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THE ICC WARRANT THAT SPLIT THE WEST

While the international court's move lends credibility to the growing perception that Israel has become a pariah state in the world, non-compliance by member states reduces the institution to a paper tiger, exposing discrepancies in the reach and application of international law

By **HAMMAD SARFRAZ**

For more than a year, Gaza has been the target of an unrelenting military campaign, widely described by experts as a genocide playing out in full view of the world. Amnesty International, a prominent human rights group, has now joined the growing chorus of critics, formally alleging that Israel has committed unlawful acts during its offensive, causing unprecedented devastation and loss for Palestinians in the besieged enclave.

The London-based rights group's chargesheet, detailed in a sweeping 296-page report, lands as another mounting legal challenge unfolds at the International Criminal Court (ICC). In a striking development last month, the court issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defense minister, Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military commander Diab Ibrahim al-Masri, also known as Deif, accusing them of potential responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The charges, swiftly rejected by Israeli officials as unfounded, have reignited intense global debates about accountability and the West's willingness to uphold the principles of international law.

Based in The Hague and established in 2002 to prosecute the world's most serious crimes, the ICC has long faced a significant limitation – it lacks the power to enforce its own warrants. Instead, it depends on its 124 member states, including all 27 EU nations, to apprehend suspects—a reliance that has highlighted the challenges of delivering justice on the global stage. While the West largely aligns on the need to arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin under a comparable warrant, several governments have begun to waver in their initial support for the ICC's efforts to pursue charges against Netanyahu.

France, for instance, has argued that the charges against Netanyahu lack validity because Israel is not a member of the court. A similar tone of hesitation has emerged from Germany and Italy, aligning Europe's three most populous nations in a noncommittal stance. Hungary, by contrast, stands alone in the European Union, openly declaring its refusal to comply with the court's orders—a departure from the more cautious ambiguity of its counterparts.

Although several European governments, including Norway, Ireland, Spain, and to some extent Belgium, have voiced support for the ICC's principles, the bloc's most influential powers have stopped short of pledging to enforce its warrants. Across the Atlantic, the United States has taken a more overtly oppositional stance. Over the past year alone, it has not only vetoed attempts at the United Nations calling for a ceasefire in Gaza but also "fundamentally rejected" the court's decision, with some lawmakers even proposing sanctions against the tribunal. This hesitance, legal and human rights experts contend, risks promoting a culture of impunity.

Last month, Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof muddied the waters further by suggesting that Netanyahu—the first Western-allied leader to face accusations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the court—could visit the Netherlands without being arrested, despite the charges. His remarks appeared to temper the unequivocal stance of his foreign minister, Caspar Veldkamp, who earlier assured parliament that the Netherlands fully complies with the court's warrant. The mixed messaging, experts argue, not only underscores a broader reluctance among Western nations to uphold the reach and credibility of international law but also exposes a double standard – one for the West's traditional allies and another for its adversaries.

This inconsistency persists even as the conflict in Gaza displays the hallmarks of genocide—a calculated effort to obliterate a national, ethnic, religious, or racial group, as defined under international law. With more than 45,000 dead, nearly two million displaced, and entire cities reduced to rubble, there is little room to argue it is anything but that.

To unpack the implications of the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant and the challenges posed by its lack of enforcement, The Express Tribune conducted a no-holds-barred interview with William Schabas, a leading legal scholar and author of the seminal book Genocide in International Law: The Crime of Crimes. Here is what Schabas, a professor of international law at Middlesex University in the UK, offered as his unvarnished perspective on the matter:

ET: The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister, a former defence minister, and Hamas' current military leader. What are your thoughts on the evidence underpinning these warrants?

WS: Historically, the International Criminal Court made arrest warrant applications public, with both the prosecutor's application and the judges' rulings typically accessible. However, that practice has changed without an explanation from the court.

This makes it difficult to fully assess all the evidence. What is available to the public is based on the charges levied. The charges against Israeli leaders include starvation and attacks on civilian objects, both of which have substantial supporting evidence in the public domain, such as reports from NGOs and media outlets like Al Jazeera. Clearly, there is ample evidence to support these claims.

As for the evidence against the Hamas leader, it concerns actions like the taking of hostages—an issue that is well-documented and not particularly controversial in terms of evidence. To issue an arrest warrant, the court must establish reasonable grounds to believe the crimes occurred. This is a relatively low evidentiary threshold, but it is the necessary starting point for prosecution. I am confident that the prosecutor has more than enough evidence to meet this requirement.

ET: According to Article 27 of the Rome Statute, all individuals are considered equal before the court. However, since Israel is not a party to the Statute, could this provide any basis for exclusion or an excuse to avoid prosecution or trial?

WS: The jurisdiction of the court, in principle, applies to crimes committed on the territory of a state that is a member of the court. It's not controversial that states have the authority to prosecute crimes committed on their territory—that's a fundamental aspect of sovereignty. What happens with the International Criminal Court is that it shares the sovereignty states have over their own territory. So, if Israel has committed crimes on Palestinian territory, then, in principle, Palestine has the authority to prosecute those crimes.

