whitewashing." The core purpose of sportswashing is to redirect public attention. It exploits positive sports emotions to distract from negative publicity. The key performers of this concept are authoritarian states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Western regimes like Germany and the USA, and major climate-unfriendly commercial companies.

Nazi Germany 1936: The Prototype

The foremost example of sportswashing can be traced back to the **1936 Berlin Olympics**. This model later influenced major sports events. Before the Olympics started, the Nazi government temporarily removed anti-Jewish signs and discriminated politically against Jews to improve its image in the global arena. Helene Mayer, the only Jewish woman, was allowed to participate in the German team and was used as a symbolic inclusion to counter accusations.



**“1936 Berlin Olympics Photograph – The Entrance of the Olympic Stadium on August 1, 1936,Awaiting the Arrival of the Führer”
by France1978 is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0.**

Moreover, Germany won most of the medals, which further improved its image internationally. The event got widespread global praise and a favourable international perception. The New York Times quotes it as “the biggest athletic games ever held.” Hence, the propaganda succeeded for a short period of time, and later it exposed its true nature as persecution intensified after the Games. It introduced more aggressive policies and later invaded Poland in 1939.

Qatar's 2022 World Cup and the Politics of Sportswashing

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar is the most recent and prominent example of sportswashing by authoritarian states to project soft power and legitimise their crimes. Qatar's hosting of the 2020 FIFA World Cup was not just a show of symbolic progress but a means to draw attention to migrant workers and harsh working conditions for labourers. It uses several strategies to divert attention, such as lavish productions and cultural narratives, to strengthen its reputation. As per statistics, [400–500 migrant](#) workers died on projects for the tournament. [6,500 South Asian](#) workers have died in dangerous jobs since 2010, and in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, deaths: [5,927 \(2011-2020\)](#); Pakistani workers' deaths: [824 \(2010-2020\)](#).



“2022 FIFA World Cup United States 1–1 Wales – (39)” by حسين ظهورند is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

The 2026 World Cup and Sportswashing in the United States

Historically, sportswashing has been used by authoritarian regimes, but in 2026, the FIFA World Cup raises the question of sportswashing in the Western political system. Trump's violations have drawn criticism and debate worldwide about whether the USA will improve its image through the World Cup. The Trump administration has been riddled with dubious immigration policies, military intervention, and international relations, such as the ICE deportation campaign, [deporting 675,000+ people](#), and military strikes in 7 countries.

Similarly, an important incident received global attention when the USA denied a visa to [Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan](#), citing security concerns, despite him having been selected to officiate at the World Cup. Moreover, [the restriction on some Iranian sportspersons](#) raises concerns about immigrant politics and challenges the idea of the political neutrality of sports.

Visa Pressure on Teams

The [2026 FIFA World Cup](#) demonstrates how political and immigration policies impact low-ranked teams differently. For instance, [teams from Iran and Iraq have](#) faced challenges during visa checks and tournament arrangements. For immigration and security reasons, the Iranian team had to return to Mexico after its matches in the USA. Likewise, Iraqi personnel and staff experienced additional visa checks and procedures. These examples raise concerns about whether international sports are completely neutral and free from political influences.

The Draw and Competitive Fairness

The [group-stage selection process](#) appears to be random at first, but it is regulated by FIFA's rules. FIFA applies seeded pots and specific placement rules to decide the allocation of teams into the groups. Therefore, the draw is systemically controlled and organised rather than based on complete chance. Although the rules are intended to maintain balance and ensure fairness among the teams, they also determine the outcome of the final draw.

Why the Three Host Model Matters

FIFA selected the USA, Canada, and Mexico as [host countries](#) for the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The reason for choosing these countries was to have modern infrastructure, stadiums, and the facilities required to host a World Cup. However, political factors present a different perspective. It underscores that the USA uses this World Cup to improve its global reputation and diverts global attention from its political issues. In addition, Mexico's rich football tradition adds authenticity and cultural significance to the tournament.

The Double Standard Exposed

Further, we can see the gap between reality and promises; the 2018 World Cup bid promised to provide social inclusion and environmental sustainability, but reality reflects a much different story. The recent immigrant policies and actions have contradicted inclusion and equality. Moreover, the closeness of FIFA leaders and political figures also raises concerns about accountability and fairness. For example, FIFA President Gianni Infantino, Trump's close friend, awarded him the [FIFA Peace Prize in 2025](#).

Apart from that, media coverage shows biased preferences. On the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, heavy media coverage was seen; however, silence in the 2026 FIFA World Cup hosted by the USA.



Why the FIFA World Cup Is a Tool of Sportswashing

FIFA is the ideal platform for sportswashing for particular reasons:

Worldwide Reach Without Borders

FIFA is the most widely watched sport in the world, attracting billions of views across different regions. Alone, [the final match of the 2022 World Cup grabbed 1.5 billion views](#). No sport has this large a reach across different regions, cultures, and languages. This reach has made the host state a centre of global engagement, which hides different controversies of the state.

The Myth of Political Neutrality

Another prevailing idea is that sport stands above politics and ideology. However, it is not completely true. This illusion is fake and carries political meaning. When FIFA President Infantino awarded Trump the Peace Prize, this act enhanced his public standing and legitimacy. Hence, this helps to reflect and promote the narrative of neutrality in football, distancing the government from controversies.

Sports: The Amplification of Nationalism

The FIFA World Cup strengthens national unity and patriotism, presenting a collective expression and identity among citizens. When a particular leader portrays successful sports hosting as a symbol of pride and national accomplishment, they get wider public support in the name of nationalism. As [Trump uses this formula by associating America with the World Cup](#), it is equal to pride. Similarly, [Nazi Germany had used it before by referring to medals as national strength and justifying its regime](#).

Financial Incentives for Silence

The 2026 FIFA World Cup tournament is estimated to have [around \\$11 billion in investment](#) in infrastructure, commercial sponsorship, and tourism. This billion-dollar economic investment overshadows the criticism. Moreover, global commercial companies that heavily spend on sponsorship also avoid the negative publicity amid a huge economic flow.

This collective economic benefit creates a chain of silence that ignores human rights and their violations.

The Halo Effect: The Power of Positive Association

The halo effect (sometimes called the halo error), a term coined by Edward Thorndike, is the tendency for positive impressions of a person, company, country, brand, or product in one area to positively influence one's opinion or feelings of a person, company, country, brand, or product in another area. One of these halo-effect examples can be seen in the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup. Despite violations of labour rights, [Qatar improved 23% of its global standing](#).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the sport and politics are not to be separated or neutral. Sports are often used to portray, hide, and promote political means to enhance a country's image and divert attention from illegal and inhuman activities. Sportswashing is not new; it has a long history, and as long as sports remain a powerful tool for legitimacy, sportswashing continues to evolve.

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Gujrat: Three Villages, Three Nishan-e-Haider Medals

About the Author



Kainat Farooq is a passionate International Relations student with a strong interest in diplomacy, policy, and global affairs. She is dedicated to contributing thoughtful analysis and research on international issues.

Pakistan's Nishan-e-Haider has been awarded eleven times since independence in 1947. Eleven. Across eight decades, two generations of wars, and hundreds of thousands of soldiers who served and fell, the nation's highest military honour has gone to eleven men. Three of them came from the same district.

Not from military posts, nor from a town with a tradition of breeding military commanders. Not from a large city, but from Gujrat, a town located where the Chenab River meets the northern border of Punjab in Pakistan. To most people throughout Pakistan, Gujrat is synonymous with producing fans and furniture; however, the area also has a substantial diaspora. The streets within the town will contain names that almost no one outside of Gujrat has ever looked at, and there are three sample villages within Gujrat (Ladian, Dinga and Kunjah) that quietly produce several hundred of soldiers who died defending places they shouldn't have; at the same time, they survived in circumstances that they shouldn't have survived in.

Major Raja Aziz Bhatti, Major Muhammad Akram, and Major Shabbir Sharif, three men, three wars, one district. The story of what each of them did and what it cost them.

The Award That Is Never Given Lightly

[The-Nishan-i-Haider](#), Emblem of the Lion, is the highest military honour Pakistan gives. Nothing else, military or civil, comes above it. The name comes from Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph of Islam, remembered in Islamic tradition as its greatest warrior. In that sense, it sits alongside the British Victoria Cross or the American Medal of Honor, though Pakistan has handed it out far more sparingly, eleven times, against the VC's 1,358 and the Medal of Honor's 3,515.

There is one aspect of the award that sets it apart from almost any comparable honour in the world: it has only ever been awarded posthumously. Every single recipient paid for it with his life.

[The medal itself is forged from captured enemy equipment](#), 88 percent copper, 10 percent gold, and 2 percent zinc, and the recipient's name, rank, regiment, and date of award are inscribed on the back. It is handed to a family. Never to the soldier himself.

Pakistan's military has a simple, stark position on why this is so. When the Chief of Army Staff was once asked why the award was never given to a living recipient, his reported answer was that if it were awarded to a living person, that person might one day act dishonourably and disgrace the award. The Nishan-e-Haider's integrity, in this view, depends on the certainty that the recipient's record is closed. The only way to guarantee that is death. Three of those eleven closed records belong to men from Gujrat.

Major Raja Aziz Bhatti Shaheed: The Guardian of Lahore

Major Raja Aziz Bhatti was born in Hong Kong in 1928. His father was stationed there at the time, though the family itself was from Ladian, a small village in the Kharian tehsil of Gujrat district. He was back in the subcontinent before Partition happened, and eventually found his way into the Pakistan Army in 1950, commissioned into the 17th Punjab Regiment. He was, by all accounts, one of the more outstanding officers of his generation: the first person to complete the PMA long course and receive both the Norman Medal and the Sword of Honour, as documented by the District Gujrat government.



Major Raja Aziz Bhatti by the Pakistan Army Web Portal is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike license.

In September 1965, India launched a major armoured offensive in the Lahore sector. The objective was to cut the GT Road and isolate the city. Major Bhatti's company was positioned at Burki, on the outskirts of Lahore, directly in the path of the Indian advance. What followed was six days and five nights of continuous combat with his company, heavily outnumbered, absorbing attack after attack from Indian armour and infantry while holding the BRB Canal line.

Bhatti maintained his position over the course of the six days; he continually moved around to different areas of his troops, reorganising his troops between attacks, controlling where the artillery was firing, and observing the enemy on every move, and that's how he was martyred. On September 10, 1965, Bhatti rose up from his position so he could observe the Indian positions he would need to see, so he would know to call in artillery fire to the right locations. Bhatti's sergeant allegedly told him to take cover, but he did not do that.

He was hit by a round from a tank in his chest and died at the age of 37. He is buried not in a military cemetery, but in the courtyard of his family home in Ladian, Gujrat, the village he left as a boy and returned to only upon his death.

Burki did not lose contact with Lahore, and the Indian offensive at Burki was also stopped. In 1966, the Government of Pakistan awarded the Nishan-e-Haider, the highest military award, to Bhatti, and an annual honor guard is mounted at his grave on Defense Day. The road to his village in Gujrat and the roundabout and housing association in Lahore have been named in his honor.

He has been regarded as one of the most decorated military officers in Pakistan's history due to his commitment to helping others and ultimately sacrificing himself to do so, rather than his status as a military officer in the years following 1965; therefore, Bhatti now holds the title of most celebrated military officer in Pakistani history.

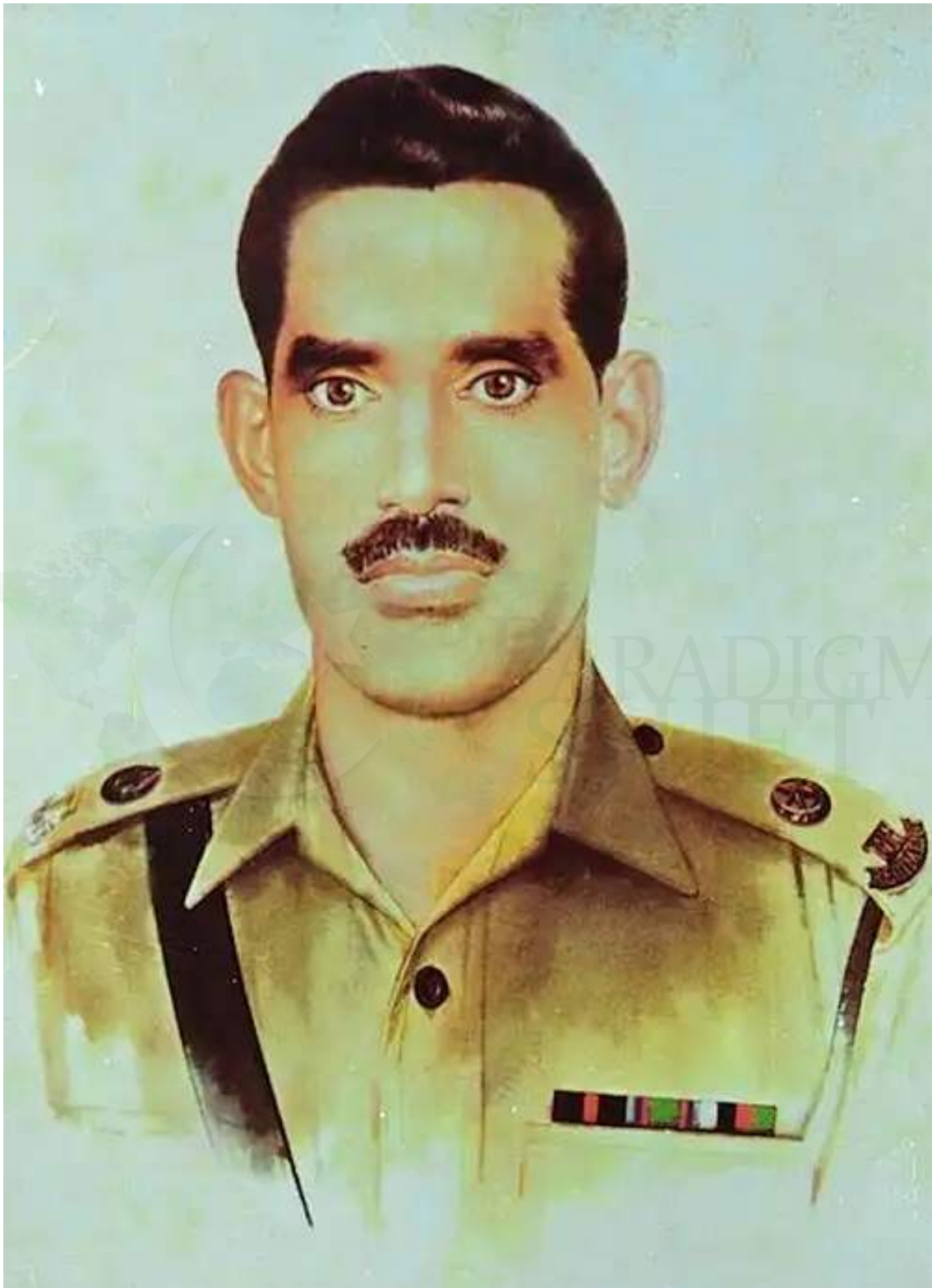
Major Muhammad Akram Shaheed: The Hero of Hilli

Major Muhammad Akram was born on 4 April 1933 in Dinga, a town where military service wasn't unusual, and his family was no exception. His father had done his years in the British Indian Army, retiring as a Havildar. Akram followed the same path, graduating from the Pakistan Military Academy in 1953 and getting his commission in the 4th Frontier Force Regiment. The 1965 war put him in the Lahore sector as a Captain, where he led several operations through some of the hardest fighting of that conflict. He was made a Major before 1971, and when that war came, he was on the eastern front with a company under his command.

