

# NEWS LETTER



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## Focus Areas

- Desk of Chairman
- Think Tank Wing
- Research and Consultancy Wing
- Education and Learning Wing
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**Shahid Javed Burki**  
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## Pakistan's New Alliances

Although Prime Minister Shabaz Sharif is the nominal head of the Pakistani state, the real exercise of power is by Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir who has accumulated a number of titles that clearly indicates where the power of governance really resides. One of his initiatives has been to conclude agreements with a number of predominantly Muslim states in the region. The first move in this direction was the defense pact with Saudi Arabia, by far the strongest Muslim state in the world. Since the

conclusion of this agreement, Pakistan has been visited by a number of political leaders from the Muslim world. Each visit concluded with the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOUs) if not a full-fledged agreement. These understandings are not only with the countries of the Arab world. Turkey has also expressed an interest in concluding an agreement with Islamabad.

Among the many flashpoints in the Muslim world is the growing unrest in Iran where the ruling class of clerics have made clear that they will use extreme force to subdue the protesters including groups of women who have come out in the streets to agitate for fundamental improvements in the quality of their lives. According to a report by the Iran Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) death toll caused by the use of force by the Islamic state had by January 11 reached 500 including 14 law enforcement people. Although women were prominently involved in the protests, it was high inflation that was the primary cause.

The official version of the unrest was different from that of the human rights groups. The government said that the enemies of the Iranian people trained a group of saboteurs both inside and outside the country to destroy public and private properties and kill innocent people. "The enemy has infiltrated trained terrorists into the country. Rioters and saboteurs are not the protesting people. We listen to the protesters and have made our utmost efforts to solve their problems," said President Masoud Pezeshkian. Donald Trump, the American President was preparing his country and the world that America may get involved on the side of the protesters. On January 10 he posted on his media account: "Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The U.S. stands ready to help!!!!"

Raza Pahalvi, the son of the late Iranian Emperor who had fled from the country when Ayatollah Khomeini had boarded a plane bound for Tehran from Egypt where he had lived in exile joined the latest fray in his country. "I'm prepared to return to the country and the first possible opportunity. I'm already planning to do that," he said on Fox News Sunday Morning Features with Maria Bartiromo. "My job is to lead this transition to make sure that no stone is left unturned, that in full transparency, people have an opportunity to elect their leaders freely and to decide their own future."

As the Pakistani newspaper Dawn put it in its editorial on January 11, 2026 that there is much for Pakistan to be concerned about. "Iran is an adjacent neighbor and also a brotherly nation. The uprising there cannot be simply considered an internal manner. Given the actors involved and the global forces seeking an opening. Pakistan must remain wary of any situation that brings another global conflict to its doorstep. That said, the ruling class must identify and accept its mistakes and move to address them decisively and transparently. It must win back the trust of those protesting and accommodate their demands to avoid further meltdown. Meanwhile the Iranian people must remain wary of those exploiting their divisions while posing as friends. Ultimately, a nation must decide what is best for itself."



**Shahid Najam**

**Vice Chairman**

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## Changing World & Democratic Deficit – Challenges for

In a rapidly changing world characterized by use of deterrence and brute force by the powerful and mighty to bulldoze the global systems and norms in pursuit of their myopic and ill-conceived policy objectives, it is inevitable for Pakistan, and not merely a probable choice, to recalibrate its strategic engagement in the international political and economic arenas to safeguard its national interest and sovereignty. This would however, a priori, require articulation of a strong national commitment, internal harmony, social cohesion and all-inclusive shared vision to define a composite set of policy metrics around geo-strategic, geo-economic and geo-political dictates for carving out a sovereign, self-standing and sustaining role on the global landscape. For the purpose, the country as a whole need to carry out a serious introspection and an inner exercise of responsibility at and across all levels especially by the major players and stakeholders including politicians, bureaucrats, judiciary, media and more importantly the establishment to rid the country of "toxic, illusory and delusive" ill-conceived sense of internal stability and venerated international standing. The command-obedience governance paradigm, praetorian-pluralist swing and sway, and conformity-confrontation culture, inculcated through historical experience and mimic learning have to be abandoned to create a pervasive pluralist

and inclusive societal ethos conducive for "Pakistan first" national sentiments.