I don't see any objection or problem in that regard. Article 27 specifically addresses the immunity of heads of state, as heads of state and government typically enjoy immunity under international law from other tribunals, except their own. Article 27 removes that immunity within the context of the court. The question then arises whether Article 27 applies to a state that is not a member of the court. Member states have agreed that their heads of state cannot invoke immunity before the court, but this does not automatically extend to non-member states like Israel.

However, the court has made a series of decisions, including one by the appeals chamber—the court's highest authority—that states the prohibition on immunity for heads of state also applies to those from non-member states. This precedent was first applied to President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, then to President Vladimir Putin of Russia, and now to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Most recently, the prosecutor submitted an application regarding General Min Aung Hlaing of Myanmar. This principle now clearly extends to heads of state or government from states that have not joined the Rome Statute.

ET: Is Netanyahu immune from the ICC arrest warrant, as France is claiming?

WS: France has raised a question about this and invoked Article 98 of the Statute, which addresses situations where a state is asked to proceed with the arrest of someone who could benefit from immunity. If you'd asked me this six years ago, I would have said that France had a strong argument.

However, the judges have ruled differently more than once, including very recently, in late October. There was a decision addressing the same argument raised by Mongolia, which declined to arrest Putin when he visited at the end of August. France is entitled to have its own opinion on this issue, but as a member of the court, it must also respect the conclusions reached by the judges.

ET: What does the arrest warrant itself mean for Israel and Netanyahu personally?

WS: The arrest warrant cannot be enforced without Israel's cooperation, unless Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant travel to countries willing to arrest them, which seems unlikely. You asked about France, but I don't think they would even go there. France is not a dictatorship; it's a democracy with an independent justice system.

While a bureaucrat in the French Foreign Ministry may say they won't arrest Netanyahu, it is ultimately a judge who would make that decision. Netanyahu, I believe, would not feel confident that he would be protected if he were to go there.

It will be a real challenge for the court to arrest these two men. There's also a political impact, as no country wants its head of government labelled a wanted war criminal. This has already isolated Putin and will further isolate Netanyahu. It contributes to the growing perception that Israel has become a pariah state in the world.

ET: Do you think it will have any impact on the conflict in Gaza?

WS: This is difficult to say. To the extent that Israel is increasingly isolated, it may have some impact. The problem with Israel is that, even if isolated by the vast majority of countries in the world, it remains effectively a dependency of the most powerful military and economic power, the United States. Without a change in the United States' position, I'm rather pessimistic about what can happen in Israel and Palestine.

ET: What would happen if a majority of Western states, many of which are founding members of the ICC, find reasons not to comply with its arrest orders?

WS: What will happen is that it will ultimately cause great harm to the International Criminal Court, which these states themselves have worked hard to build. They have invested heavily, both financially and politically, in the court, which has a budget of over 200 million euros a year, most of which comes from European states.

These countries are very committed to it. However, the success of the ICC ultimately lies in its reputation and prestige as a truly impartial and independent judicial institution. A little over a year ago, before the latest Gaza conflict, it seemed that the

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UN STANDS PARALYSED AS THE WORLD BURNS

As wars rage and accountability falters, the UN's failures expose a need for urgent reform

By **HAMZA RAO**

Emerged from the charred remains of bombed cities and the cries of a world torn asunder in 1945, the United Nations today appears increasingly toothless as unprecedented headwinds buffet global peace – but no crisis seems to merit more than a yawn in the international room that watches the spectacle with a deafening silence.

Hands of the mighty few continue to wield the weapon of veto to strangle peace efforts at the divided global table – a chilling redux of its predecessor, the League of Nations.

From attacks on Lebanon's sovereignty to the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the smouldering crisis in Ukraine, the UN remains paralysed and all its efforts to enforce peace seem to fall victim to greater security architectures.

With more than 55 conflicts raging across the globe, including genocidal assaults, the reforms in the UN are already a few thousand lives too late.

If any opportunity for meaningful reform ever existed, it vanished almost immediately. A flicker of hope, seen at the second birth of the existing status quo, was almost immediately extinguished.

"A new chapter in the history of the United Nations has begun," proclaimed Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as the Cold War came to an end, heralding what he described as an "extraordinary opportunity" for reform and progress.

However, in an ironic twist, the opportunity seems to have slipped through the cracks. Today, as wars rage and threats multiply, the global political mood has inexplicably turned inward.

Soon after the end of the Cold War, civil wars in the Balkans, Africa, and the 1994 Rwandan genocide exposed the UN's impotence, drawing sharp criticism while exposing a system unable to respond effectively to the crises of the day.

Historically, attempts to reform the organisation at the highest levels have largely faltered, exposing layers of internal corruption. Under pressure from the Clinton administration, NATO bypassed the UN Security Council to bomb Kosovo, setting a dangerous precedent for unilateral humanitarian interventions.