The Battle of Hilli, fought in the Dinajpur district of what was then East Pakistan, is not as widely remembered in Pakistan as the western front battles of 1971. It should be. Akram's company, positioned at the Hilli forward area, came under continuous and coordinated Indian attack air strikes, artillery, and armour, wave after wave, for a fortnight. The Indian force was vastly superior in both numbers and firepower. For fourteen days and nights, Akram and his men held out.

On the night of 5-6 December 1971, Akram led an anti-tank party forward, crawling toward the enemy position under fire and personally directed the destruction of three Indian tanks. During that action, he was struck by machine-gun fire in the chest and killed. He was 33 years old. The Indian forces could not capture Hilli while Akram's unit held it, and even after his death, the position was not given up until his regiment received orders to withdraw.

Indian Commander-in-Chief General Jagjit Singh Arora later acknowledged the fierce resistance his forces had encountered at Hilli, an unusual recognition from an opposing commander, and a measure of what Akram and his men had actually done. Akram is buried in the village of Boaldar in the Dinajpur district of Bangladesh, far from Dinga, far from Gujrat, far from the family that waited for him. His martyrdom anniversary is observed every 5 December. Pakistan Army's top leadership attends. The village in Gujrat where he was born holds its own ceremonies.



Major Akram Shah headed by ISPR licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

There is a memorial to him in Jhelum city as well, because his family roots were also there. But Dingra claims him. Gujarat claims him. The boy from a small city who held Hilli for fourteen days.

Major Shabbir Sharif Shaheed

Major Shabbir Sharif was born on 28 April 1943 in Kunjah, a small town in Gujrat district. His family had a military background. He did his O Levels at St. Anthony's High School in Lahore, then went to Government College, where the call from the Pakistan Military Academy at Kakul came before he'd finished. He left for Kakul, commissioned on 19 April 1964 into the 6th Frontier Force Regiment, and walked out with the Sword of Honour.



The 1965 war was personal for him in a way it wasn't for most; his uncle, Major Raja Aziz Bhatti, was killed in that same conflict. Shabbir Sharif was a subaltern then, and whatever he did in those weeks earned him the Sitara-e-Jurat. Six years on, he was a Major with 6 FF Regiment, his company positioned near the Sulemanki headworks on the western front, and he was already probably the most decorated field officer of his rank in the army. That war is where he won the Nishan-e-Haider.

Image details: Major Shabbir Sharif by Pakistan Army Web Portal
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On 3 December 1971, his commanding officer ordered him to take the high ground overlooking Gurmukh Khera and Beriwalla in the Sulemanki sector. Defending it was a company of the Indian Assam Regiment with a squadron of tanks behind them. What Sharif did over the next three days and nights is genuinely hard to write down without it reading like fiction. He took his men through a minefield, through heavy obstacles, knocked out four enemy tanks, killed forty-three soldiers, and kept two full enemy battalions from breaking through a force that outnumbered and outgunned his company by a distance that should have made the outcome obvious.

On the afternoon of 6 December 1971, a gunner on an anti-tank gun went down wounded mid-assault. Sharif stepped in and took over the gun himself. A direct hit killed him. He was 28. He carried two decorations, the Sitara-e-Jurat he won in 1965, and the Nishan-e-Haider from this war. Between them, no soldier in Pakistani history has collected what Shabbir Sharif Shaheed collected.



What Gujrat Gave, and What Was Taken

It is worth sitting with the geography for a moment. Ladian, Dinga, and Kunjah are not far from each other. All three sit within Gujrat district, a stretch of Punjab that is roughly 120 kilometres north of Lahore on the GT Road. The district is known, in economic terms, for manufacturing electric fans, furniture, and surgical instruments. Its diaspora is substantial: [over 300,000 people from Gujrat live abroad](#) and send back more than three billion rupees a year in remittances. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who knew this region, called it *Khitta-e-Yunan*, the Greece of the subcontinent, for the quality of its people.

None of that fully explains why three of the eleven Nishan-e-Haider recipients came from here. Punjab has a long military tradition, and the regiments that recruited from this belt, the Punjab Regiment and the Frontier Force, drew heavily from the same communities for generations. The families involved had military fathers and military uncles. Bhatti's family had a military background. Akram's father was a Havildar. Shabbir's family produced both a martyr and an army chief. The culture of military service ran deep, and in that culture, the highest form of service was the one that did not come home.

What Gujrat gave in those two wars was three young men, none older than 37, one as young as 28, who died holding positions under conditions that most soldiers would not have survived, let alone continued to fight in. What was taken from Gujrat was three families that received medals instead of their sons. Graves that families visit instead of kitchens that brothers come home to. The district commemorates them. Schools are named for them. The Punjab Government maintains its records. Every 6th September, guards of honour appear at Bhatti's grave in Ladian. Every 5 December, the army observes Akram's anniversary. Shabbir Sharif's name appears on the buildings of a district that has not been forgotten.

The Nishan-e-Haider is not just a military award. It is a record of the moments when Pakistan found itself at the edge of what it could defend, and someone stepped forward anyway. Of the eleven men on that list, three were from the same stretch of land along the Chenab.

That is not a coincidence born of statistics. It is the result of families, communities, and a culture that produced soldiers who understood, in the most concrete possible way, what it meant to hold a line.

Major Raja Aziz Bhatti stood up to watch the enemy when his sergeant told him to take cover, because he needed to see clearly to protect Lahore. Major Muhammad Akram crawled forward in the dark with an anti-tank party in the middle of a fortnight-long siege because three more Indian tanks needed to be stopped. Major Shabbir Sharif picked up a dead gunner's anti-tank weapon in the middle of an assault and kept firing because there was nobody else to do it. They were not superhuman. They were men from small towns in Gujrat who had trained for war, understood what war required, and did not step back when the moment came. The country gave them its highest honour. Their families received medals and graves. Gujrat kept their names.

Pakistan has been asking, in various ways and for various decades, what kind of country it wants to be. The answer to that question is long, complicated, and contested. But somewhere in it, without much controversy, is the recognition that three men from Ladian, Dinga, and Kunjah set a standard that has not been matched not because no soldier has been brave since 1971, but because this particular combination of circumstance, leadership, and sacrifice only happens when everything aligns at once. It happened three times in Gujrat. The district earned its title.

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NATO 3.0: Europe's Strategic Reckoning in the Age of Russian Revisionism

About the Author



Syeda Mishal Zahra is an independent researcher, pursuing her BS in international relations from the National Defence University, Islamabad. She has published her work with various national think tanks. Her interests include geopolitics, security, and world order.

Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has been working on a simple strategic bargain, where the United States provides the military backbone, and Europe gives the political strength and supplementary capabilities. Today, that bargain is being rewritten. Though the alliance's reorientation is logical and necessary, the unofficial banner of NATO 3.0 isn't merely another phase of NATO's evolution; it represents the most consequential shift in transatlantic security.

The debate is no longer whether Europe should spend more on defence or not; that argument has already been settled. The real question is whether Europe is in a position to assume a greater responsibility for its own defence, without losing its deterrence against Russia.

European Defence Capabilities And Division:

One of the biggest circumstantial achievements is that NATO members are spending more on defence. On 25th June, when Mark Rutte met Trump, he showed him charts showing over one trillion USD in cumulative extra core defence expenditure by European Allies and Canada since 2016. Rutte suggested that this increase was largely driven by Trump's repeated pressure on the European allies. However, we see that several countries had already begun spending much more on defence before NATO adopted the new 5% GDP budget. For instance, Poland and the Baltic states were already spending 4% of their GDP, not under Trump's pressure, but due to the Russian threat.

One of the important divisions among European states concerns perceptions of the Russian threat, which hinders equal defence contributions. Northern Europe – due to its closeness to Russian territory – perceives Russia as a major security threat, whereas southern European countries see it as a less direct threat. Historically, Southern European nations have viewed Russia as a reliable trade partner and supplier of energy, which has led them to feel less urgency about increasing defence spending.

The public opinion here matters a lot, making it difficult for the governments of Southern Europe to convince the people that they should prepare for the war.

Hybrid Warfare: NATO's Greatest Blind Spot

While the debates over conventional military prevailed at the summit, the major European security issue lies elsewhere – the grey zone warfare. Historically, Russia has heavily relied on hybrid warfare through cyber-attacks, sabotage, espionage, and drone incursions, etc., to destabilize NATO without the invocation of Article 5. This strategy exposes a fundamental weakness in NATO's posture, as it exploits ambiguity and makes it difficult for the debates over the defence budget and conventional military capabilities in Ankara to decide whether collective action is required.

In today's era, deterrence cannot be measured through conventional means alone but through resilience via technological, economic, and societal advancement. Thus, even if Europe builds its defence without US backing, military modernization alone cannot protect it if Europe remains vulnerable to hybrid threats.

Strategic Paradox of NATO 3.0

NATO 3.0 emphasizes the reduction of Washington's conventional military support in Europe, while relying mainly on America's nuclear guarantees. However, such a trade-off rests on a flawed assumption. Conventional and nuclear security aren't interchangeable but complementary to each other and two faces of the escalation ladder. A strong nuclear deterrence depends upon the strength of the conventional responses to aggression, which lie below the nuclear threshold.

This creates a strategic paradox, where the United States, on one hand, encourages the European allies to strengthen their conventional military input, and simultaneously remains cautious about Europe's nuclear role. This creates a dangerous gap between the escalation framework, which Russia can exploit at any time in the future, by applying limited conventional pressure while calculating that the United States would be unwilling to escalate directly to the nuclear level. Therefore, the objective of NATO 3.0 shouldn't be the rapid transfer of responsibilities but to strengthen the European pillar of deterrence across both the conventional and nuclear domains. Otherwise, a hasty transition would leave Europe with fewer credible options to counter future Russian aggression.



U.S. President Donald Trump poses for a family photo, joined by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and other leaders during the NATO leaders' summit at the Bestepe Presidenti Compound in Ankara, Turkey, July 8, 2026. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst/File Photo

Intra-EU and Intra-NATO Rivalries:

The disagreement among European countries caused by instability in the neighborhood must be addressed promptly for a successful transition towards NATO 3.0. For instance, France and Italy [support opposite political factions](#) in Libya and have competing strategic and economic interests. Consequently, this makes it difficult for the EU to have a unified Libya policy.

Whereas, Turkey backed the UN-recognized government in Libya, while France was perceived as favouring rival forces. They also disagree over security issues in the Sahel region of Africa.

While these political divisions hinder collective action, they also provide an opening for Russia and China to exploit them and strengthen their positions in Europe's Southern neighborhood. Russia expands its military and political presence through arms sales and diplomatic engagement, while China prevails through economic integration via infrastructure development and the BRI.

For decades, Europe thought of exporting its economic and political model to neighboring regions through the Brussels effect. However, we see that the reality is the reverse of it. Instead of Europe shaping the regions, the eastern side – involving the Russia-Ukraine war – and the southern side – conflicts in Libya, Syria, and the Sahel – are directly affecting Europe's strategy.

Thus, Europe must do two things simultaneously under NATO 3.0: strengthen the European pillar of the existing NATO structure and begin preparing for a new European security architecture, where the American role is downsized and redefined.

Conclusion:

NATO 3.0 shouldn't be a transition towards an independent Europe but a more balanced and resilient alliance. It can be done efficiently, because the stakes are on Washington's side as well: American military bases in Europe are the backbone of Washington's world power projection framework; moreover, the European defence industry supports over [83.000 jobs](#) in the US. Thus, rather than weakening the relationships, NATO 3.0 should modernize them. The real test is not whether Europe can smoothly replace Washington's role, but whether both sides can redefine burden-sharing without risking deterrence capabilities.

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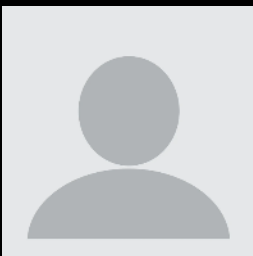
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Vani and Swara: A Tragedy Disguised in Tradition

About the Author



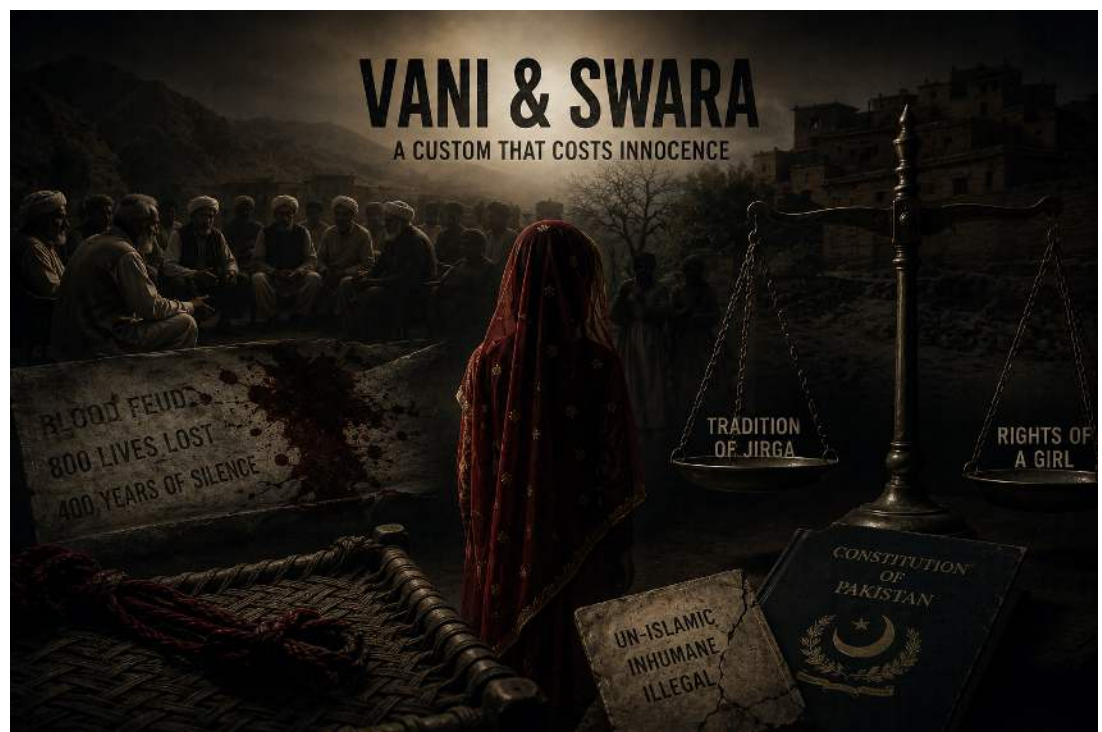
Laiba Khalid is a university student and emerging content writer with a keen focus on socio-political issues, governance, and policy. With a background in English and an interest in current affairs, she brings a critical and youth-driven perspective to contemporary debates. Laiba is particularly interested in bridging academic insight with real-world challenges. She writes with a commitment to clarity and research-based analysis.