Pride in Pakistan based on shared identity and connectedness should constitute the cementing bond to glue the ethnic, religious, cultural and spatial diversity and parochial interests into oneness and unity. This internal strength, resolute bondage and national belongingness, however, could only and only be developed through state-citizen synergy which quintessentially derives from empowerment of people and exercise of their collective choice through free and fair elections, and establishment of a democratic and representative system. In a coherent, dynamic and viable polity, people themselves determine their destiny and future and as the system develops and matures, its own dynamics culminate in consolidating constitutional supremacy and rule of law; fair power distribution; effective, and accountable functioning of the state apparatus; and above all in mustering a national collective will to define and explicate its role among the community of nations as a sovereign, autonomous and independent state to conduct its international relations in pursuit of its national interests based on universally agreed international norms and standards and established mechanisms. This indeed is the only pathway to effectively respond to the changing world order and to prepare the country for carving out a constructive role both in safeguarding the national interests and contributing to world's peace and security, sustainable and inclusive human development and balancing overall economic well-being with environmental integrity of the planet. earth.



**Muhammad Firas Shams**  
**Director Research & Think**  
**Tank Functions**  
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## The West-Led Order is in a Free-Fall

The rules-based order has been undergoing a decay for couple of years now catalyzed by the Trump factor. In other words, there has been a global reset manifesting with loci of powers gradually shifting and perpetually emerging. The aforementioned order led by particularly the United States of America has been unabashedly embracing neo-imperialism in case of Venezuela and Iran, openly orchestrating a regime change, although history is fraught with instances of US-backed coup d'états against Socialist and anti-American dispensations. However, what is different in the present mise-en-scène is that there is a warmonger-in-chief in the Oval office who conspicuously has outright contempt for international law and espousing a root and branch destruction policy. One might disagree with the captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's style of ruling his country or Hugo Chávez's brand of socialism, but the way the US conducted seemingly Hollywood inspired Operation Absolute Resolve on foreign soil, which according to many is akin to kidnapping an international leader and his wife Cilia Flores. It even trumps the brand of US imperialism that the world witnessed in Iraq during the Bush presidency. Trump didn't mince his words when referred to managing and selling Venezuela's oil, which according to many international relations pundits, was the primary objective behind Operation Absolute Resolve. Caracas holds the world's largest proven oil reserves even surpassing Saudi Arabia, with 303 billion barrels, which in other

words is a field day for Trump's inner circle of American investors.

Over in Iran, there have been genuine protests against the clerical regime especially by the traders due to the acute economic woes triggered especially by the devaluation of Iranian Rial, but the protests erupted into violent scuffles; former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo even tweeted how CIA and Mossad agents are embedded with the rioters. Trump along with other Western leaders have made no secret of promoting and facilitating a regime change in Tehran in order to install a pro-West government akin to pre-Islamic revolution Shah Regime. The Middle East is once again overcast by dark clouds of a war between Iran and the US, notwithstanding the advices of Middle Eastern leaders; the likes of veteran and hawkish Senator Lindsey Graham has thrown a shade on Arab allies for making diplomatic bids to stop a possible Iran-US all-out war. Trump has led his country to a blind alley as he has reiterated that an armada is headed towards the shores of Iran, however the pretext of "liberating" the Iranians has become flimsy as the protests have ceased.

Now the US and Israel see the highly advanced missile program of Tehran as a threat after the US supposedly destroyed Iran's nuclear capability using bunker busters. Moreover, quite interesting is that fact that those speaking up, many have come out of the woodwork including Western politicians, Zionist segment of the Iranian diaspora and bourgeois/liberal feminists for rights of women in Iran which in fact is a bona fide issue were either tight lipped or outrageously selective by turning a blind eye towards the massacre and systemic rape of Palestinian women as well as children. The above examples solidifies the notion that the rules-based or West-led order is in a free-fall. The hypocrisy of the order also manifested once Trump made his nefarious designs for Greenland public, the muffled opposition from

European allies surfaced; the same people who have been silent on the exercise of imperialism vis-à-vis Iran, Gaza and Venezuela, now have their conscience awaken since it encroaches their scope of power in the Global North.