In the early 2000s, the George W. Bush administration embraced preemptive war, casting aside the core principles upon which the UN was founded.

Earlier, under Ronald Reagan, the US distanced itself from the International Court of Justice, and later, it snubbed the new International Criminal Court (ICC) while weakening global arms control frameworks.

Today, Gaza stands as a symbol of devastation—a site of destruction, starvation, and unspeakable atrocities. The suffering of its people once again raises urgent questions about international justice and exposes the double standards that have become painfully apparent. Israeli missiles, tanks, and airstrikes relentlessly batter the homes of helpless Gazans, serving as a glaring example of the failing global order.

Despite this, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's campaign of destruction, which blatantly violates international law, has somehow managed to avoid the scrutiny typically reserved for the actions of other regimes across the world.

Rights groups, including UN rapporteurs, have warned that international law is not obsolete, but rather systematically obstructed. Despite the existence of mechanisms to prevent and punish atrocities such as genocide, the UN's responses have been sluggish and inconsistent.

The system remains hamstrung by the influence of powerful states. The ICC, for instance, has faced intense pressure, particularly in its investigations into Palestine, with progress moving at a painfully slow pace.

On December 2, ICC President Tomoko Akane warned that attacks on the tribunal—largely originating from Washington and Moscow—were "jeopardising its very existence." She pointed to "coercive measures, threats, pressure, and acts of sabotage" against the court, though without naming the US and Russia specifically.

However, observers note that in contrast, cases like Ukraine have seen swift action, which goes on to reveal the blatant double standards at play.









Reforms

Meanwhile, recently, regional powers like Brazil, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria, and South Africa have pushed for an expansion of the Security Council or permanent seats for themselves.

Some have proposed that France relinquish its permanent seat to the European Union following Brexit, especially after France and Germany shared the presidency of the Security Council for two months in 2019.

In 2021, Britain endorsed Germany's bid for a permanent seat. Additionally, in January 2024, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed hope for permanent African representation, citing support from all five permanent members of the Security Council.

However, calls for reform have yet to be answered. Many countries are instead focusing on strengthening their diplomatic influence through other international coalitions.

The debate over Security Council expansion often centres on the balance between legitimacy and effectiveness. In 2013, Saudi Arabia made the rare decision to turn down a non-permanent Security Council seat, stating that it would not serve unless reforms were made to the institution.

Critics of the current system, including advocates of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), argue that the P5's veto power undermines the Security Council's ability to act on global crises. For instance, Russia's vetoes over Security Council action on Ukraine have led some to call for Russia's removal from the P5.

The criticism had already been growing before the invasion; UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein (2014–2018) repeatedly warned that the veto system granted undue power to the P5, putting the UN's future at risk without reform.

"Africa wants the veto abolished," said Sierra Leonean President Julius Maada Bio in August 2024. "However, if UN member states wish to retain the veto, it must be extended to all new permanent members as a matter of justice."

However, reluctance to use force is not limited to the P5. Aspirants like Brazil, Germany, and India have generally opposed interventions, viewing them as violations of sovereignty.

While R2P proponents criticize the Security Council for its lack of political will, others question the UN's ability to manage conflict, pointing to the peacekeeping failures in Rwanda, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

Recently, the UN's handling of the Gaza Strip has come under scrutiny and has reignited debate for reforms, with critics claiming that its delayed and diluted response to calls for a cease-fire has been woefully insufficient.

The truth is, most experts agree, that the system isn't broken—it is functioning to protect vested interests.

While the Council passes resolutions on a variety of global issues, it often finds itself paralysed when the interests of the major powers are at stake. In cases like Russia's invasion of Ukraine or Israel's actions in Gaza, the veto power effectively stymies any meaningful response.

One of the most glaring issues with the Security Council is the lack of accountability for its decisions.

Resolutions may be binding on member states, but they carry little weight unless adopted under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which allows for coercive measures such as military intervention or sanctions. Even then, the Council often fails to follow through on its own resolutions.

There is also no legal recourse for states or individuals who are subjected to sanctions or other punitive measures imposed by the Council.

Reform proposals have been on the table for decades, with two main areas of focus: the composition of the Council and the veto power of the permanent members. The current system, based on the power dynamics of the post-World War II era, is widely considered outdated. However, efforts to amend the UN Charter to address these issues have been repeatedly thwarted by the very powers that benefit from the status quo.

France and other states have called for voluntary self-restraint from the permanent members when it comes to using their veto power in cases involving genocide or war crimes, but these calls have largely fallen on deaf ears.

The need for reform has never been more urgent. Today, there are 55 armed conflicts worldwide—the highest number since World War II.

The UN, which was established to prevent such atrocities, must undergo major changes to address these challenges. The veto power remains a significant roadblock to global peace and security, with decisions often serving national interests rather than the common good.