Vani, also known as “*swara*”, is a centuries-old custom prevalent in some tribal and rural areas of Pakistan. This practice exists under the garb of tradition, but at its core, it is a violation of human rights. Through the custom of *vani*, women, especially young girls and minors, are used in order to settle disputes between tribes or families. The female from the aggressor family is married off or given in servitude to a man of the aggrieved family. This temporarily or permanently puts an end to the conflicts, typically involving murder, kidnapping, sexual misconduct, and others. *Swara* has been under criticism for years now; however, the custom is still being followed, continuing the explicit robbery of the rights and future of many girls.

Origin and Cultural Context

“*Vani*” (derived from the word “*vanay*”, meaning “blood”) and “*swara*” (meaning “female rider”) refer to the practices tied to resolving the [blood feuds and disputes](#) among the tribes or clans. This traditional practice persists in some parts of the provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and other tribal or rural areas.

Called by diverse names, such as Sangchatti, Ijai, Sak, and Badl-i-Sulh, this custom allows for the resolution of conflicts by providing the girl(s) in compensation for the crime often committed by the male members of their families. It is rooted in the tribal codes, whereby the jirga (local informal court system)



decides on such compensation to prevent further bloodshed.

The practice emerged some 400 years ago when [two Pathan tribes of Mianwali](#) engaged in a bloody conflict against each other. After the loss of around 800 lives, the jirga convened by the Nawab of Tank decided that giving girls as *qisas* (retribution) would end the conflict by establishing ties between the tribes. This decision set a precedent for future generations to follow, without thinking much of the un-Islamic, inhumane, and illegal foundations of the practice.

How *Vani* and *Swara* Work

The mechanics of this custom are horrifyingly straightforward. When a crime, such as murder, sexual assault, or abduction, is committed by any male member of a tribe or family against the other party, a jirga of influential people of the tribe is convened to mediate. If and when decided, the offending family is required to offer a female member, [often a young girl or even a minor](#), to the aggrieved family as compensation for the crime. The girl is forcibly married to a male member (even an old man in many cases) of the rival family without her consent to “restore honour” or settle the dispute.

In some cases, the aggressor family is required to present multiple girls as and when demanded. The decision is binding, though not legally, but it is enforced through social and tribal pressure. In rare cases, the family is given other options, such as giving blood money to avoid *vani*. However, the option is often unaffordable for the aggressor family or unacceptable for one or both parties. The *vani* brides are sent to live with the aggrieved party, who never treat them as their family members. Rather, they face isolation, torture, abuse, assault, humiliation, and a lifetime of servitude.

Swara is not always given by the offenders only. In some cases, both parties exchange girls to form ties and end the dispute. The aggrieved party might get a piece of land or cash for their loss in such a scenario. Similarly, there are instances when the giving of one girl as *vani* by the aggressor side is followed by the exchange of two more girls, one from each side, to strengthen the ties between the hostile tribes. Nonetheless, the essence is the same in all circumstances: the practice is a blatant objectification and violence against females.

Legal Framework

Pakistan's legal framework has taken some steps to curb the practice of *vani* and *swara*, though enforcement remains unsatisfactory. The practice violates several laws of the country, including the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act. In 2004, the Sindh High Court outlawed all parallel justice systems, including the *jirgas*. This position was endorsed by the Supreme Court on multiple occasions. Moreover, in 2005, [section 310-A](#) was added to the Pakistan Penal Code, explicitly criminalising the giving of women in *badl-i-sulh* or compensation. A landmark ruling of the [Federal Shariat Court](#) in 2021 declared the practice of *vani* un-Islamic, citing violation of fundamental rights, including discrimination, lack of consent, absence of dower, and denial of legal recourse.

LAW ABOVE CUSTOM

ENDING VANI & SWARA

PAKISTAN'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

2004
Sindh High Court outlawed all parallel justice systems, including the *jirgas*.

2005
Section 310-A added to the Pakistan Penal Code, criminalising the giving of women in *badl-i-sulh* or compensation.

2021
Federal Shariat Court declared the practice of *vani* un-Islamic, violating fundamental rights, including discrimination, lack of consent, absence of dower, and denial of legal recourse.

2006
Supreme Court formed district-level committees to register complaints against cases of *Swara* and take initial action.

2012
Supreme Court took suo motu notice against a *jirga*'s decision in Balochistan to give away 13 girls in *vani*.

2019
Supreme Court declared *jirgas* acting as courts illegal and violative of Pakistan's commitment to human rights.

THE CONSTITUTION OF PAKISTAN

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

PREVENTION OF ANTI-WOMEN PRACTICES ACT

PAKISTAN PENAL CODE SECTION 310-A

SUPREME COURT OF PAKISTAN JUDGEMENTS

JIRGAS ARE NOT COURTS

**NO TO VANI
NO TO SWARA
YES TO JUSTICE**

**JUSTICE
EQUALITY
DIGNITY**

EVERY WOMAN. EVERY RIGHT.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has also intervened at various instances. In 2006, it formed district-level committees to register [complaints against the cases of Swara](#) and push for initial action. In 2012, it took a suo motu notice against the report of a jirga's decision in Balochistan to give away 13 girls in *vani*. In 2019, it declared the [jirgas acting as courts illegal](#) and held them violative of Pakistan's commitment to human rights. Despite these legal interventions, the state has been unsuccessful in curbing the practice in the tribal and rural areas, where such cases are reported frequently.

Impacts of *Vani* and *Swara*

The impacts of *vani* are complicated and profound. The victims, specifically, and society, in general, are negatively affected. The [consequences are catastrophic](#) for the females sacrificed through this brutal tradition. Their basic human rights, in addition to their integrity, are compromised. The victims are compelled to face abuse, lack of education, psychological torture, regular assault, and violence. Bearing the unjust punishment for a crime they never committed, they spend their lives facing deprivation and stigmatisation. The trauma of being treated as a commodity rather than a human being is very often compounded by consistent torture, intense physical labour, forced pregnancies, and health risks.

Ironically, the custom might become a trigger to sow seeds of further disputes between the concerned families, as the aggressor family might sometimes face social or economic pressure to surrender unwillingly, and the aggrieved family often treats the girl as a symbol of enmity and unresolved grievance, fostering a long chain of resentment rather than resolution. In such cases, the exchange of girl(s) often leads to cold wars, which soon erupt into physical conflicts.

On a societal level, the *swara* custom perpetuates a cycle of gender-based violence and mistreatment. Treating women as mere objects to settle disputes reflects the cruel misuse of power dynamics. This practice is both the enabler and the product of the misogynistic structures that work to promote violence against women.

This erodes trust in legal institutions, as communities continue to rely on jirgas and the local system, which frequently operate and pass judgments outside the law. Such customs function to hinder progress and bring defamation to the country at the international level, as they explicitly violate the global standards of human rights.

Islamic Perspective

The Islamic principles of justice, human rights, compassion, and dignity are openly disregarded through *vani*. Islam not only mandates women’s consent in their marriage but also prohibits forcing them into unions against their will. Moreover, Islam entitles a woman to a *mahr* (dower) from the groom. This financial right is openly neglected in marriages based on *swara*. The Islamic concepts of protection and compassion towards women are also compromised in this practice. The Islamic notion of *qisas* (retribution) is present to ensure true justice and punishment for the criminal, not to treat the innocent as guilty, as in the cases of *swara*.

ISLAM UPHOLDS DIGNITY, NOT DISPUTES

Vani & Swara violate Islamic principles



CONSENT IS ESSENTIAL
Islam mandates a woman's consent in marriage. Forcing her into a union is strictly prohibited.



MAHR IS HER RIGHT
Islam entitles a woman to mahr (dower) from the groom. This right is openly denied in swara marriages.



PROTECTION & COMPASSION
Islam commands kindness, respect, and protection of women. Vani and swara compromise these sacred values.



QISAS ENSURES JUSTICE
Qisas (retribution) in Islam is for the guilty, not the innocent. Using women as compensation punishes the blameless and is intolerable.



ISLAM DEFENDS HUMAN DIGNITY
Every human being is honored in Islam. Treating women as a tool to settle disputes is a grave injustice.



HONOR HER
NOT HARM HER



GIVE HER MAHR
NOT MISERY



SHOW COMPASSION
NOT CRUELTY



SEEK JUSTICE
NOT REVENGE



UPHOLD DIGNITY
NOT DEGRADE

ISLAM COMMANDS

JUSTICE
COMPASSION
RESPECT
DIGNITY

"And do not inherit women by compulsion nor treat them harshly that you may take away part of what you have given them..."
— Qur'an (4:19)

A JUST SOCIETY HONORS WOMEN. ISLAM PROTECTS WOMEN.

SAY NO TO VANI & SWARA. SAY YES TO ISLAMIC JUSTICE.

Furthermore, Islamic teachings prioritise protecting the rights of the marginalised, including children and women, and reject all those practices rooted in pre-Islamic tribalism and ignorance. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) repeatedly emphasised the rights of women, including their right to [choose their spouses](#). He (SAWW) has opposed coercion in marriage, which is inherent in the practice of *vani*. Scholars have time and again condemned the customs stripping women of their rights and urged the need to align the traditional practices with Islamic principles. By framing *vani* as un-Islamic, religious authorities can play a role in eliminating this cruel cultural practice from a society whose majority is Muslim.

Path Forward

Eradicating the customary practice of *vani* requires a multi-dimensional approach, countering the cultural sensitivity and systemic gaps simultaneously. Strengthening and training the law enforcement agencies to cater to the victims in such cases, without taking any political and cultural pressure, is paramount. The government must ensure that the writ of the state is implemented and local jirgas are dealt with seriously. The offenders must be swiftly prosecuted under the relevant laws of the constitution to make an example out of them. Running an awareness campaign, tailored to the tribal and rural communities, is the need of the hour. The local institutions, media, influential personalities, political leadership, and religious authorities should help the government in eradicating this custom.

Women of Pakistan must be empowered through proper education, vocational training, and financial security. Providing legal aid and establishing shelters can ensure immediate relief for the victims, whereas active community monitoring can decrease the occurrence of such incidents. To address the cause of the problem at the base level, engaging tribal leaders and men in healthy dialogue is essential. Pakistan can uproot the custom of *swara* by integrating grassroots activism and government resolve.

Conclusion

Vani and *Swara* serve to promote oppression, discrimination, and violence in the name of tradition. Their incompatibility with the Islamic and constitutional framework justifies the need for their quick elimination from the societal structure. The damage caused to the victims, along with the clear violation of international human rights, calls for community awareness and robust legal action. A country founded with the active involvement of females should strive to ensure that no woman or girl faces the inhumane treatment of being reduced to a bargaining tool and commodity to resolve disputes here.

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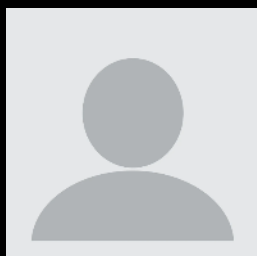
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From Toys to Career: How Pakistan Loses Its Women in STEM

About the Author



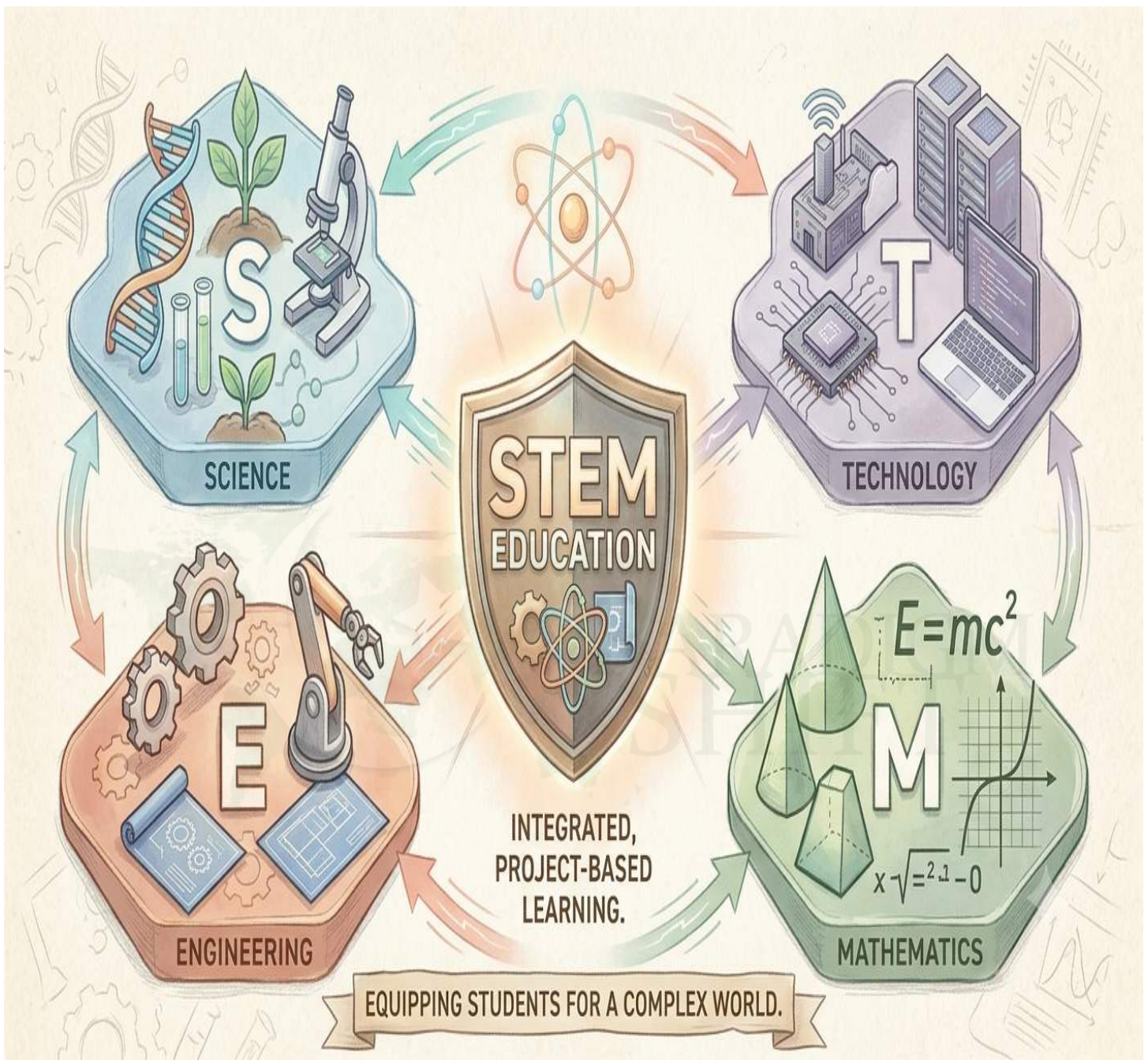
Fiza Bibi Ameen is a gold medal qualifier in BS Physics from Riphah International University, Islamabad. She also contributed a prize-winning submission to the HEC inter-university essay writing competition held in 2022. She enjoys researching and writing about science, technology, and informative topics in various niches. She is also a freelance writer.