The decline of the rules-based order has somewhat been echoed by the Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney who said that the old order is not coming back and urged middle powers to come together during a speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos. Arnaud Bertrand of Zeteo describes Carney's words announcing that the West lost the Second World War. The speech is being described as one of most significant speeches made by a global leader in the last three decades. Carney said, *"It is time for companies and countries to take their signs down"*, the signs signify American hegemony. Canada being a member of both NATO and G7 as well as amongst the closest allies of the US historically and a neighbor of the US made a comparison of Trump's hegemony to that of USSR. He held no punches and called for the aforementioned hegemony's end stating that the world should stop living within it. Being a central banker, the Canadian Prime Minister is cognizant of how a world order akin to trust in a currency or a financial system for that matter, invariably hinges on the maintenance of a belief. Bertrand states that the world knew that the story of the rules-based order was partially false, however this fiction of a belief was useful. As part of a reactive foreign policy, subsequent to Carney's speech, Trump revoked Canada's invitation to the newly formed Board of Peace for Gaza. In addition to alienation by the US, Starmer's UK has been trying to reconfigure relations with America's Communist alter-ego, China, forging multi-dimensional ties across various streams of intercontinental collaboration. This epitomizes how China is a global pole of power and very well an alternate for global leadership and collaboration. Another shifting of paradigm

is indicative by how "mother of all deals" has been signed between EU's Ursula von der Leyen and India's Narendra Modi. The sands of regional and global alliances and treaties have been shifting and the US-led rules-based order is witnessing fragmentation.



**Rehmat Ullah**  
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### **Ecology of Innovation System - Pakistan Needs S&T Commission**

Pakistan has experienced a lot of scientific developments in the last 4 to 5 decades. The innovation competitive index of Pakistan denies all those efforts. There is a need to find a relationship between having more than 300 Research & Development (R&D) institutions, more than 10 thousand PhDs, 200 universities and huge investments in labs and laboratories versus the Competitiveness Index of Pakistan around 110<sup>th</sup> and 99<sup>th</sup> in terms of global Innovation Index in the world. We need to question the causes behind this highly lopsided relationship. The ecology subject has some answers to this question.

The ecological perspective on innovation, rooted in systems theory, offers a powerful explanatory framework. In ecology, individual species do not thrive in isolation; their survival depends on complex, adaptive interactions with other organisms and environmental conditions. Similarly, innovation is a systemic phenomenon, requiring coordinated interaction among universities, industry, government, financial institutions, regulators, and society at large.

The development is in vain when done in isolation by one or few stakeholders. The very exponential efforts yield no good results due to disintegration with other stakeholders who influence the situation. A very high tech economically viable technology can fail due to simple consumer perception or a technical point of regulation and law. The national innovation system approach is more connected with the ecology approach as an intertwining network of multiple stakeholders of both sides as technology adopters and technology producers builds the entire ecosystem that translates science into technology and produces economic results along with social development.

The fragmented structure of science, technology, education and industries in Pakistan demands a highly powered Science and Technology (S&T) commission that can connect, inspire and drive all S&T stakeholders in Pakistan to a single focused agenda of export economy led by technological interventions. The independent commission free from all bureaucratic barriers and complexities can provide a moon-shot vision of technology led growth in Pakistan. Having resourcefulness, the commission can move fast, drive the private sector quickly and connect the fragmented structure into a unified vision of technology led export economy of Pakistan.



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### **Unveiling the Nobel Prize: A legacy of Recognizing Excellence**

Every year since 1901, last year also, the Nobel Prize season culminated with the award giving ceremony held on December 10, 2025. A total of 14 laureates from across six categories were announced as winners for 2025's Nobel Prize. As we know, the Nobel Prize is one of the most prestigious awards, recognizing outstanding contributions from recipients around the world in specific categories including: Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, Peace and Economics. But how many of us are aware about the history of this most esteemed of prize and how it all started?

#### **History of Nobel Prize:**

The Nobel Prizes are a set of international awards established by Alfred Nobel of Sweden (1833-1896). Alfred Nobel was a genius himself, being an inventor, chemist, engineer, and a wealthy businessman. His most famous invention is dynamite, which he got patented in 1867. His invention revolutionised the construction industry as dynamite became the core material in the construction of roads, tunnels and canals more effectively and expeditiously. It brought him lot of fame and success. However, Nobel was a man of conscience. The fact that dynamites were later used extensively during warfare for destructive purposes affected him deeply. It was this episode in his life which led him to devote his wealth towards serving humanity by establishing the Nobel Prize as a means of

recognizing outstanding contributions and achievements at global level, in the field of Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, Economics, and Peace. The first of these awards was conferred upon the recipients in 1901. Since then, it has established itself as the most prestigious international set of awards.