Proposals from the Lichtenstein Initiative suggest that countries using their veto power explain their actions to the General Assembly, and that vetoes be restricted in cases involving mass atrocities. The reforms are essential if the UN is to regain its credibility and fulfil its original mandate to safeguard peace and justice across the globe.

'Special rights'

In his book, 'No Enchanted Palace', Mark Mazower observes: "In other words, the UN, even more than the League, was to be run by the great powers and far less confidence was reposed in international law as a set of norms independent from, and standing above, power politics."

On the contrary, international law now implicitly recognised "special rights" (and special obligations) for the "great peace-loving states".

In his thought-provoking book, Mazower argues that the United Nations, much like its predecessor the League of Nations, did not arise from a purely liberal vision of universal rights. Instead, it was a product of Victorian-era "imperial internationalism," an ideological and organisational extension of the British Empire.

He explores the provocative argument through brief portraits of several League of Nations figures who reappeared during the drafting of the UN Charter, most notably Jan Smuts, a South African who championed white racial superiority, and Sir Alfred Zimmern, the leading British proponent of liberal internationalism. Both were part of a broader elite group seeking to "shore up a liberal world order that would be compatible with empire and Anglo-American hegemony".

According to Mazower, Smuts saw the League as a way to ensure "white leadership of the world," promote a "global civilizing mission," and support British imperial dominance. His reappearance in the 1940s with a draft preamble for the future UN suggests, for Mazower, that the UN was shaped by the same imperial mindset.

Though the UN Charter ultimately affirmed racial equality, and similar ideals were echoed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When the UN first convened at its New York home in October 1946, the veto was already baked into the Security Council's structure. The five permanent members were handed this privilege on a silver platter due to their prominence after the Second World War, with the hope that they would act in unison to uphold international peace and security.

Fast forward to today, and the picture tells a different story. Israel's war on Gaza rages on without UN intervention. Resolutions brought to the Security Council are frequently dead on arrival, vetoed by the United States—just as it has consistently torpedoed prior resolutions sanctioning

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court's prosecutor was completely indifferent to the situation in Palestine, focusing instead on Ukraine, which appeared to be driven by the European states' agenda. For a time, he didn't seem to take any action on Palestine, but more recently, he has done so, which is a positive step and has helped enhance the court's image as an independent and impartial institution.

However, if the court is seen as just a political tool, and is tainted by the perception that it is not impartial and independent, it would be devastating for the institution. If the rest of the world sees it this way, they will not support the court, and it will become ineffective and mediocre.

ET: If we reach a point where the majority of states find reasons not to comply, as they have suggested or indicated in their statements, will this signify the end of the International Court's reputation or its ability to function as a system of international justice?

WS: We have a lot of international institutions that lack credibility, and I think the ICC will just join them. I don't believe it will mark the end of the institution itself.

It has a large staff, a significant budget, and considerable infrastructure, so I don't see it simply shutting down or ceasing to exist. However, we won't see new countries joining it. Some countries may leave, and it certainly won't live up to the promise that inspired its creation and the widespread support it initially received from many parts of the world, not just Europe.

One of the surprising aspects of the International Criminal Court at its inception was the strong support from African states, which became its largest bloc. They joined because they respected and trusted it, appreciating an organization that, by design, was somewhat independent of the dominance of major powers, particularly the European ones.

But if that trust erodes, these states will lose interest in the ICC. Some might withdraw, and it certainly won't expand. The biggest gap in the ICC's membership today is in Asia. While some Asian states are members, the continent overall has the weakest level of support for the court. That won't improve as long as countries in Asia perceive the ICC as a tool of Western European states that fails to act independently and impartially.

ET: How do these warrants compare to those issued for Omar al-Bashir and Vladimir Putin? What similarities or differences stand out to you?

WS: I don't think they're very different. Bashir was actually charged with genocide, although subsequent charges brought by the court against leaders close to Bashir in Sudan didn't include the genocide charge. I'm not sure whether they will persist with it. The charges against Netanyahu, in particular, and against others like Gallant, are very, very serious and, in many respects, much more severe than those against Putin.



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>
> William Schabas

Putin is charged with abducting children, but, as I understand, there's no allegation—again, we haven't seen the arrest warrant—that the children were subjected to physical or sexual abuse. None of them have been killed. By contrast, Netanyahu has left a bloody trail behind him.

So, I believe the nature of the charges against Netanyahu is much more dire and serious than what Putin has been accused of.

ET: What will it take for these cases ever to go to trial?

WS: The International Criminal Court doesn't prosecute people in absentia, so they have to be brought into custody. If they're not, there's very little that can happen. There is, however, a thesis by the prosecutor that a kind of preliminary hearing could take place in absentia.

This has never been done before, but the prosecutor is planning to attempt it with Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. It was initially scheduled to start in October of this year but has been postponed for several months. I'm not sure if it will actually take place.