Pakistani Women in STEM: Talented but Underrepresented

Pakistani women have proved their talent not just nationally but internationally. Theoretical physicist Tasneem Zehra Husain, computer scientist Asma Zaheer, astrophysicist Mariam Sultana, and biologist Asifa Akhtar, to name a few notable names, represented Pakistan globally and made major contributions in their fields. Compared to some developed countries, where female researchers make up only **38.8% of total researchers**, Pakistani women contribute a higher share to research. However, this percentage does not translate to the STEM women's workforce as a whole; in engineering and technology, women's participation in Pakistan remains far lower. As much as **70 percent** of women engineers are not employed. On average, the situation in STEM-based institutes remains challenging for Pakistani women.

An Overview of the STEM-based Gender Gap

STEM is a rigorous career choice, requiring candidates to clear multiple entrance tests, demanding exams, and projects throughout their degree. After the completion of the degree, the graduate has to compete for scarce jobs. Women's contribution to STEM is low all across the world. However, in Pakistan, a country with almost as many females as males, the female workforce in STEM remains **less than 10 percent**. While participation in scientific research and academia has improved compared to previous years, women remain underrepresented in **leadership roles**. Prominent women in STEM are bringing **meaningful change** through subtle yet powerful ways. Women-led social media campaigns and initiatives are supporting thousands of aspiring women professionals. However, the pace at which Pakistan is trying to close the gender gap in STEM is too slow compared to the needs of the situation.



A Girl's Early Childhood and Social Conditions

In Pakistan and globally, it is not the difficulties of STEM itself that push women away. It is a fact that STEM remains a male-dominated field. Differential treatment begins in early childhood, when boys and girls are given different toys. This practice indirectly shapes different patterns of thinking in them. Compared to boys, many girls may have limited exposure to and understanding of the technical aspects of technology during their adolescence. Voltaire has said that one should be judged by one's questions.

The early lack of exposure restricts the depth and confidence of girls' questioning in STEM. The government and institutional-level initiatives, where they exist, only support women with already developed critical thinking skill sets needed for the scientific and engineering fields. The question is: how can the system support a student who is making every effort to access these opportunities but is restrained by gaps in knowledge, skills, and experience?

The Institutional Barriers for Pakistani Women

In formal education, indirectly, the discriminatory pattern repeats. The idea that curricula and academic quality are equal across institutions is a myth in Pakistan. Arguably, there are many educational institutions where the system indirectly reserves leading roles for male students. To prove their competence, the female students need to work more than their male peers, who are more likely to be called on to answer a question. On the whole, the academic system has lower expectations of female students, which makes them reluctant to pursue this career.

Mehreen Kaiser found in her [research](#) that women with high performance in STEM subjects in high school often changed to non-STEM fields later in their careers. Lack of familial support and the location of the university and training centers are the determinants of whether a girl will pursue higher education. The family responsibilities and financial costs are also high for women, making it difficult to pursue science even if they wish to. These challenges are predominant for girls coming from underprivileged and lower-middle-class backgrounds.

Workplace Challenges

Once women complete their degrees, new challenges emerge in the workplace itself. In the STEM institutes, many Pakistani women report getting a lower salary than their male peers. For married women in STEM, securing a job after a career break is [increasingly difficult](#). STEM careers often demand long work hours and create a work-life imbalance for women.



Image Details: Girls in school in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. CC BY-SA 2.0. By Vicki Francis.

Various factors, from primary to higher education to professional careers, challenge Pakistani women as they navigate their STEM careers. The women in STEM often part ways with the system as it demands hard work at the expense of their lives beyond work. This work-life disruption earns them at most the same recognition as their male peers. Cultural expectations for women, security concerns, lower wages, and stereotypes associated with STEM careers are also responsible for some women's abandonment of STEM careers.

The Fix for the Leaky Pipeline

To increase the retention of women in STEM, grassroots-level changes are required. Many provincial and national-level interventions are made to strengthen women's retention rate in STEM. But what these interventions do not address is that the problems of girls in the underprivileged and middle classes start from the bottom. The gap has to be addressed from where it began: at a point where the girl child was placed at a different part of the thinking spectrum from the male child.

Instead of randomly gifting children, the parents should gauge the interests of their children. The exposure to the technical aspects of technology must be increased for both male and female children. Within academic institutions, the learning environment must be equalized for both genders. Particularly, in a professional career, the roles should be offered without prejudice and with policies that support work-life balance. Pakistan's university curricula do not largely align with industrial requirements, which impedes all graduates' paths to securing a job, but it particularly impacts women as they may enter a career with different perspectives from the ground up on industrial realities. This, of course, is not the story of all women and all institutions of Pakistan. However, a woman in STEM from an average background faces at least one of these challenges.

Can a nation truly advance in science and technology while a significant portion of its talent pool quietly exits the workforce or never enters? The answer is a big no, and the solution lies in increasing public awareness of grassroots-level challenges and structural changes at the institutional and policy level. Some revolutionary steps are already in place. Accomplished women in STEM are developing initiatives and platforms to support the coming generation of women in science and technology. However, what a girl from an underprivileged area needs is a societal shift, a familial shift, which demands increased public awareness and every individual's willingness to shoulder personal responsibility.

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Defiance & Celebration: How Ayatollah Khamenei's Funeral Overshadowed American Independence

About the Author



Abrar Hashmi is associated with the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. He is also a student of international relations at Government College University, Lahore.

On 4 July 2026, the United States of America celebrated its 250th anniversary of independence; at the same time, Iran began preparations for the funeral of its spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and opened the gates of the Grand Mosalla in Tehran. On 28 February, the USA launched the strikes on Khamenei's residence; the results were disastrous and caused his death along with close family members. Iranian media is reporting that approximately fifteen to twenty million mourners have attended the funeral and ritual grief of their supreme leader. Two nations and two different situations on the same day. One is celebrating a party that it did not fully justify, while the other is burying a man who stood with his nation till death.

This is not a small irony. It is the story of the year.



From Epic Fury to the Versailles MoU

Washington and Tel Aviv started their operations, Epic Fury and Roaring Lion, against Iran at the start of 2026 with the belief that war would be decisive and short. The death of their leader would be the last nail in the coffin, but Iranian leadership showed that they followed an ideology, not a person. They dragged on the war for months and brought the superpower to the negotiation table. Iran surprised its enemies with asymmetric warfare and maritime strategy, as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz was a major setback for the world.

The fuel prices and inflation climbed from Tokyo to Islamabad. The superpower with one of the world's largest militaries was unable to reopen one of the most crucial paths for the transport of goods and oil. Washington had to negotiate again and again and at last signed an MoU in Versailles on 17 June. As a result, Hormuz was reopened, with the announcement that Iranian assets would be unfrozen and sanctions would be lifted gradually, according to Iranian media. In simple words, the USA had to agree to most of Iran's terms for the reopening of the strait that was already open before its attack.

A Fractured NATO

In the funeral of the Iranian supreme leader, delegates from more than one hundred states, including Pakistan, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, participated. It showed that Iran was not isolated diplomatically on a global level. While America was busy rehearsing the fireworks and traditional flag ceremonies over the National Mall, without any global headlines. The unity of NATO is badly affected in this war, and the states, including Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, Australia, Japan, and South Korea, all rejected Trump's call for the military effort to reopen the Hormuz.

Germany's defense minister openly said that this is not our war. Donald Trump was furious with the role of NATO members and called them "cowards" and also gave a warning about leaving the alliance. This kind of language by the leader of a superpower showed the frustration about the fact that even his closest allies would not join him in every fight.



"4th of July Fireworks" by Creativity+ Timothy K Hamilton is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

A New Kind of Independence

4th July was supposed to be a day of celebration for the nation that assumed at the start of the year that its victory was inevitable. The ground realities have changed the circumstances and reversed the role; millions of people gathered in Tehran for the funeral, not for the celebration of winning the war. Despite having civilian loss and a shattered economy and infrastructure, the huge number tells a different story, and Washington can't deny it. Even while burying their martyrs, there was a kind of summons of victory by the addressees.

When an economically sanctioned state with comparatively weak military capabilities and a population of ninety million refuses to hand over its strait for free.

It showed bravery and buried its leader before millions of people from all over the world; it was not just a survival but a strategic victory in these kinds of wars. Missiles can destroy buildings and kill people, but they could never shatter the will and morale of a nation. Iranian officials and people showed that spirit and forced a superpower to negotiate on their own terms and conditions.

It is very difficult for commentators to declare who won the war, because no document will ever show it publicly. It is decided by the facts who requested the negotiation first, who accepted the demands of the adversary, and who is still standing tall enough, even in mourning, to call this July their own kind of independence day.

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Brain Drain in Pakistan: A Nation Exporting Its Future

About the Author



Maham Asif is a BS International Relations student at Government College University Lahore, with a research focus on geopolitical theory, nuclear strategy, and South Asian foreign.

Pakistan's brain drain numbers haven't slowed down; they've picked up speed. As the country enters 2026, the total number of people who have left over the past two years is expected to cross 1.5 million. One columnist put it bluntly a few months back: this isn't migration anymore; it's "a vote of no confidence in the state." That line has stuck around because it's hard to argue with. What's changed isn't just the scale of people leaving; it is how openly everyone talks about it now.

There is a kind of dark joke circulating on Pakistani social media: the country itself is going nowhere, but its people are going everywhere. It is funny until you realize it's not really a joke. The desire to leave used to be associated mostly with the poor or the unemployed. Not anymore. Commentary from this January described something closer to a national mood, including rich, poor, educated, uneducated; almost everyone wants out.

Maybe the most uncomfortable detail in all this is who's choosing to stay abroad. Diplomats and government officials posted overseas people whose entire job is to represent the state, are quietly trying not to come home, even though there are formal rules meant to stop exactly that. When the people paid to believe in the country don't want to live in it, that tells you something the GDP numbers can't.

The Numbers Behind The Exit

None of this happened in a vacuum. 2023 was brutal: inflation hit 30 percent, unemployment hit a record 8.5 percent, and the rupee lost roughly a fifth of its value against the dollar, one of the worst currency performances in the world that year. So, it's not surprising that emigration jumped the way it did. In 2021, fewer than 230,000 Pakistanis left for work abroad. By 2023, that number had ballooned to 862,625 in a single year. Zoom out further, and the number gets staggering: since official record-keeping began in 1971, more than 13.5 million Pakistanis have emigrated. There are now over nine million Pakistanis living abroad, making it the sixth-largest diaspora in the world.



Even global indices that try to measure this kind of thing put Pakistan well above average. One index that tracks human flight scored Pakistan at 5.5 out of a possible range in 2024, down slightly from 5.8 the year before, but still well above the worldwide average of 4.98. Pakistan's own long-run average since 2007 sits at 7.01. So even the "improvement" isn't really good news, just slightly less bad news.

From Labourers to Leaders

This used to be a story about unskilled labor heading to the Gulf. It is not that story anymore. Between 2011 and 2024, applications to emigrate jumped 151 percent among doctors, 172 percent among engineers, and almost unbelievably 990 percent among managers. In just the 2022–2023 window alone, highly qualified professional emigration rose by 26.6 percent, and the number of highly skilled people who left in those two years (around 107,000) was higher than the entire previous five years combined.

The damage is showing up in very specific ways. Nearly 2,500 doctors left the country in 2023 alone, and hospitals are feeling it. Education is being squeezed from both directions: experienced teachers are leaving, and so are the students who would eventually replace them. A 2024 survey found that over 45 percent of university students in Pakistan are already planning to leave after graduation. A separate government report found that nearly a third of graduates aged 25 to 35 are seriously considering migration, mostly because there's nowhere good for them to go career-wise at home.

The numbers keep climbing. One recent report put last year's skilled outflow at over 862,000 workers, including close to 46,000 doctors, engineers, and IT professionals, a noticeably higher figure than the 727,381 officially registered for 2024. Even the people tracking this can't quite agree on the exact number, which says something on its own: this is moving too fast to pin down cleanly.

The Migration Nobody Counts

Not everyone leaving is doing it the official way, and the unofficial route is far more dangerous. Pakistani nationals are now one of the largest groups attempting irregular migration into Europe. Frontex, Europe border agency, has flagged Pakistani men as among the most common male victims of human trafficking into Europe, mostly funneled into forced labor in construction and farming. The routes run overland through Iran and Turkey, then either by boat across the Mediterranean or overland through the Balkans, run by smuggling networks that charge several thousand dollars a head. Families often borrow heavily to cover those fees, which means some migrants arrive already in debt bondage to the very people who smuggled them in. It's the same desperation driving the white-collar exodus, just with none of the safety net.

Is It Really A Brain Drain Trap?

The scarier version of this story isn't just that people keep leaving; it's that the loss starts feeding on itself. There's a term for that: the World Bank calls it a "brain drain trap," a point at which a country has lost the exact people it would need to fix the system that made them leave. Once you are in the trap, getting out gets harder every year, not easier.



The day-to-day damage is already visible. Hospitals are short-staffed. Schools are short on experienced teachers. Tech companies cannot find senior engineers. Dr. Nadeem ul Haque, former Vice-Chancellor of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, has put it plainly: without real institutional reform, Pakistan will keep funding other countries' growth while its own economy quietly falls apart.

And the money side of this only sounds reassuring at first glance. Remittances reportedly hit \$38.5 billion recently, but the same analysis estimates the underlying productivity loss at \$4.2 billion a year. Pakistan still ranks sixth globally for brain drain, and 92,000 university graduates left in 2022 alone, a loss that hollows out exactly the middle class that's supposed to drive consumer spending and long-term growth.