### **Names of Institutions which select candidates for Nobel Prize:**

- (a) The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences for Physics and Chemistry
- (b) The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet for Medicine
- (c) The Swedish Academy for Literature.
- (d) The Norwegian Nobel Committee for Peace
- (e) The Sveriges Riksban for Economics.

The nomination and selection process is an elaborate and transparent one. After a thorough scrutiny, winners are selected by respective institutions (named above). Finally, the names of the selected winners are announced publicly in October of each year and the prizes are conferred upon the Nobel Laureate formally in a grand ceremony.

### **The Nobel Prize Ceremony in Sweden:**

The Nobel Prize Ceremony is held annually in Stockholm on the 10th of December (which is also the death anniversary of Alfred Nobel) for all categories except the Peace Prize, which is held in Oslo, Norway. The ceremony is attended by the Nobel Prize winners from all over the world, and by members of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and other royal and high dignitaries.

### **Highlights of the Award giving Ceremony:**

The Ceremony held in Stockholm is indeed a very special occasion. The world gets to hear lectures from the selected cream of Nobel

laureates from around the world who made ground breaking discoveries and research in their areas of specialisation. They receive their awards from none other than the monarch of Sweden in the fields of Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, and Economics at Stockholm, whereas the award for Peace is bestowed upon to the laureates by the Chairman of the Norwegian Nobel Committee, at Oslo. Both the award giving ceremonies held at Stockholm and Oslo get extensive media coverage and are broadcast live globally, giving an opportunity for the rest of the world to participate in the event.

In conclusion, it is a matter of great honour and pride for a nation if any one of their citizens are awarded the coveted Nobel Prize. Pakistan too has two such world-renowned heroes who are household names. Abdus Salam was our first Nobel Laureate in Physics (1979), the other being Malala Yousufzai who earned the Nobel Peace Prize (2014). They are national heroes and provide impetus for others to follow suit.



**Saleem Ranjha**  
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### **Sustainability at Wan Miana: A Village That Invested Its Way Out of Fragility**

In much of rural Pakistan, sustainability is discussed as an aspiration. In Wan Miana, a village in Punjab, it is increasingly a balance sheet item. Over the past decade, the village has quietly assembled a portfolio of interventions, financial, technological and agricultural, that together suggest a model for

rural resilience rooted less in aid and more in disciplined capital deployment. The results are modest in scale but notable in structure. The cornerstone has been access to finance. Through Akhuwat's interest-free lending, PKR 650 million has reached more than 13 thousand plus families. The absence of interest has mattered less than predictability; households could invest in assets rather than merely smooth consumption. That predictability now underpins investments in health, energy and farming.

Healthcare, often the weakest rural link, has been partially decoupled from geography. A telemedicine programme operating for 12 years has treated over 35 thousands plus patients, supported by an on-ground ambulance. Preventive care has improved not through large hospitals but through continuity. Education has followed a similar logic; the local school's adoption of e-learning and smart boards has narrowed, if not eliminated, the rural-urban digital gap.

Energy transition has been incremental but deliberate. Sixty homes have been fully solarized through grants; another 35 through a mix of grants and interest-free loans; and 55 more are in progress under blended finance. Notably, charitable giving has shifted away from food rations towards solar panels, an implicit acknowledgement that resilience beats relief.

Agriculture shows the clearest economic logic. Burning crop residue has been reduced replaced by green fertilizer and supplementary crops such as jantar. Out of 130 acres at Ranjha Farms, 89 are now solar-powered, with green meters already reducing operating costs and rainwater harvesting planned next. Kinnow orchards are being converted to high-density plantations, increasing plant counts from 5,500 to a projected 13,000 on the same land. Guava,

bamboo groves and forest land conversions further diversify risk and revenue.

The total investment stands near PKR 25 million. Returns have already been realized not as windfalls, but as reduced costs, higher yields and energy independence. A new fund now targets solar tube wells paired with rainwater harvesting, addressing the next bottleneck, water.

Wan Miana's lesson is not that villages can become self-sufficient overnight. It is that when finance is patient, technology appropriate and agriculture treated as an enterprise rather than a tradition, sustainability stops being a slogan and starts looking replicable.