The prosecutor's ambition might be to conduct such a hearing to stigmatize the accused, raise the standard of proof to something higher—such as substantial grounds to believe the crime was committed, rather than reasonable grounds to believe. This would be a relatively short process, and since it's done in absentia, there would be no real defense. It's not as though the defense would call witnesses or present a full case. The prosecutor might pursue this approach, but beyond that, not much else can happen.

ET: The West showed unanimous support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's arrest warrant, despite over 11,000 deaths in Ukraine, far fewer than those in Gaza. Yet, there is significant division, as seen in different capitals, over Netanyahu's case. What are your thoughts on this selective approach?

WS: Well, I don't like the selective approach. I don't like the double standards in international justice. I think it's very harmful to both international justice and the institution itself. The court has distorted its priorities, placing more emphasis on Ukraine, which, in an objective sense, is not as dire as the situation in Palestine, where human suffering is far greater.

The people of Ukraine are not living under the same conditions as the people of Gaza. This is certain. Anyone who watches even a little bit of media will know that. Yet, the situation in Gaza has been treated as of secondary importance by the prosecutor of the court.

So, yes, the court is afflicted with double standards. Until very recently, all of its attention was focused exclusively on Central Africa. That's still the case in terms of its trials. We have yet to see a trial of anyone from outside Africa. All of those actually prosecuted have been Africans, and most of them have been Muslims.

ET: What are the political implications of not complying with the ICC arrest warrant?

WS: The political implications are that the institution will suffer, not the political reputations of Western European states. Everyone knows they have double standards, that they're two-faced and hypocritical, and they have no reputation to lose in that regard. They're simply being loyal to Israel for political reasons.

That said, there are some cracks. Some Western European governments, like Norway, Spain, Ireland, and Belgium to some extent, have taken different positions. What I'd like to see in the long term is a situation similar to South Africa. In the 1960s, apartheid South Africa was largely backed by Western European states, many of which still had colonies or had recently been involved in colonialism. South Africa received substantial support, even though it was isolated among the countries of the Global South in the 1970s and '80s.

However, support for South Africa faded over time. The International Court of Justice issued a judgment in 1971 on their occupation of Namibia, but it took 19 more years for Namibia to gain independence from South African rule and apartheid.

I would like to think something similar could happen with Israel. The current situation could provoke new efforts to establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian state, which would transform the region's geography and politics. However, without U.S. commitment, there's only so much that can be done.

Honestly, the Western European countries may be called powers, but right now, they're largely aligned with the United States and subordinate to it. Until they're ready to break with the U.S., I don't see much progress. Even if they do, we'll still need to confront the United States on this issue.

CITIZENS ON THEIR OWN



Stuck in Karachi's cycle of poor management and temporary solutions, some residents are pushed to take action to improve their localities. Is it easy to take responsibility where government accountability is absent?

By **YUSRA SALIM**

One of the most populated cities in the world and Pakistan's financial centre, Karachi has been suffering and struggling with civic problems for decades. The issues range from inadequate sewerage system, deteriorating infrastructure to broken roads and lack of water. The metropolis is a case study in urban mismanagement despite its economic importance.

The complicated system of bureaucratic red tape, political blame games, and institutional inefficiencies frequently result from the question of who is in charge of handling these civic issues.

There are numerous federal, provincial, and local government entities involved in Karachi's disjointed and multi-layered governance structure. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) is responsible for planning and maintaining the entire city, but it is limited in its ability to do so due to administrative and financial constraints. The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board (KWSB), on the other hand, is in charge of maintaining sewerage systems and supplying drinkable water. However, that too has come under fire with accusations of inefficiency and corruption.

Many organisations, such as the Sindh Government and several federal agencies, too frequently avoid local authorities, causing a backlog in execution, and have considerable power over Karachi's resources and decision-making.









In many areas of Karachi, groups of residents have been managing and resolving the civic issues in their localities. Such management societies collect maintenance fees from each house, and that amount is later used to resolve issues such as building broken roads, new water supply lines, sewerage pipes even.

Are they legally allowed to dig up government-owned streets and use ad-hoc basis workers to install new water and sewerage lines?

"Making a road, putting up a new or even fixing any line is not as easy as we think, as we need several permissions and have to pay a whole lot of money to the organisations even to do it ourselves," said Muhammad Hassan Ali, who has been in an administrative society for 15 years. Ali said that when the society was built, the population was not the same, as today it has increased by 200 per cent. The need for water, sewerage, and parking has also increased to cater to such issues.

Recently, his society had a sewerage issue for which the management committee collected funds and had to go through a rigorous process of permission and charges such as challan. Then they installed a new sewerage line to cope with the issue of stagnant filthy water in the streets.

Similarly, Ali and his society laid Envicrete on the streets in their residential block with the help of funds. "In such cases, a few people do not contribute by using the excuse that they live on rent and making a new road or installing a new line will not favour them in the long term. Then the burden falls on the management mostly, and we have to deal with such issues which are ultimately the responsibility of the city's administration to resolve," the chairman of the society committee shared.