Periphery Nation or Brain Circulation

There's a real fork ahead. One path is the bleak one: Pakistan slowly becomes what some analysts call a "periphery country," a place that trains talent for other countries to use.



The other path is more hopeful: “brain circulation,” where people who leave eventually come back with money, skills, and global connections, but only if there’s actually something worth coming back to. That means real investment in startups, research infrastructure, and basic security.

It helps to look at neighbors. India still sends huge numbers of skilled professionals abroad, especially in tech and research, but it’s built stronger pathways for that talent and capital to circulate back. Bangladesh’s outflow, by contrast, has historically leaned more toward low-skilled labor heading to the Gulf. The lesson isn’t just about how many people leave; it is about who leaves and whether the system gives them any reason to come back.

Which path Pakistan ends up on depends on things that are entirely within its control right now: competitive pay for high-skill sectors and tax policy that doesn’t punish salaried professionals more than everyone else. One recent piece put the human cost of inaction about as well as anything I’ve read: Pakistan loses billions in talent every year, doctors treating patients in Manchester instead of Multan, engineers building skylines in Dubai while startups at home quietly die.

Conclusion

Pakistan keeps calling this “brain gain,” but the math tells a different story. Every doctor who leaves for London, every engineer who picks Dubai over Lahore, every diplomat who quietly stays abroad, they are not just numbers in a remittance report. They are votes. And right now, the country is losing the election against itself.

The uncomfortable truth is this: a nation can survive losing its money. It can survive losing its industries. What it cannot survive, long-term, is losing the very people who would have fought to fix it. That’s the real exodus, not just of talent but of hope. And hope, unlike remittances, does not wire itself back home. The question Pakistan keeps dodging isn’t whether it can afford to stop the bleeding. It’s whether there will be anyone left to stop it if it waits much longer to try.

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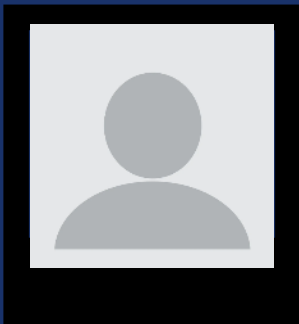
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28th Amendment: Where Do CSS Reforms Land?

About the Author



Dr. Osama Jaffer is a freelance contributor



As the nation buzzes with discussions surrounding the proposed “28th amendment,” one issue appears to have captured the imagination of Pakistan’s youth more than even the anticipated voting age increase from 18 to 25, which is the future of the Central Superior Services (CSS) examination. Across universities, institutes, and social media platforms, the question echoes repeatedly: Should the CSS age limit and attempts be increased?

Merely increasing the age limit without corresponding reforms to the outdated retirement structure inherited from the British era serves little purpose. Pakistan continues to operate with a retirement age of 60, despite rising life expectancy, delayed educational completion, and an increasingly specialized global workforce.

A more balanced approach may lie elsewhere.

One practical proposal could be targeted relaxation rather than blanket expansion. Federal and provincial government employees serving or retired officers of BPS 17 or above with a minimum of three years of federal service may be granted an additional two years, and two extra CSS attempts, provided these are exhausted before the age of 32.

Imagine retaining some of Pakistan’s brightest engineers, economists, and administrators within the state structure rather than losing them permanently to brain drain. A young engineer serving in a technical ministry or a doctor in a rural health district would remain motivated by the possibility that government service itself opens a future pathway into bureaucracy, plus someone already part of the state machinery and system would be well-versed in many of the skills that their other counterparts will take more time to learn.

Moreover, if such officers qualify, civil service mechanisms should exist to compensate for the earlier years already spent in public service. Their retirement age may be reasonably extended by two or three years, or they may be considered for accelerated promotion timelines to BPS 18 to offset the years already devoted to federal employment.

However, the age debate alone misses a far larger structural flaw within the CSS system: the monopoly of the essay paper. At present, one essay determines the fate of exceptional candidates. Years of preparation across diverse subjects collapse upon a single topic selection. A candidate may possess brilliance in governance, economics, law, administration, or international affairs, yet remain entirely vulnerable to one examiner's interpretation of a single essay.

No serious meritocratic system should allow one paper to exercise such disproportionate authority over a candidate's future. A more balanced mechanism is urgently needed. Essay papers should ideally be assessed by a panel or jury of three examiners rather than a single individual, ensuring greater objectivity and minimizing extreme marking variations.

Furthermore, the current structures psychologically demoralized candidates. If an aspirant feels their essay has gone poorly, motivation for the remaining papers collapses.



One possible solution could involve cumulative facilitation. Currently, candidates must separately pass the Essay and Precise while also achieving a 50 percent aggregate threshold. A more rational alternative may allow candidates scoring above 55 percent

overall in the remaining subjects, for example, 550 out of 1000 marks across ten papers, a cumulative provision for Essay and Precise combined should be offered to such candidates, which will require them to score 80 or higher out of 200 for both Essay and Precise. Below 55 percent, the candidates will be judged on the existing criterion of passing both the essay and précis separately.

Another alarming concern is the growing number of highly capable but unallocated candidates. This year alone, nearly 172 candidates failed to secure allocation despite investing years of preparation, finances, and energy. Many effectively lost the immediate chance to appear in the following years' CSS exam attempt.

A provision, therefore, should exist whereby candidates passing the written and interview stages but fail to obtain allocation may have their attempt count protected.

If you want to submit your articles and/or research papers, please visit the [Submissions](#) page.

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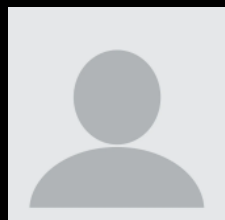
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Pakistan's Federal Budget FY 2026–27: Same Circus, Bigger Military, Smaller Future

About the Author



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Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of Pakistan's Federal Budget for FY 2026–27, which carries a total outlay of Rs 18.771 trillion (\$67 billion). The analysis examines key budget allocations, including debt servicing (42.9% of expenditure), defence spending (Rs 3 trillion), and comparatively inadequate allocations for education (Rs 46 billion) and health (Rs 25.1 billion). The paper investigates hidden military expenses, the freeze on new development projects, and the regressive taxation policies that burden ordinary citizens while exempting six industries. Through comprehensive data analysis and examination of public budget documents, this study demonstrates that Pakistan's budget perpetuates institutional self-perpetuation, prioritizing military spending and debt servicing while constraining investments in human capital development and essential public services.

Introduction: The Third Budget, Same Broken Priorities

The FY 2026–27 federal budget carries a total outlay of Rs 18.771 trillion (\$67 billion), up from Rs 17.57 trillion the previous year. On the surface, this looks like an expansion. Dig one centimeter beneath the surface, and you find the same suffocating structure; nearly half the budget eaten by debt interest, the military handed the single largest institutional allocation, development spending frozen at a paltry Rs 1 trillion, and health and education receiving crumbs while generals receive upgrades. The NEC, the National Economic Council, actually slashed the overall development budget by 25 percent just days before the budget was presented, with no new development projects approved except for the interior and defence ministries. (Dawn, June 2026)

This paper dissects Pakistan's FY 2026–27 budget with zero diplomatic courtesy. Every claim is backed by a reference. Every number is sourced. And the conclusion is one that no government minister will state openly but that every citizen living through Pakistan's collapsing public services already knows: this country is governed for its military, its creditors, and its elite, not for the 240 million people paying the price.

1- The Budget at a Glance – The Numbers That Indict

- Total Outlay: Rs 18.771 trillion (\$67 billion)
- Debt Servicing (Interest Payments): Rs 8.054 trillion, which is 42.9% of total expenditure
- Defence Budget (official): Rs 3 trillion, which is 15.98% of total expenditure
- Military Pensions (separate from defence): Rs 822 billion. Civil Pensions: Rs 272 billion, thus total Pensions: Rs 1.169 trillion
- Federal PSDP (Development): Rs 1.05 trillion
- Health (ADP allocation): Rs 25.1 billion
- Higher Education and Research (ADP): Rs 46 billion
- BISP (Social Protection): Rs 838 billion (+17%)
- Subsidies: Rs 1.091 trillion
- FBR Tax Target: Rs 15.264 trillion
- GDP Growth Target: 4% | Inflation Target: 8.2%

(Sources: Dunya News Budget Documents; Bloom Pakistan, June 2026; Business Recorder, June 2026)



Take a moment with those numbers. Pakistan is spending Rs 8.054 trillion servicing debt and Rs 25.1 billion on federal health development. That is a ratio of 321 to 1. For every single rupee the federal government invests in building new hospitals or health infrastructure, it pays Rs 321 to its creditors. The military budget

alone is 120 times larger than the federal health development allocation. These are not misfortunes. These are choices deliberate, defended, and repeated year after year. (ProPakistani Budget Live, June 2026)

2- Defence – Rs 3 Trillion and Climbing, With More Hidden Beneath

The budget allocated to the defence sector in FY 2026-27 is Rs 3.01 trillion, marking an increase of 17.7 percent over last year's allocation of Rs 2.55 trillion. This is for the third consecutive year that the defence budget has seen double-digit increases: Rs 2.12 trillion in FY 2024-25, Rs 2.55 trillion in FY 2025-26, and now Rs 3 trillion in FY 2026-27. Within two years, Pakistan's official defence budget has risen by Rs 880 billion, an increase of 41.5 percent. The federal budget for health development has, meanwhile, been slashed. (Business Recorder Defence Budget, June 2026)

The Official Numbers Are Just the Beginning

The Rs 3 trillion defence budget figure does not tell us the whole story. There are, in fact, several other military expenses within the official documents that are accounted for separately as follows:

Military pensions: Rs 822 billion, rising from Rs 742 billion last year, showing an increase of 10.8 percent. These are lumped together in the category of 'total pensions' (Rs 1.169 trillion), thereby staying out of the official defence budget figures. (ARY News Defence Budget, June 2026)

Expenses of employee defence: Rs 967 billion; the increase is from the revised figure of Rs 851 billion for the cost of salaries that are kept undisclosed in the defence budget. Salary disbursements to military personnel have been lumped under 'General Public Services – Staff Salaries,' thereby making an independent audit of the full salary expenditure incurred on military personnel impossible for citizens and independent scholars alike. (ARY News Defence Budget, June 2026)

Operating expenses: Rs 743 billion; Administrative costs: Rs 10.9 billion; Tangible assets (procurement of military hardware): have been lumped into the Rs 3 trillion without any breakup being made public. Apart from this, the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) was granted Rs 40.66 billion in the PSDP, almost double last year's Rs 22.42 billion, while SUPARCO was allocated Rs 11.57 billion in the PSDP. (Business Recorder Defence Budget, June 2026)

Total these up: defence budget (Rs 3 trillion) + military pensions (Rs 822 billion) + concealed military salary payments under general services + PAEC (Rs 40.66 billion) + SUPARCO (Rs 11.57 billion) + Armed Forces educational institutions in cantonments (Rs 22.96 billion). What we come up with is that the real military budget in Pakistan's fiscal year 2026–27 is likely to be between Rs 4.5 and 5 trillion, representing a proportion of around 24 to 27 percent of the total budget of the Pakistani government. This is clearly the budget of a state whose main *raison d'être* is its army.

What Does Rs 3 Trillion Actually Buy?

What does this Rs 3 trillion defence budget buy, really? It is actually Rs 3,000 billion. Federal ADP for health is Rs 25.1 billion, and federal ADP for higher education is Rs 46 billion, adding up to Rs 71.1 billion. This means that the defence budget is over 42 times as large as the total budget allocation of the Pakistani government for health and higher education. As acknowledged by the Prime Minister himself at the NEC meeting, "the biggest challenge is strengthening defence." (Dawn NEC/PSDP, June 2026) A revealing confession. Not poverty. Not illiteracy. Not malnutrition. The biggest challenge is defence.

Aurangzeb, Finance Minister, also mentioned defence pacts between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, where military expenses were justified on the grounds of earning foreign currency through arms sales. This is the new layer added to the old 'regional threats' excuse; the military is now also an export industry. The unspoken reality is that defence exports by Pakistan are just a small portion of its defence imports, and there has never been an arms deal that built a school in Baluchistan. (24NewsHD Budget Speech, June 2026)

3- Education – Still Drowning, Now With Less Funding

Pakistan's education disaster did not happen overnight, but each new budget has made the situation more serious. The allocation towards Higher Education and Research under the ADP for FY 26-27 is Rs. 46 billion, marginally better than last year when it was Rs. 34.9 billion. HEC's recurrent funding for salaries and operations will be frozen again despite the increased number of universities and students over the past years. (Business Recorder, June 2026; ProPakistani: HEC Development Spending)

The Context: Structural Crisis Getting Worse

To see how inadequate anything less than an enormous hike would have been in terms of education, consider the situation in which Pakistan finds itself. Education expenditure has gone down from 2% of GDP in 2018 to 0.8% of GDP in FY 25. There are around 25.37 million to 26 million children out of school in the country. Pakistan's literacy rate is at 60.6%, while female literacy is only 52.8%. In Balochistan, three-quarters of girls are out of school. UNESCO and the UN's Incheon Declaration recommend 4-6% of GDP on education, whereas Pakistan has just one-fifth of that amount. (Save the Children, June 2025; Minute Mirror Education Budget, 2026)



The education experts pointed out that at least a goal of Rs 3 to 3.5 trillion could be expected to be achieved for the education sector, although the figure was a

massive jump and fell far short of international norms. The education budget allocated for the next fiscal year stood at Rs 46 billion in terms of federal budget allocation towards ADP for higher education and research. Regardless of how lenient one is in considering education expenditures by assuming provincial education budgets, Pakistan's educational budget is extremely low compared to internationally acceptable figures. (Daily Destination Education Budget)

No New Schemes – A Development Freeze

Among the worst aspects of the FY 2026-27 budget lies one particular line mentioned in the NEC decision that no development projects are to commence other than for the Interior and Defence departments in this budget. Provincial Development budgets are slashed by 29.3 percent, effectively frozen at around their actual utilization in the current budget period. In an extraordinary turn of events, the NEC reduced the development expenditure for the federation and provinces by 25 percent to Rs 3.218 trillion from Rs 4.264 trillion approved by the Annual Plan Coordination Committee recently. (Dawn NEC PSDP Cut, June 2026)

That means no new schools. No new universities. No new hospitals except whatever the defence and interior ministries deem necessary for their own infrastructure. At the same NEC meeting, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal, in a moment of rare candor that his own government promptly ignored, acknowledged that "Pakistan has lagged behind the region due to weak investment in education and skills." He said this. And then the government presented a budget where the defence ministry gets unlimited new projects while education gets a frozen recurring grant and a Rs 46 billion ADP. Words are cheap. Budget lines are not. (Dawn NEC PSDP Cut, June 2026)

The amount that Pakistan spends per student on their education is still among the lowest in the world, at about \$25 per child per year in nominal value, which in PPP comes to about \$397, 66 percent below the South Asian average per child per year according to UNICEF reports. The military expenditure in FY 2026-27, based on the official figure of Rs 3 trillion, amounts to around Rs 7,000 per Pakistani per year. Pakistan cannot be a forward-looking nation if it spends 500 times as much on its military per citizen as it invests in federal education development. (UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report 2025)

4- Health – Rs 25.1 Billion for 240 Million People

The annual development budget allocated to the health sector of the federal government for the period FY 2026-27 amounts to Rs 25.1 billion for tertiary healthcare and critical care purposes. This figure is equal to about Rs 104 per Pakistani per year, which is less than \$0.38.