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### Impact of Information and Communication Technology on Higher Education in Pakistan

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in shaping higher education in Pakistan. In recent years, colleges and universities across the country have increasingly adopted ICT tools to improve teaching, learning, and academic administration. With the rapid growth of digital technology, ICT has become an essential component of modern higher education.

One of the key roles of ICT in Pakistani colleges and universities is improving access to educational resources. Students can now use the internet to access online journals, e-books, research databases, and digital libraries

provided by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). This access supports research-based learning and helps students stay updated with global academic developments. ICT has also enabled students from remote and underdeveloped areas to benefit from quality educational content through online platforms.

ICT has significantly enhanced teaching and learning methods at the higher education level. The use of multimedia presentations, smart classrooms, and learning management systems such as Moodle and Google Classroom has made lectures more interactive and effective. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, online classes and virtual lectures became common in Pakistani universities, demonstrating the importance of ICT in ensuring continuity of education during emergencies.

Another important contribution of ICT is the promotion of distance and blended learning programs. Universities such as Allama Iqbal Open University and Virtual University of Pakistan rely heavily on ICT to deliver education nationwide. These institutions provide opportunities for working students and those unable to attend on-campus classes, thereby promoting inclusive and lifelong learning.

ICT also plays a vital role in developing skills required for the modern job market in Pakistan. Through ICT-based education, students gain digital literacy, research skills, communication abilities, and technical expertise. These skills enhance employability and prepare graduates to compete both nationally and internationally.

Thus, ICT has transformed higher education in Pakistan by improving access to knowledge, enhancing teaching methods, supporting distance learning, and preparing students for a technology-driven economy. Effective integration of ICT is essential for the continued growth and quality improvement of colleges

and universities in Pakistan.

Despite its advantages, the use of ICT in higher education in Pakistan faces several challenges, including limited infrastructure, unequal internet access, lack of trained faculty, and frequent power shortages in some regions. Addressing these issues requires government investment, institutional support, and proper training programs.



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### **Institutionalizing Agripreneurship Education through Policy, Academia, & Corporate Collaboration**

From a policy perspective, an innovative introduction of semester-long agripreneurship courses/education across Pakistani universities by aligning academic curricula with national development priorities, market realities, and climate resilience imperatives has emerged as a strategic instrument for operationalizing government commitments to food security, youth employment, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) development, and climate adaptation. Universities serve as talent incubators, while policy institutions provide regulatory coherence and strategic direction, and corporate partners bridge the gap between innovation and commercialization. This tri-sectoral collaboration has yielded impact-oriented project prototypes; project presentations with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) led by skilled graduates embedded in value chains spanning

agriculture, agri-processing, logistics, agri-tech, and climate-smart services with a significant policy-aligned reform in higher education, workforce development, and sustainable economic planning.

The successful outcomes of semester-based agripreneurship programs now call for a forward-looking transition toward micro credentials. From a policy perspective, micro credentials offer agility, scalability, and inclusiveness, critical attributes for addressing Pakistan's rapidly evolving socio-economic and climatic challenges. These short, competency-based learning modules can be strategically aligned with national policies such as climate action plans, SME promotion frameworks, carbon market readiness, and sustainable agriculture strategies. They also enable continuous skill upgrading without the structural limitations of full-degree programs enabling students to transition from conventional graduates into solution-oriented agripreneurs equipped to address food security, climate vulnerability, and rural livelihoods.

Micro credentials further strengthen governance outcomes by enabling evidence-based capacity building in priority areas, including regenerative agriculture, carbon crediting, waste-to-energy systems, organic certification, water stewardship, and agri-finance. Their modular nature supports decentralized implementation, making them accessible to youth, women, smallholders, and peri-urban/permaculture entrepreneurs, groups central to inclusive growth and climate social justice. By empowering these stakeholders with practical, market-relevant skills, policy objectives, one can move beyond documentation and towards measurable field-level impacts.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, agripreneurship micro credentials contribute directly to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 8 (Decent

Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry and Innovation), SDG 12 (Responsible Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). More critically, they embed climate justice within national development by ensuring that adaptation and mitigation efforts generate livelihoods rather than exclusions. Together, this consortium approach has fostered a new generation of job creators rather than job seekers, particularly in peri-urban and rural contexts, practicing permaculture in real-world, operational settings.