While areas under KMC face challenges, those under Cantonment are not much better off. Sana Zubairi, a representative of the DHA Phase 2 residents' community, highlighted that over the past four years, they have been working with various stakeholders to address ongoing issues such as security, greenery, animal welfare, and road construction.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, we created a WhatsApp group to monitor and assist the elderly in our area. Over time, this group evolved into a community that identified and addressed local issues. We collaborated with the police, Rangers and traffic department to enhance security and tackle theft in the area," Zubairi explained. She added that gradually, they began engaging with more departments, consistently reaching out for assistance and collaboration.

To begin with the residents' community requested DHA Vigilance to enhance security in their area. In response, four policemen on two bikes were assigned to patrol the streets and monitor street crime. "When we asked for greenbelts, many community members contributed plants and caretakers, while the authorities provided water and maintenance. That's how we collaborate," she explained.

At first, they found it difficult to get the authorities to take their complaints seriously. However, a dedicated team of five to seven people would regularly visit the CBC and DHA offices, submitting letters outlining their community's demands and grievances. Over the past four years, this persistence led to improved and more timely collaborations.

"As far as roads and infrastructure are concerned, we don't contribute directly. Instead we write to the authorities pointing out areas in need of repairs," Zubairi shared. While they cannot handle everything on their own, such as installing sewerage lines or street poles, they do take steps like adding lights to their houses to ensure the streets are well-lit.

While the authorities are accountable for repairs, Zubairi pointed out that residents also have a role to play in improving their surroundings. "There are certain responsibilities that residents must take on as well. In our case, we pushed harder to be heard and to get the work done, but collective effort from everyone is essential to make the environment better," she emphasised.

As an example of when residents make their own situations worse, almost every housing society and town where the area was provided with water and sewerage lines for one-unit houses now has three to four-floor buildings while the supply lines are still the same. This results in overflowing due to increased number of residents. "[Housing] societies were made through a master plan and were allotted water and sewerage lines accordingly. But if the societies exploit the usage, then obviously it will impact the supply lines," said Amber Alibhai, general secretary of Shehri, an NGO working for urban development.



Legal rigmarole

According to law, utilities such as water and sewers must be handled by specified agencies as public goods. It may be unlawful to perform unauthorised work on public infrastructure, such as installing sewage lines or making changes to drainage systems. "There are two practices in the scenario, one where the society or the management takes permission from the KWSB and then installs a new line or mends the existing one; the second practice is to talk to the linemen of the area and they can charge money and install a supply line," said the general secretary.

People who build infrastructure on public property or state-owned land face legal action under the laws. This is especially important when planned urban designs are disrupted by community endeavors. "We can't blame the KWSB or KMC for everything and anything because in such scenarios citizens must not misuse or exploit the land when they built more than allowed and allocated. Why blame exploding lines on the system?" she lamented, adding that in recent times KWSB and all such organisations have become more responsive to the civic issues and they try to assist when anyone approaches them for installation of new lines or expanding of supply lines.

Unauthorised changes to water and sewer systems could jeopardise safety regulations and result in liability for infrastructure-related losses. Encouraging citizens to handle civic concerns could compromise the function of the state and result in a chaotic precedent where unchecked efforts cause more problems than they solve. "If a reasonable request is made, then the system will allow it but demanding a 12-inch supply line where only 6-inch is allocated won't be allowed because, eventually, it will create a problem when the main line gets trapped, and it will get flooded from one end," Amber explained. One of the main reasons why the practice is discouraged that people shouldn't be involved in unauthorized changes to supply lines is because each area is designated to lines in terms of depth because the basic rule of thumb is water lines will be deeper than the sewerage lines just so they can't be contaminated and punctured easily, she added.

Collaboration between municipal, provincial, and federal institutions is frequently impeded by political rivalries because they depend on inadequate funding from higher governmental levels, and local governments have little control over how much money is generated. "KWSB and other organisations have millions of budgets, but they only work for main roads and arteries as VIPs don't see streets and small towns even if line damages or roads are in dilapidated forms," said union council chairman Junaid Mukati. Given the fact that the population of the city is exploding, the system is finding it difficult to keep up with the rapid, unplanned urbanisation that has overloaded the infrastructure.

Mishandling money and resources worsens ineffective service delivery. "The problem is the organisations that have budgets only work for main roads and don't pay heed to what the small streets are facing. We are left with UC and town budget which are insufficient," said the UC chairman of Jamaat-e-Islami. He also said that even when the UC constructs a street, KWSB makes bills and gets more from the water board for something the UC has done.

Several neighbourhood residents have banded together to raise money to install or fix sewage lines. Although these initiatives tackle pressing issues, they also include more extensive urban planning projects, resulting in disputes with local authorities. "Here the problem is political appointment and bribery. Whenever anyone goes to take permission for roads of any lines, they charge them money to even provide with a simple permission which is a necessity," said Mukati, adding that then they also try to include their workers so anything that would cost the citizens 100 rupees will cost them 500 rupees.