When we consider a country with 240 million citizens, this does not qualify as a health budget; rather, it appears as an accounting mistake for the military operations cost. (Business Recorder, June 2026)

Of course, the burden of financing healthcare falls to the provinces under the system of devolution in Pakistan. However, what needs to be understood is that the federal government provides leadership in this regard, setting the priorities, and even determining how money should be transferred to fund health projects. It cannot go unnoticed when in the very budget document, the federal government commits itself to spending Rs 3 trillion towards the military and Rs 25.1 billion for health development purposes. There were no new health schemes announced in the PSDP, which was true for the FY 2025–26 budget as well. No new hospitals, clinics, or research facilities will be developed under the ongoing plan. (Dawn NEC PSDP Cut, June 2026)

The Health Baseline Is Already a Catastrophe

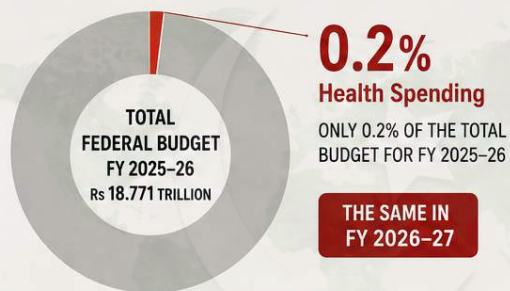
As per the data compiled by UNICEF, Pakistan's federal health spending was only 0.2% of the total budget for FY 2025-26. The situation did not change for FY 2026-27. This is an extremely alarming scenario considering there are 11 million children in forced labor, six out of ten children under five who remain unregistered and hence unable to access any social services, a large number of people suffering from malnutrition and diseases which can easily be prevented, as well as poor healthcare leading to millions being pushed below the poverty line due to health costs every year. (UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report 2025)

World Health Organization suggests that developing nations should invest at least 5 percent of their GDP in the health sector. The combined figure for health spending by Pakistan's federal and provincial governments is estimated at around 0.9 percent of the GDP.

PAKISTAN'S **HEALTH CRISIS**: AN INVESTMENT WE CAN'T AFFORD TO IGNORE

LOW SPENDING. HIGHER HUMAN COST.

FEDERAL HEALTH SPENDING – ALARMINGLY LOW



WHERE THE MONEY GOES (FY 2025–26)



HEALTH GETS THE LEAST, WHILE DEBT GETS THE MOST.

THE HUMAN COST BEHIND LOW HEALTH INVESTMENT



HEALTH IS NOT AN EXPENSE, IT IS AN INVESTMENT IN HUMAN POTENTIAL.

Source: UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report 2025

FY 2026–27 budget continues with the same trend. Instead, what the government proposes is BISP cash transfers as the primary source of social protection with an allocation of Rs 838 billion, a significant rise by 17 percent, which is equivalent to giving Rs 8000 per month to impoverished families. (Business Recorder, June 2026)

At the same time, the government earmarked Rs 103.1 billion towards 43 hydroelectricity projects and Rs 116.2 billion for power under the PSDP. Energy is definitely a key component. Yet, when it comes to this budget, there is simply no match: the government plans to spend Rs 219 billion from the development budget on power and energy, as opposed to Rs 25.1 billion on health. Money on pipes and turbines rather than hospitals and physicians. In a country suffering from widespread malnutrition and childhood mortality, that is outrageous. (Business Recorder, June 2026)

5- Debt Servicing – 42.9% of the Budget Eaten Before Anyone Gets Paid

The amount allocated to interest payments on public debt, built up over years of borrowing to pay off such expenses, comes to Rs 8.054 trillion under the FY 2026-27 budget of Pakistan. In relative terms, that accounts for 42.9 percent of the country's total spending. Slightly less than 46.9 percent of the previous year's expenditure on debt interest repayments, but certainly not something to be proud of. (Bloom Pakistan Budget Analysis, June 2026)

The debt of the Pakistani government has kept on increasing in terms of sheer volume. The pre-budget assessment by Geo News indicated that there was a failure to meet the tax collection target of the FBR in the year FY 2025–26, a decline in exports, an increase in imports, and a rise in the volume of the absolute public debt. The government has indeed been able to bring down the deficit from 7.8 percent of GDP in June 2023 to 4 percent of GDP towards the close of FY 2025–26; however, this consolidation has been done at the cost of development spending and social services rather than by generating economic growth. (Geo News, June 2026)

The conditions of the IMF Extended Fund Facility of \$7 billion have made every fiscal decision. The targeted primary surplus has been fixed at 2 percent of GDP for the FY 2026–27, which equals Rs 2.828 trillion. It means that the government will have to earn a profit of Rs 2.828 trillion over its operating cost before spending a single rupee on development.

This is why the NEC slashed provincial development budgets by 29 percent, not because development is unimportant, but because the IMF program's fiscal targets take absolute precedence over Pakistan's children, Pakistan's hospitals, and Pakistan's future. (CSS Prep Salary and Budget Analysis, June 2026)

BUDGET 2026-27

RELIEF FOR THE SALARIED CLASS

Lower Taxes. Higher Wages. Better Support.

“ Our focus is on easing the burden on the salaried class and supporting their purchasing power. ”

– Finance Minister Aurangzeb

INCOME TAX RELIEF

Lower Income Tax for Many Categories

Reduced tax rates for salaried individuals across multiple income slabs.

Lower Tax for Rs 1.2M – Rs 2.2M Earners

Individuals earning between Rs 1.2 million and Rs 2.2 million will pay less income tax.

Reduced Income Tax for Higher Income Categories

Tax relief extended even to higher income groups.

10% INCREASE

Minimum wage increased by 10 percent.

7% INCREMENT

Government employees given a 7 percent increase in salaries.

7% INCREMENT

Pensions increased by 7 percent.

You Earn. We Support.

STRONGER SUPPORT TODAY, BRIGHTER TOMORROW.

A stronger salaried class builds a **stronger Pakistan.**

Similarly, another amount of Rs 1.727 trillion has been allocated by the government through the petroleum levy, a regressive tax system under which people who earn less income suffer much more than the rich, as this is a bigger percentage of their total income. Although the tax rates of the wealthy businessmen are being lowered and even waived in some sectors, the petroleum levy for those who use oil for transport and goods that require transportation continues to be at record-high rates. Trickle down with the rich benefiting and trickle up with the poor paying the bill. (Geo News, June 2026)

6- Tax ‘Reforms’ – Who Actually Gets Relief and Who Pays the Bill

This budget is marketed as giving the ‘salaried class’ relief. According to Finance Minister Aurangzeb, the income tax rate has been reduced for many categories of income. Those earning between Rs 1.2 million and Rs 2.2 million will pay lower income taxes, and the government has even reduced the income tax for the higher categories. The minimum wage has been increased by 10 percent. The government employees were given an increment of 7 percent in their salaries and pensions. (ProPakistani Budget Live, June 2026)

It does sound quite logical. But who else benefited from the decision made by the government? The government completely exempted six industries from the super tax, while the super tax has been reduced from 10% to 8% for the high-earning brackets (excluding banks, oil & gas, and fertilizer companies, which still need to pay the super tax). The super tax policy had been adopted because of the need for the rich to pay their dues, but now they have been let off with it. Furthermore, the Capital Value Tax on financial assets has been scrapped, and the property transaction tax has been cut by 50%. Who gets the benefit of scrapping capital value tax on financial assets as well as the reduction of property taxes by 50% – the salaried class earning Rs.60,000 per month or the corporate tycoons and real estate investors having these assets? (24NewsHD Budget Speech, June 2026)

While the FBR has set itself the target of collecting Rs 15.264 trillion – an all-time high target. In order to achieve this while lowering the rates for companies and rich individuals, the government plans to increase collection efforts against the visible economy, including salary earners, registered companies, and documented individuals. It will require banks to report the transaction details of customers to the FBR to detect evasion. Late-filing penalties have also been hiked to Rs 50,000 for associations of persons and Rs 100,000 for corporate taxpayers. A flat tax system will also be implemented for shopkeepers and retailers. (ProPakistani Budget Live, June 2026)

Yet the basic issue persists! Pakistan's tax-GDP ratio stood at 8.5 percent three years ago, which has now risen to 10.3 percent. This is a good sign, although it has been admitted by the FBR in its budget statement. The agricultural industry, which has strong lobbying power in terms of direct representation in Parliament, and the retail industry continue to be heavily under-taxed. Every year, the budget pledges to do something about it but fails to keep that pledge. (Daily Destination Budget Analysis)

7- PSDP and Development – A Rs 1 Trillion Fig Leaf

The Federal Public Sector Development Program for the fiscal year 2026-27 has been pegged at Rs. 1.05 trillion, which remains unchanged from last year's amount of Rs. 1 trillion. It is the major development indicator by the government. In terms of a budget of Rs. 18.77 trillion, this represents a commitment of 5.6 percent of total expenditures towards developing the nation's future. Military spending, on the other hand, is 2.86 times more than the combined total of all development expenditures. (24NewsHD Budget Speech, June 2026)

The total development expenditure by the country, including the provincial ADPs as well as the spending by SOEs, is Rs. 3.675 trillion. However, this is another figure that deserves a considerable amount of skepticism on account of a trend in Pakistan to announce a development budget and then underspend. For example, federal PSDP spending amounted to only Rs. 820 billion last year in comparison to Rs. 1 trillion budgeted. Similarly, provincial ADP spending stood at Rs. 2.938 trillion against higher figures approved initially. NEC's decision to cap provincial ADPs' spending in FY 2026-27 at the actual levels spent last year is an admission of underspending on planned amounts. (The Nation/NEC Report, June 2026)

Of the Rs 1 trillion PSDP provided by the federal budget, transport takes the lead! Rs 365 billion towards roads, railways and communications, including Rs 100 billion for N-25, the superhighway



from Karachi to Quetta, as well as allocation for the M-6 motorway and the beginning of the ML-1 railway corridor. Yes, infrastructure is vital, but one can ask: do the motorways benefit more the farmers and workers who cannot even afford medical treatment, or do they benefit

more the logistics firms, construction contractors, and the army? (Daily Times Budget Report, June 2026)

The decision of the NEC should not go unnoticed, as no development projects have been sanctioned in any sector other than those of the interior and defense ministries, which have been exempted from the reduction. It would be a joke to call it 'fiscal consolidation,' for the government not only will not spend a single penny on building schools or health facilities, but will continue expanding the security infrastructure. (Dawn NEC PSDP Cut, June 2026)

8- The Economy Under Aurangzeb – Stabilized for Whom?

The speech made by Finance Minister Aurangzeb in terms of macroeconomic achievements was filled with various impressive facts. Pakistan's GDP increased from previous levels to reach \$452 billion. The per capita income rose from \$1,751 to \$1,901. Foreign currency reserves have gone up from \$4 billion to over \$17 billion. Large-scale manufacturing has achieved a growth rate of 6.1 percent. Remittances would be expected to hit \$41 billion in this fiscal year. (Bloom Pakistan Budget Analysis, June 2026)

These are some very impressive statistics on paper. In reality, however, these indicators provide no accurate measure of Pakistani prosperity. Growth in GDP to 3.7 percent against a target of 4.2 percent in fiscal year 2025–26 in an economy suffering from high inflation due to the Middle East energy crisis falls far short of expectations. The per capita income of \$1,901 refers only to the nominal dollars and does not account for extreme inequality within the country. The high Gini coefficient and poverty ratio in Pakistan (44.7 percent) imply that income data tell nothing about the actual lives of most Pakistanis. (Geo News Budget Context, June 2026)

Inflation again rose into double figures in FY 2025–26 due to the Iran-US clash and its implications for fuel prices. The FBR failed to meet its tax collection objectives in FY 2025–26. There has been a huge rise in public debt in terms of rupees. What was the response of the government? Reduction of development expenditure by 25% through the NEC, increase of salary of the military by 17.7%, and preparation of a budget aiming for a 4% growth rate and 8.2% inflation rate, which seem sensible yet have been consistently missed in past years.

The Human Development Index value of 0.544 places Pakistan at rank number 168 among nations. Any number of GDP growth announcements will not change the reality faced by hundreds of millions of Pakistanis who lack basic access to education, healthcare facilities, and other opportunities. (Wikipedia Economy of Pakistan)

9- The Opposition's Protest – Noisy But Toothless

During the budget presentation ceremony, members of the PTI lawmakers performed their usual show by displaying banners, shouting slogans, tearing agendas, and criticizing the budget as “an anti-people budget.” Members of the treasury benches banged on tables in favor of the PM Shehbaz Sharif. There were some arguments. Finance Minister Aurangzeb went ahead with his statement. (Khyber News, June 2026)



Pakistan's budget politics are encapsulated in this episode. PTI's protests are justified because they reflect

the people's feelings, yet historically, PTI has always lacked an alternative economic program. The opposition rightly argues that this is a budget against the people, but the truth of the matter is that whenever PTI was in government, it never succeeded in increasing the budget allocations in the education and health sectors, nor did it succeed in placing the military budget under the parliament's supervision, or taxing the feudal elite's income from agriculture. The issue in Pakistan is neither the particular government nor the particular coalition. It is a system where the military establishment, the business elite, and creditor organizations make sure no government challenges their share in the national cake.

This is why Finance Minister Aurangzeb can open a budget speech with a tribute to military glory, announce Rs 3 trillion for defence, cut health spending, freeze education development, and then face only theatrical opposition because the institutions that would challenge this allocation have either been co-opted, suppressed, or simply lack the political power to change it.