This consortium-driven agripreneurship microcredential framework enables Pakistan to proactively respond to economic, climatic, and food system transitions. It provides a policy-coherent and future-ready pathway to strengthen national resilience, support sustainable SMEs, and operationalize climate commitments. Aligned with national priorities and global sustainability agendas, the model is scalable and positions Pakistan as a regional hub for sustainable agribusiness innovation and inclusive growth, transforming education into action—building resilient food systems, empowering sustainable enterprises, and converting climate ambition into national prosperity.



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### When Enforcement Turns Deadly: ICE and the Crisis of Trust in America

In the United States immigration policy is increasingly unraveling in public spaces, on city streets, and in tragic situations. It is no more merely a matter of laws and statistics. Since the

beginning of US President, Donald Trump's second term in January 2025, Immigration enforcement has expanded significantly, an estimated 540,000 people have been deported by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). What was once framed as a tough on crime agenda is now raising deeper concerns about power, accountability, and the limits of federal authority.

These issues became inevitable in January 2026, when lately two American citizens were murdered during federal immigration operations in Minneapolis. On 7 January, Renee Nicole Good, a 37-year-old mother, was shot and killed while sitting in her car by an ICE agent. Her death was officially described as a homicide by the county medical examiner, although federal authorities claimed exclusive control over the case, preventing state officials from accessing evidence. Less than three weeks later, on 24 January, Alex Petti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse, was also killed during another enforcement operation. The camera footage, which shows Petti unarmed and already subdued when he was shot, seems to paint a different picture than the federal officials' description of the shooting as self-defense. Both cases are still being investigated.

The killings provoked enormous protests in Minneapolis, a city already severely impacted by disputes over police violence since the murder of George Floyd. Minneapolis, however, is not an exception. Cities all around the nation, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, DC, Philadelphia, and Boston, have experienced similar abuse of power by ICE. In numerous of these areas, civil rights organizations have claimed trends of excessive force, racial profiling, and the arrest of U.S. citizens sometimes based on appearance, accent, or mistaken identity. 32 persons died while in ICE custody in 2025 alone; this number has received little official recognition but is causing

increasing public worry.

The institutional structure pertaining to ICE has changed concurrently. In situations involving suspected constitutional infractions, the Trump administration has claimed that ICE agents should be granted *absolute immunity*, so protecting them from lawsuits. Meanwhile, the agency has expanded fast, backed by huge government appropriations. Recruitment has expedited, training has been cut, and standards have apparently been loosened. With less focus on de-escalation, immigration law, and community contact, the ICE Academy's training term has been shortened from 22 weeks to about 8 weeks.

Critics warn that this combination of greater power, weaker oversight, and reduced preparation is a dangerous one. Law enforcement errors carry heavy consequences, and in this context, mistakes are often irreversible. Scholars and civil rights advocates increasingly describe ICE's current role as a crisis of legitimacy, drawing comparisons to earlier periods of unrest in American history. The difference today is that immigration enforcement, rather than local police or state authorities, has become the face of coercive power.

The Minneapolis events have come to represent a larger national reckoning. Fundamentally, the argument is no longer just about immigration; it is also about the extent and nature of the federal government's domestic power. A major problem continues to be striking a balance between national security and the rights and dignity of people residing within U.S. borders. The destruction of public confidence may be more difficult to repair than any border in the absence of significant responsibility and restriction.



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### Gul Plaza or Graveyard? Karachi's Fire Safety Failure

Gul Plaza or a graveyard? Said Zafar Abbas, a social worker, outside the blazing building of Gul Plaza, at M.A Jinnah Road, Karachi, a shopping center and livelihood for most of the people in the city. The inferno erupted from an artificial flower shop where two of the shopkeepers' kids were allegedly playing with the matchsticks, around 10 pm, and spread through almost every shop and floor in mere minutes. It was not the first and sadly not the last fire to erupt in Karachi. Another fire incident happened in a new vegetable market three days after the Gul Plaza incident.

The exact death toll remains uncertain, but reports show that the death toll was approximately 30 people initially, but rose to 71, when over 30 people were found dead at a store on the mezzanine floor during the final stages. Friends and family of the victims stood outside the building until the last stage of the investigation, hoping their loved ones would appear out of that rubble or at least their bodies would be recovered from the debris, but many could only get the remains of their loved ones, not even knowing if these remains were of their family member or someone else. It is the most devastating fire since the 2012 Baldia fire, in which over 250 people died.