Municipal autonomy

It is essential to grant Karachi's municipal government administrative and financial independence. To facilitate efficient service delivery and clearly define roles, the Sindh Local Government Act has to be amended. Including private businesses in infrastructure construction can improve civic initiatives by adding efficiency and experience. For example, water delivery systems could be run by private operators while being supervised by the government. "All such initiatives can help, but the major problem at hand is sincerity to serve, and that is where everything takes a back seat," he said. The UC chairman also pointed out that the authority charges a challan to dig up any road or street as it the town's property. After submitting the challan, they are allowed to fix the road or install a new line, but if anyone digs up without permission, then they are charged with challan and if they don't pay up, the authority will remove the lines installed.

The lines are supposed to be installed at various depths at various localities, for example, lines and roads in hilly areas will be at different depths, while in steep areas, it is different. "Lines are to be installed on opposite sides to avoid contamination when any puncture happens, mostly water and sewerage lines are 3 feet deep but, depending on areas, can go 10-15 feet deep as well," he explained.

Restoring confidence in government institutions requires accountability and transparency. To discourage corruption and inefficiency, public entities might be monitored by independent audits and citizen monitoring groups.

All parties involved must work together to resolve Karachi's civic problems. Although resident's efforts to solve water and sewerage issues demonstrate tenacity, this is not a long-term, sustainable, or legally acceptable solution. It is the responsibility of government officials to carry out their duties efficiently and to foster an atmosphere that encourages citizen involvement.

Karachi runs the risk of continuing its cycle of poor management and temporary solutions without systemic changes, allowing its citizens to suffer the consequences of neglect. A more functioning and fair urban future may be possible by striking a balance between controlled citizen action and state accountability.

EARNING ONLINE, THE HARD WAY

STORY BY : NABIL TAHIR

Pakistan's digital talent faces outdated policies and barriers, hindering growth in the booming $20 trillion global economy

Imagine this: You wake up early, pour your energy into creating content, running a small business, or freelancing on global platforms. You work with the same passion, skill, and dedication as your peers in neighboring countries. Yet, when it's time to reap the rewards of your hard work, you find yourself earning significantly less—not because you lack talent or effort, but because your country doesn't provide the tools and opportunities needed to monetise your work effectively. How long could you keep going before your motivation starts to dwindle?

This is the harsh reality for millions in Pakistan. Despite being home to over five million freelancers and small businesses contributing $400 million in exports, and ranking 4th globally in freelance earnings, the country's potential is stifled by outdated policies and inadequate digital infrastructure. For 78 per cent of small business owners, their enterprise is the primary source of income for their families, underscoring the critical role these businesses play in Pakistan's economy. Yet, they remain excluded from platforms that could amplify their impact—YouTube memberships, TikTok monetisation, PayPal, and access to global e-commerce giants like Amazon and Etsy.

As the global digital economy surges and neighboring countries embrace monetisation opportunities, Pakistan's freelancers, creators, and entrepreneurs are left wondering: Why can't we compete on the same stage as the rest of the world?

Monetisation roadblocks

Despite Pakistan's undeniable digital talent and entrepreneurial spirit, the road to earning online remains riddled with obstacles that limit creators, freelancers, and entrepreneurs. These challenges, born from outdated policies, lack of infrastructure, and limited international collaboration, have placed Pakistan at a competitive disadvantage in the global digital economy.

A glaring challenge faced by Pakistani digital creators is the limited direct monetisation opportunities on major platforms. While neighboring countries like India have more extensive monetisation options, Pakistani creators can still earn through YouTube's Partner Program (YPP), where they can monetise their videos with ads. According to YouTube, Pakistani creators can earn between $0.50 to $5 per 1,000 views, depending on factors like niche, audience engagement, and ad clicks. However, this is still a relatively limited option compared to other countries, and many Pakistani creators rely on sponsorships, merchandise sales, or affiliate marketing to supplement their income. Similarly, TikTok's monetisation features, such as the Creator Fund, TikTok Shop and TikTok Live, remain unavailable in Pakistan, despite the platform being one of the most popular social media apps in the country. These restrictions hinder creators who work tirelessly to produce content that garners millions of views but fails to provide them with financial stability.

The ban on platforms like X (formerly Twitter) has only deepened the divide. With X offering monetisation features such as ad revenue sharing and subscriptions globally, Pakistani creators are effectively locked out of another revenue stream. The absence of these monetisation options not only restricts individual earnings but also stunts the growth of Pakistan's digital economy, which contributes a mere one per cent to the GDP compared to the growing digital economies of neighboring nations.

Payment processing woes

Another significant hurdle for freelancers and small business owners is the lack of access to international payment systems like PayPal. While PayPal is the default payment method for platforms such as Fiverr and Upwork, Pakistani freelancers are forced to rely on expensive third-party intermediaries or informal networks to receive payments. This not only eats into their hard-earned money through high transaction fees but also creates delays, discouraging international clients from working with them.