10- What Must Change – A People’s Budget for Pakistan

Criticism without alternatives is commentary. Here is what a genuinely reformist budget for FY 2026–27 would have required. Not idealism, just basic prioritization of a population over an establishment:

Education

A sharp increase in education budget as a percentage of GDP to a minimum of 2.5 percent immediately, and with a mandatory pathway to 4 percent by 2029. The HEC grant must be unfrozen and indexed to actual enrollment growth. It cannot remain stagnant at the level of 2018 despite the explosion in enrollments. Provincial ADPs for education should not be subjected to any NEC reductions in their budgets despite cuts in overall development budgets. Formula-based transfer payments from the federation for education must prioritize students enrolled in Balochistan and rural Sindh. (Minute Mirror Education Analysis, 2026)

Health

The paltry federal health development budget allocation of Rs 25.1 billion is an insult. An increase



of ten times, up to Rs 250 billion in the immediate term. New PSDP health projects in underdeveloped districts must be exactly the opposite of the “no new projects” policy of this government. The WHO standard of 5 percent of GDP for the health budget must become a constitutional

obligation. Catastrophic health expenditures are impoverishing millions each year; there is no way one can talk about achieving economic growth targets in such a scenario. (UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report 2025)

Defence Transparency

It should all be consolidated and brought together in one consolidated defence spending report to be put before parliament for review. It is essential in a democracy that people know how much is being spent on the armed forces of the country. The sum of Rs 3 trillion is itself scary, but it is intentionally made small on purpose. (Business Recorder Defence, June 2026; ARY News Defence Budget, June 2026)

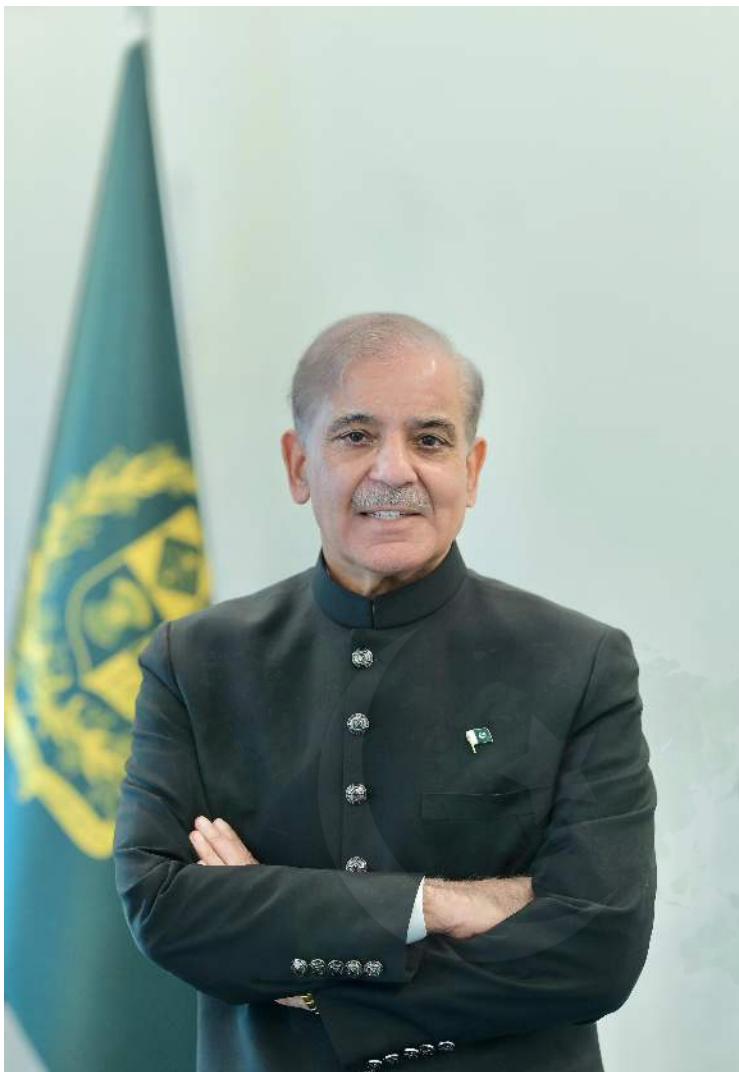
Taxation

Removing super tax from six industries but increasing taxes on petroleum to Rs 1.727 trillion shows that we are following the policy of reverse Robin Hood, taking from many and giving to a select few. We cannot develop the country into a developed state based on a tax-to-GDP ratio of 10.3 percent. There should be a law for the taxation of income from agriculture, real estate, and the retail industry. (CSS Prep Budget Analysis, June 2026)

Conclusion

Pakistan's FY 2026-27 federal budget is, at its core, a document of institutional self-perpetuation. It perpetuates the military's financial primacy with Rs 3 trillion and counting. It perpetuates the debt trap by paying Rs 8 trillion in interest while borrowing more. It perpetuates elite tax privilege by abolishing the super tax while keeping the petroleum levy. And it perpetuates the human development catastrophe by allocating Rs 25.1 billion for the health of 240 million people and freezing university funding while carving out defence and interior from the 'no new projects' rule.

Finance Minister Aurangzeb opened his third budget speech with Operation Bunyan Marsus. He credited Pakistan's growing international standing to its military might. He did not open with the 26 million children outside of school. He did not mention the Rs 321 that the government pays in debt interest for every Rs 1 it spends building hospitals. He did not name the Balochistan girl who is 75 percent likely never to have attended school. Because this budget is not written for her. It is written for the creditors who need their Rs 8 trillion, the generals who needed their Rs 3 trillion raise, and the business interests who needed their super tax relief.



PM Shehbaz Sharif told the NEC that 'strengthening defence is the country's biggest challenge. Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal said Pakistan has lagged behind the region due to weak investment in education and skills. Both statements were made in the same week. Only one of them is reflected in the budget. You know which one. Until Pakistan's political economy is restructured to the point where a finance minister can open a budget speech with the education crisis rather than a military victory, these budgets will continue to be exercises in managed national decline dressed up in the language of fiscal consolidation, macroeconomic stability, and sustainable growth.

The 26 million children outside school will keep waiting. The 11 million child laborers will keep working. The mothers in districts without functioning hospitals will keep dying from preventable causes. And the defence budget will keep growing, year after year, unopposed, unaudited, and largely undisclosed because in Pakistan, guns do not just come before books. Guns come before everything.

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Women Empowerment: Consent Vs Control

About the Author



Ammara Arif Baloch is a civil servant holding a Master's degree in Economics and a B.Ed. She has a keen interest in public policy, education, socioeconomic development, and women's empowerment. She qualified for the CSS 2023, Special CSS, and PMS KP examinations. Before joining civil services, she spent nearly five years teaching in private schools where she participated in professional development programs conducted by Oxford University Press.

The problem, nowadays, is not merely that many women are denied independence. The deeper problem is that men, families, and society are often not mature enough to respect the few women who do become independent. A society that does not know how to coexist with independent women will continue to preserve misogyny, whether women are earning or not.

So, what is independence? If a woman is earning and still unable to live the life she wants, what makes a woman independent? Everyone is entitled to their own opinions and thoughts. I think it is free will and the exercise of consent that make a woman independent. For example, if a woman wants to stay in her house as a house wife and raise kids while she wants her husband to fulfil her needs as that's his duty as a husband, and if she is given all of that without being pressurized to work and earn for family to do "50/50" that's empowerment, as her consent to stay at home and raise kids is respected without trapping her in guilt trip and she is well provided for, for all her needs. Contrary to that, a woman who is working and still expected to do everything at home, from raising kids to doing laundry to cooking food and fulfilling her husband's needs without her consent, is not empowered. Independence, in its truest sense, is not merely the ability to earn. It is the ability to make choices about one's life, body, marriage, work, motherhood, education, and emotional needs without coercion, guilt, fear, or social punishment.

In the present times, all these concepts and phenomena have stopped working distinctly in distinct black and white areas and are working in a mess of grey areas. And it is exactly this grey area that abusers are using for their benefit. Unfortunately, now we don't have just illegal or legal relationships between two genders, but we now have consensual acts, rape and marital rape; now we don't have misogyny and harassment but decorated misogyny and calculated harassment; now we don't have a housewife or a working woman, but now we have a stay-at-home mom, an independent woman or a shackled-earning woman. Before turning to statistics, one only needs to observe everyday households: who adjusts their career for children, who carries the emotional burden of marriage, who sacrifices sleep, health, and ambition, and who is blamed when the relationship collapses?



Look around and see how many women are actually happy with their husbands and are truly living their marriage. Look around and see how many women are raped in their marriages. Look around and see how many parents know, understand, and acknowledge terms like marital rape and would support their daughters if

she complains about it.

Unfortunately, the men in our society still consider women their property and not as individual beings. They are still expected to perform like robots and expected to stay happy while doing so. Why? Because “achi larkian aise nahi karti” and no one knows who decided these characteristics of an “achi larki.” And you know what the worst part is? The worst part is that all of this is being practiced in the name of a religion that itself has empowered women the most.

To understand women’s empowerment within an Islamic framework, two concepts are particularly relevant: **Qawwam** and **Kuf’/Kafa’ah**. Qawwam, in its original context, is understood as responsibility, protection, and financial maintenance, not ownership or control. A man’s role as qawwam does not give him the right to dominate a woman; rather, it makes him accountable for her dignity, safety, and well-being. In the simplest terms, Qawwam is a provider. In Islam, the father, brother, son, and husband are Qawwam.

A Qawwam is bound by the Almighty to provide food, clothing, shelter, and her needs that include material as well as non-material things. This also includes provisions to be made for her education, career, and marriage. In Islam, a woman is supposed to be the Queen of the house and not someone who has to beg for basics. A woman is not supposed to beg for food, clothes, empathy, warmth, and connection. A woman is not supposed to work for her children's food, clothes and other basic needs. Even when a woman breastfeeds her child, she can demand monetary compensation for it. It is the duty of a father to get her daughter a good education and then get her married to the man she consents to, or stay single if she wants to stay single. It is the duty of her husband to take care of her dignity, food, clothes, and shelter as per her requirements and standards. If at any point a conflict arises and they find it hard to live with each other, Allah has given the way out as Divorce or Khula with dignity.

The human body belongs to Allah; that is why suicide is haram. If one cannot harm one's own body, how can we harm someone else's body, let alone a woman whom you are supposed to protect and would be held accountable for? A woman cannot be called independent if her consent is ignored within marriage. Marriage does not erase personhood. It does not convert a woman's body, labor, emotions, or silence into permanent permission.

The other concept of **Kuf'** or compatibility reminds us that marriage is not merely a social arrangement. It requires suitability, consent, respect, and shared values. Yet in many societies, when a woman considers compatibility, financial stability, family background, attraction, or religious character, she is judged for exercising the very discernment that marriage requires. When a woman and a man get married, they are supposed to look for compatibility, a parameter outlined by the Holy Quran itself. And now, when we read this ayah together with what the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, we come to know about 4 parameters that we can consider to look for in compatibility. These are beauty, wealth, family name, and deen, out of which the Holy Prophet preferred deen. It is important to note that the guideline given by the Quran to get married is compatibility, and what we are supposed to do is to look for compatibility in these four domains.

Now, if we talk about the present era and come across someone choosing their life partner on the basis of beauty, wealth, family name and deen, that person is judged, especially if it's a girl.

The millennial women are not just fighting this generational gap, but also preventing the inherited gender-biased baggage from being passed down to their younger siblings and children. They have normalized conversations about mental health, postpartum depression, emotional abuse, and personal boundaries. They chose honesty over silence and self-respect over social approval. They called oppression by its name, refused to fit into narrow definitions of womanhood, and preserved their individuality. They have the guts to call a spade a spade, and know their worth is not determined by an ignorant mind. The impact of this resistance is already visible in Gen Z and Gen Alpha.

In essence, true empowerment cannot be measured only by income, education, marriage, or motherhood. It is measured by whether a woman's consent is respected, her dignity is protected, her aspirations are acknowledged, and her humanity is recognized. Empowerment begins at home, not in slogans. Until families learn to practice the respect they claim to believe in, women will continue to remain independent in theory but shackled in reality.

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Who Is Actually Winning the AI Race?

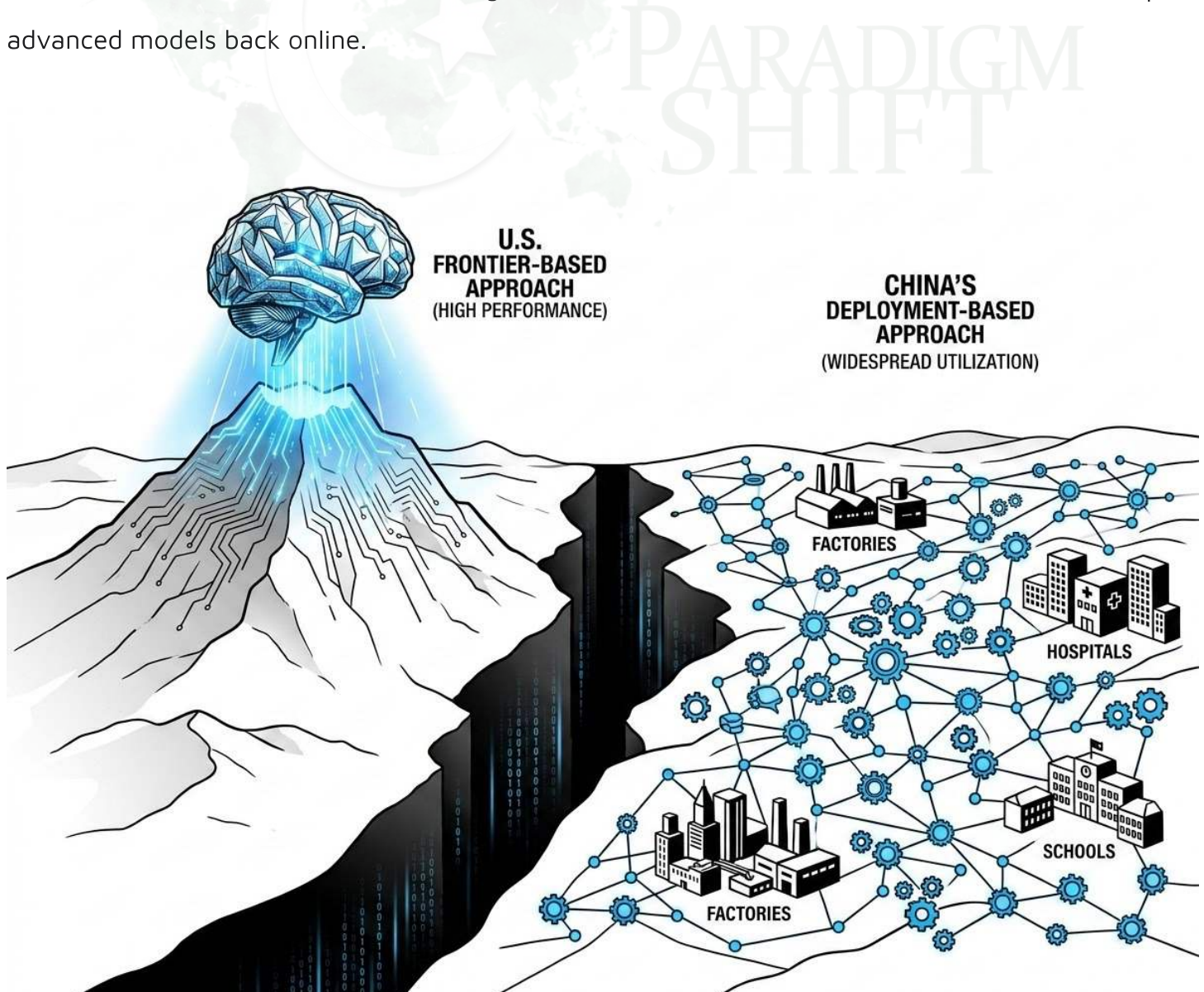
About the Author



Talha Arshad is an undergraduate student of International Relations at the School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. His writing focuses on great-power politics, with a current emphasis on the strategic dimensions of the US-China technology rivalry.