According to the statistics revealed by the Fire Brigade Department, Sindh, there were 2,187 fire incidents reported in Karachi between January 1 and December 17 alone, and after every fire incident, it is said by the officials that

strict actions will be taken, but the rise in incidents every year with casualties depicts governance failure. Fire officials said that to serve a city of around 20.3 million people, there are only 28-30 fire stations, which have no advanced equipment.

Bystanders outside the building also mentioned that until firefighters arrived, most of the building was already engulfed in the fire, and after the arrival of the fire crew, many hurdles came in the way. Such as not having enough water and diesel, etc. Moreover, according to the shop owners, the building had multiple exits that were locked at the time of the incidents – a routine practice after 10 pm, but no efforts were made to break down those doors to save the victims, because the damage was beyond their capacity and they did not have enough resources to proceed. Taken together, even after knowing the frequency of fire incidents, no resources were provided to the emergency responders, resulting in numerous casualties.

After this incident, Chief Minister Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah ordered a fire safety audit, but audits had already been conducted before tragedy struck yet no action was taken by authorities. They identified 266 unsafe buildings in the 2024 audit, with 70% of the buildings lacking fire safety system but Karachi Metropolitan City (KMC) and Sindh Building Commission Authority (SBCA) allowed those structures to continue operating. What is worrisome that there is no accountability from any institution with respect to the incident, and government has decided to compensate families with 10 million rupees. However, people this time don't seem to want money, rather they are demanding answers.



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## BIPP Round Up

On December 4, 2025, the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) hosted a lecture by Mr. Shahid Javed Burki, Chairman of the Shahid Javed Burki Institute of Public Policy (BIPP) titled *"Geopolitics, Demographics, and Pakistan's Policy Future"* at the VC Lounge. Mr. Burki discussed how global shifts, including the U.S. pulling back from international engagement under President Trump and aging populations in developed countries, present both challenges and opportunities for Pakistan. He emphasized that Pakistan needs to plan for these changes and use its young people for national development and meet global workforce demands.



Following this, on December 5, 2025, Mr. Faisal Haroon (Consultant at BIPP) organized a research field trip titled *"Unlocking the Potential of Carbon markets, Sustainable Agriculture, Livestock and Forestry"* for Civil Service Academy (CSA) probationers. The visit, arranged in coordination with the Punjab Forestry Department at Jallo Park, aimed to provide hands-on experience and understanding of carbon credits and their application.



Additionally, on December 9, 2025, a delegation from the BIPP, led by Mr. Burki visited The Sahara College Narowal (TSCN) to inaugurate a state-of-the-art solar energy system installed on the college premises. The project, developed and implemented by BIPP in coordination with TSCN, has a minimum generation capacity of 1 megawatt and is designed to significantly reduce the institution's energy costs while promoting sustainable and environmentally responsible practices. The financial savings generated through this solar initiative will be dedicated to the Shahid Javed Burki (SJB) Scholarship Program, ensuring long-term support for financially deserving students, reflecting BIPP's commitment to expanding educational opportunities and empowering future generations.



Moreover, on December 18, 2025, The Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) hosted the launch ceremony of BIPP's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, titled "*The State of the Economy: Climate Change – Mediating Chaos and Crisis*", bringing together leading economists, policymakers, academics, environmental experts, and members of the business community to examine Pakistan's growing economic and governance challenges arising from climate change.



The event featured Mr. Shahid Hussain, Rector, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), as Chief Guest, and Ms. Rizwana Anjum, Team Lead, Green Credit Program, as Guest of Honor. Proceedings opened with a welcome address by Mr. Faheem ur Rehman Saigol, President, LCCI, followed by opening remarks from Mr. Shahid Najam, Vice Chairman, BIPP. Mr. Burki presented an overview of the report, while Dr. Farrukh Iqbal, former Executive Director, IBA Karachi, discussed the state of Pakistan's economy. Mr. Muhammad Firas Shams, Director Research, BIPP, outlined key policy issues and recommendations, complemented by remarks from Dr. Shahid Munir, Vice Chancellor University of Engineering and Technology (UET); Dr. Arifa Tahir, Chairperson, Environmental Sciences, Lahore College for Women University (LCWU); and Dr. Bushra Inayat Rajput, Director General, Khaldunia Institute of Technology and Applied Sciences (KITAAS). The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr. Ejaz Sandhu, Director General, BIPP, as participants emphasized on the urgency of addressing climate change as a central economic challenge and the role of

research institutions, academia, and the private sector in informed and sustainable policymaking.