The U.S. Commerce Department ordered Anthropic to terminate worldwide access to its two most sophisticated AI systems on 12 June 2026, citing national security concerns. The government stated these systems were too advanced and ran the risk of being exploited by foreign nationals employed by U.S. companies. Due to the absence of adequate tools to distinguish American customers using the product from other customers globally, both models were taken offline throughout the globe within a few hours after the order was received.

One day later, a relatively obscure Chinese company in the tech community but virtually unknown to the vast majority of the public released GLM-5.2, a rival to Anthropic's technology, and made it publicly available, free of charge, along with the source code containing detailed technical specifications regarding the development of GLM-5.2. [Eighteen days after the Anthropic models were deactivated](#), the United States government rescinded its order and allowed Anthropic's advanced models back online.



One should take time to consider the eighteen days indicated above as a single event where nearly all of the issues involved in the US-China artificial intelligence competition occur. This does not just tell a story of which country has more advanced technology. Instead, it tells of the fundamentally divergent theories of how technology works and, at the same time, of the United States learning that there are limitations on its ability to set rules unilaterally.

Two Different Theories of Power

Measurement of the US-China AI competition has frequently relied upon counting. Examples include counting the number of advanced chips each country produces, data center size, or model scores on standardized tests. Based on all aspects of measurement cited here, the US continues to



lead China. In addition, the US continues to dominate what is referred to as the Frontier — a small number of the highest-performing AI Models worldwide.

A recent report from [Epoch AI](#) states that the US company Nvidia manufactures close to 50% of the world's installed base of AI chips and approximately 65% of the usable computer capacity; in contrast, Huawei remains the

closest competition to Nvidia among domestic Chinese chip manufacturers, yet lags with respect to raw performance and therefore must expend significantly greater amounts of energy than Nvidia.

When you consider the chips as the whole game, you are counting them as you count them. Many detailed analyses have been conducted and published up to June of 2026, including a very extensive analysis by the Brussels-based research and public policy center [Bruegel](#), which shows that the competition is not just about hardware but also about the software layer that will allow anyone to use the hardware. Nvidia's continued dominance in the marketplace stems from providing the software package CUDA as a free product, locking an entire generation of developers to their hardware platforms. On the other side of the coin is Huawei's approach, which is the complete opposite of Nvidia's; Huawei has developed and released its CANN software package as an open-source project and has also developed a plugin that allows developers to utilize their current development tools without interruption while switching to Huawei chips in the backend of their applications.

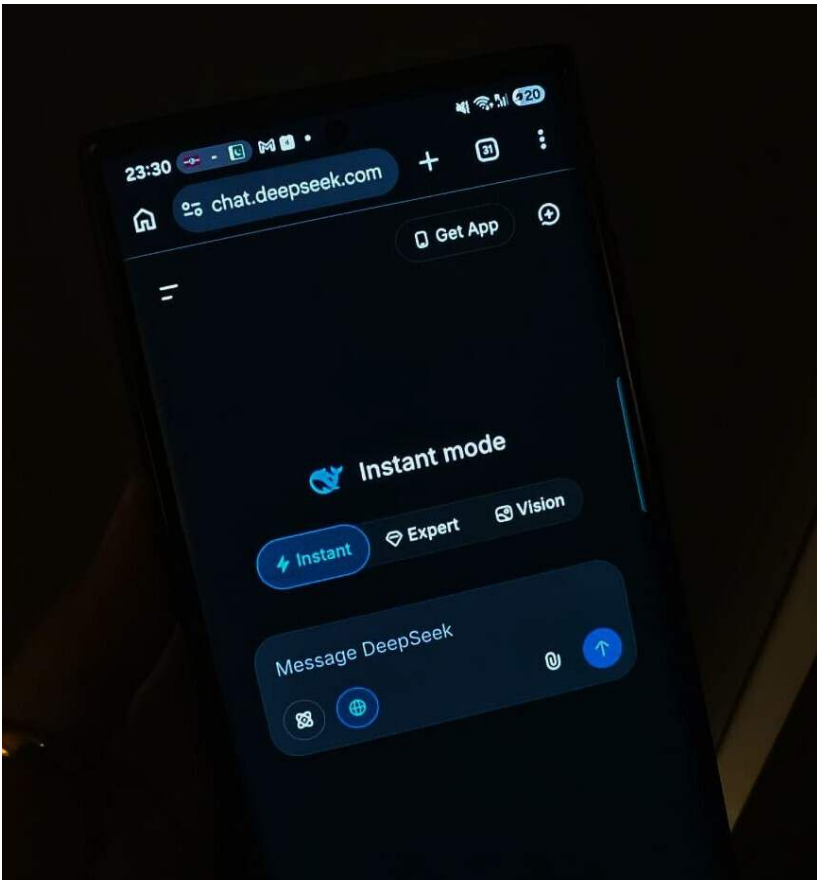
Although this war is less expensive and has less visibility than the Chip War, it may have a greater impact because it will determine whether future generations of engineers from Lagos to Jakarta to Karachi will, by default, use either American or Chinese platforms as the basis for their work products.

Separate from the terminology used to describe the distinction between "frontier" capabilities and "day-to-day" utilization of these frontiers (i.e., "transitional"), this distinction is the basis of the analyst's assumption that two different methods will produce competing advantages in Washington's "frontier-based" approach and Beijing's "deployed-based" approach.

Washington's "frontier-based" approach advances the view that by attaining technological superiority, Washington will ultimately achieve a broader strategic advantage. In contrast, there is now an increasing number of analysts, such as Emanuele Rossi in recent articles published in India Narrative, who report that gainful deployments of adequate technological assets throughout factories, hospitals, universities, and governmental institutions will ultimately produce greater benefits than having the best technology in only select locations.

The Cheap and the Many

China's strategy for advancing AI is mainly driven by financial motives rather than ideological



motivations. After DeepSeek introduced its initial models, many Chinese companies adopted an approach centered on developing models that are sufficiently effective and priced so competitively that cost is no longer a decisive factor for most users.

Research by the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) indicates that, by late 2025, downloads of Chinese models on the open-source platform Hugging Face had surpassed those of American models.

According to current data, seven out of the ten highest-rated models in the open-weight category (by performance) are from China. Some companies in Silicon Valley have been using Chinese models for simple, large-volume tasks, while American ones are used for difficult, low-volume work at significantly higher prices.

In conclusion, this method of operation does not primarily aim to achieve the best performance in benchmarking competitions but aims to obtain market share prior to making any profits (i.e., expecting to create a lasting market through extensive use). It is similar to how a currency develops significance based on whether or not it has widespread use, as opposed to intrinsic characteristics or who or what issues it.

The Case for Staying Closed

The main argument against the United States is based on the trade and security issues associated with these companies' operations. [Anthropic's position paper](#) states that limiting access to the most advanced AI systems is driven by safety rather than economic competition. Anthropic's paper states that there is research showing that potential malicious requests for open-weight models from China outnumber requests for American models, especially when using techniques to circumvent security measures like jailbreaking. Once an AI model's weights are made accessible to the public, anyone who downloads the model can bypass any pre-existing security measures and have access to significant technological capabilities as either a government or a non-governmental entity.

Nevertheless, an essential limitation is the need to recognize the fact that Anthropic is not a neutral or independent player in this scenario. Being an American company, Anthropic's commercial interests are in keeping export controls in place, as well as maintaining an American-led global intelligence and defence system for AI technology.

The broad Export-control policy in the global market may hinder the ability of American technology to create innovative technologies, if they result in greater independent Chinese AI, as a result of excluding China from being a player in the American technology ecosystem (Nvidia's Chief Executive Officer, [Jensen Huang](#)), stating that "the more you restrict China from participating in our ecosystem, the greater the opportunity you provide for them to create their own independent solutions.."



Image Details: Huang arrives for a dinner for Crown Prince and Prime Minister M. bin Salman Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Tuesday, November 18, 2025, at the White House. (Official White House Photo by Daniel Torok), Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0

The 18-day stop on the wall of Fable and Mythos gave added support to this position, as the removal of those two products allowed Chinese companies to demonstrate to potential customers



the availability of American AI to a limited number of users, while Chinese AI can be made available to the entire globe. This message is particularly appealing to both low-budget developers and governments within the Global South who, by comparison, would have little chance of having access to the most-up-to-date American models or products.

An Old Question, Asked Again

In 1969, Joseph Needham raised the famous Needham Question to explain why Europe, not China, became the site of the Industrial Revolution, even though China was historically a leader in technological and scientific advancements. A

contemporary academic investigation is now being conducted about how China is moving away from stagnation and into a [period of renewed creativity](#). In the current context, researchers are attempting to understand how China has achieved its current growth rate and questioning the previously held belief that China's growth was purely the product of adopting Western technology.

It is important to understand that there is currently no evidence to suggest that there will be a predetermined victor in this competition at some point in time.

In his influential historical work on [imperial overstretch](#) and the decline of great powers, Paul Kennedy provides valuable historical insights into the nature of declining great powers, which often result from domestic institutions' inability to adjust to their respective societies' changing expectations, rather than from external competition.

As such, no long-term predictions can be made about either the United States or China experiencing failure. Thus, when making predictions about either country's future path, it is also wise to consider each author's level of expertise with regard to their respective research area.

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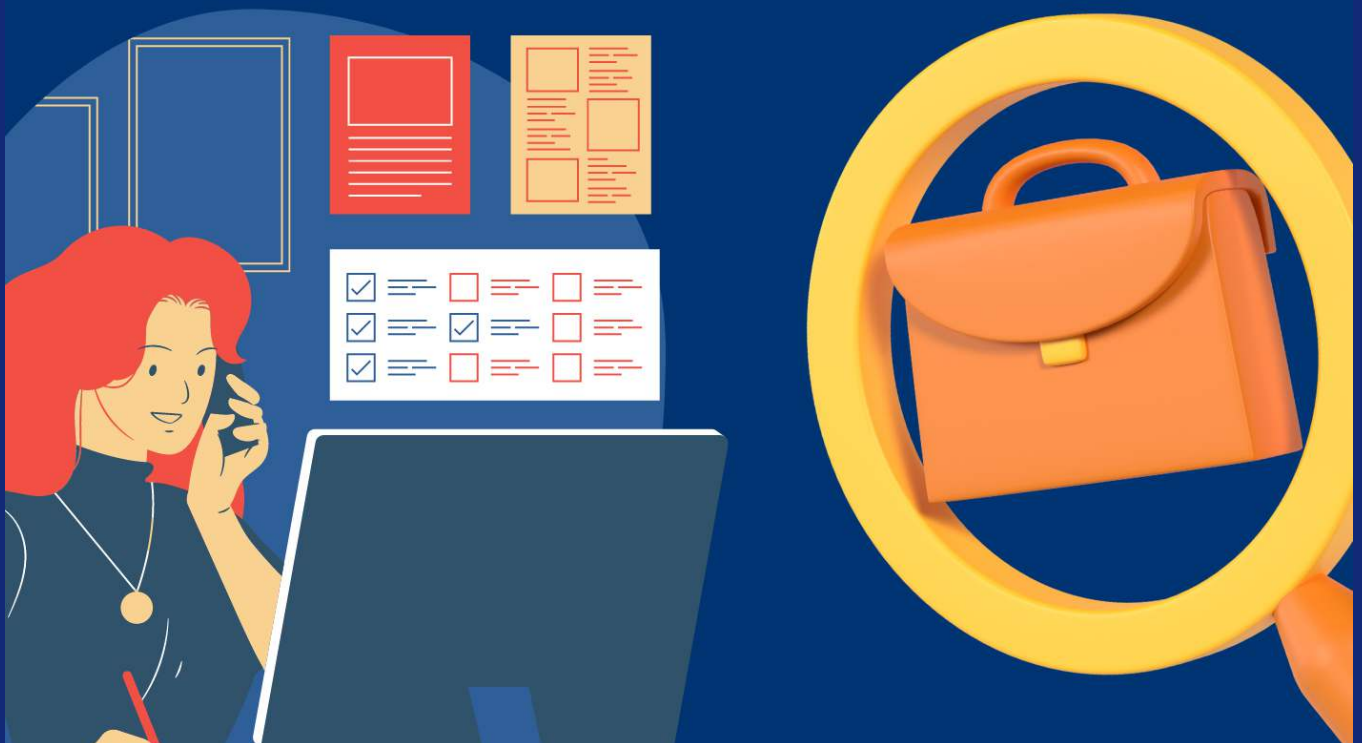


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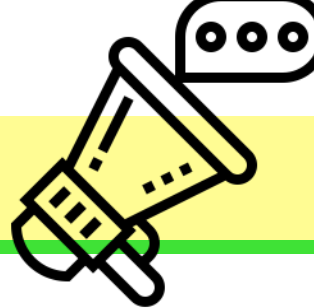
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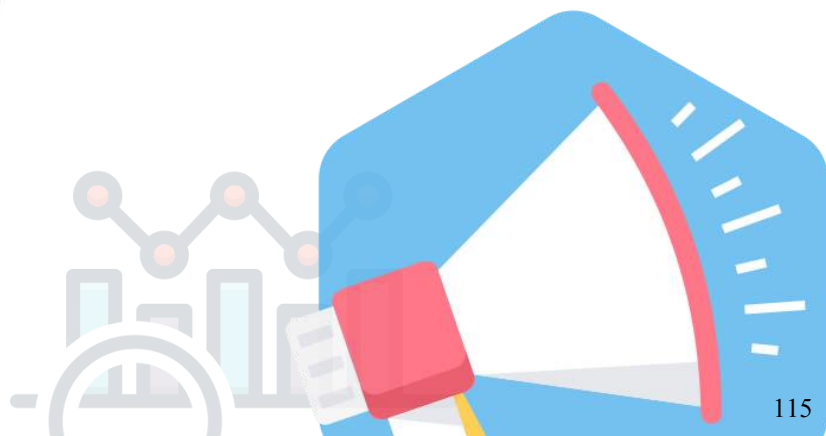


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