The launch of BIPP's 18th Annual Report 2025 received wide media coverage. City42 covered it on electronic media, while print media coverage included Express Tribune, The News, Business Recorder, The Business, and Associated Press of Pakistan in English, and Nawa-i-waqt, Mudabbir, Jurat, Mashriq, Jehan Pakistan, and Tijarat in Urdu. We sincerely appreciate their coverage and support.



On January 5, 2026, BIPP signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Premier Waste Management (PWM) and AMEERS Organica, an integral part of PWM. The MoU establishes a framework for non-exclusive collaboration between the parties in areas of mutual interest, particularly focusing on climate change, urban waste management challenges, ecosystem degradation, and the circular economy. The partnership also aims to promote innovative and replicable models in peri-urban agriculture, permaculture farming systems, waste-to-resource solutions, regenerative agriculture, and the development of climate-resilient ecosystems. Following the signing ceremony, the delegation visited PWM's waste management facility and AMEERS Organica farms, where initiatives in climate-smart agriculture, permaculture, intercropping, and horticulture are actively being implemented.



Continuing the policy dialogue on global developments, on January 7, 2026, Mr. Shahid Javed Burki delivered a guest lecture at Center of Aerospace and Security Studies, Lahore (CASS) on "*Evolving Global Order: China-US Reset*", highlighting China's transformative rise, contrasting development models of China and the US, and Pakistan's strategic importance through CPEC.



Subsequently, on January 13, 2026, School of Governance and Society (SGS) at the University of Management and Technology (UMT) hosted Mr. Burki, as a guest speaker for a seminar titled "*Adapting to Global Change: Strategic Pressures and Economic Transformation in Pakistan*". BIPP's Chairman shared valuable insights on the challenges and opportunities facing Pakistan in an era of global change, engaging faculty members, researchers, and students in a thought-provoking discussion.



Meanwhile, on January 14, 2026, BIPP signed a MoU with the Golden Ring Economic Forum (GREF). The purpose of this MoU is to provide a framework of cooperation between the parties in the areas of mutual interest on a non-exclusive basis especially relating to political, economic, strategic and trade issues in the context of Pakistan and Golden Ring Countries (GRCs), collaborate in holding and organizing policy dialogues, seminars, workshops, panel discussions, round table meetings, etc. jointly conducting education and learning and undertaking joint research (R&D), consultancy, capacity buildings and skills management programs.



Furthermore, on January 15, 2026, BIPP signed a MoU with the University of the Punjab (PU). The MoU was signed with the objective of establishing a solar energy system at the PU premises. The savings generated from this project will be directed toward the SJB Scholarship Assistance Program for financially deserving students for a period of 25 years.



On January 19, 2026, the College of Earth and Environmental Sciences (CEES) at PU hosted launch ceremony of BIPP's 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Report 2025, titled "*The State of the Economy: Climate Change - Mediating Chaos and Crisis.*" The event commenced with welcome remarks by Dr. Irfan Ahmed Shaikh, Principal CEES. Mr. Shahid Najam delivered the opening remarks, followed by an overview of the report presented by Mr. Shahid Javed Burki. Mr. Muhammad Firas Shams presented the key findings and recommendations and highlighted the relevance of each chapter to students' study modules, research work, and potential career paths.



Lastly, On January 20, 2026, an MoU was signed between the BIPP and Trade Developers & Protectors (TDP). The purpose of this MoU is to establish a structured and collaborative framework for providing intellectual property (IP) protection, advisory, and related legal services. The collaboration aims to strengthen Pakistan's knowledge economy by enabling affordable, accessible, and professionally managed IP protection, commercialization, and capacity-building services.





## Mission Statement

BIPP's mission is to improve the welfare of the citizenry with particular emphasis on identifying policy measures that will lead to inclusive, people-centered growth with equity, political stability and sustainable development besides fully harnessing the potential for regional and global integration of the country. BIPP primary areas of interest encompass social, economic, environmental and political development and security, trade and foreign policy-related issues.

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