For small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), the situation is equally dire. According to the Payoneer report 'SMB Ambitions Barometer', 39 per cent of SMBs in Pakistan cite the cost of doing business internationally—such as high foreign transaction rates, tariffs, and shipping fees—as a major obstacle. Without affordable and efficient payment processing solutions, these businesses struggle to expand their reach to global markets.

Cut off from global e-commerce

E-commerce represents a massive opportunity for economic growth, but Pakistan's entrepreneurs remain excluded from platforms like Amazon, Etsy, and eBay. While countries like India and Bangladesh have successfully integrated their sellers into these marketplaces, Pakistani entrepreneurs face significant barriers in creating accounts linked to local banks. This lack of access prevents countless artisans, small manufacturers, and exporters from reaching international customers, leaving their potential untapped.

For SMBs, globalisation is a priority, with many aiming to expand to key markets like the US, UK, China, and the UAE. Yet, outdated policies and limited infrastructure make it nearly impossible for them to compete. According to 'SMB Ambitions Barometer,' 62 per cent of SMBs in Pakistan believe that having a diverse global vendor network helps protect against disruptions, but without access to international platforms, this remains an unfulfilled goal.

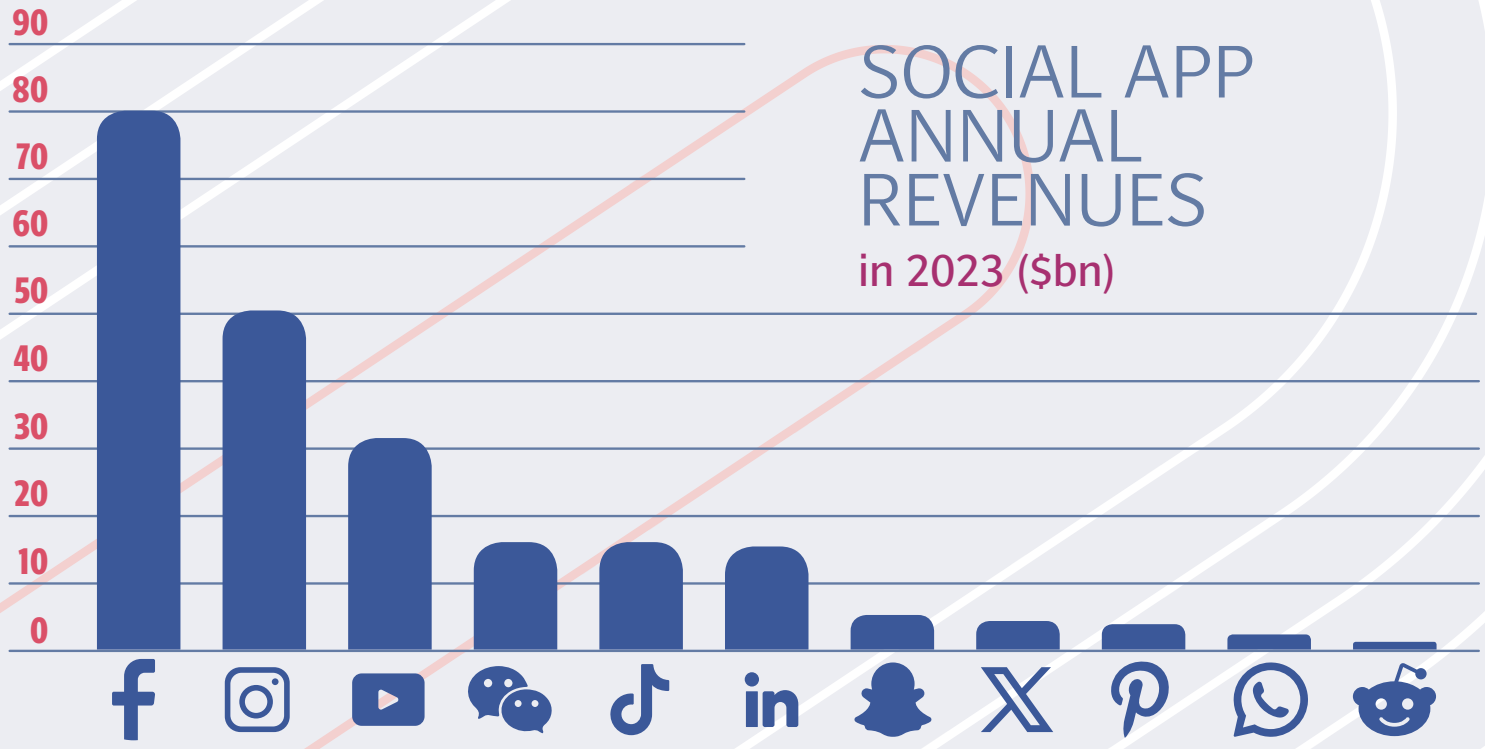
Regulatory and policy bottlenecks

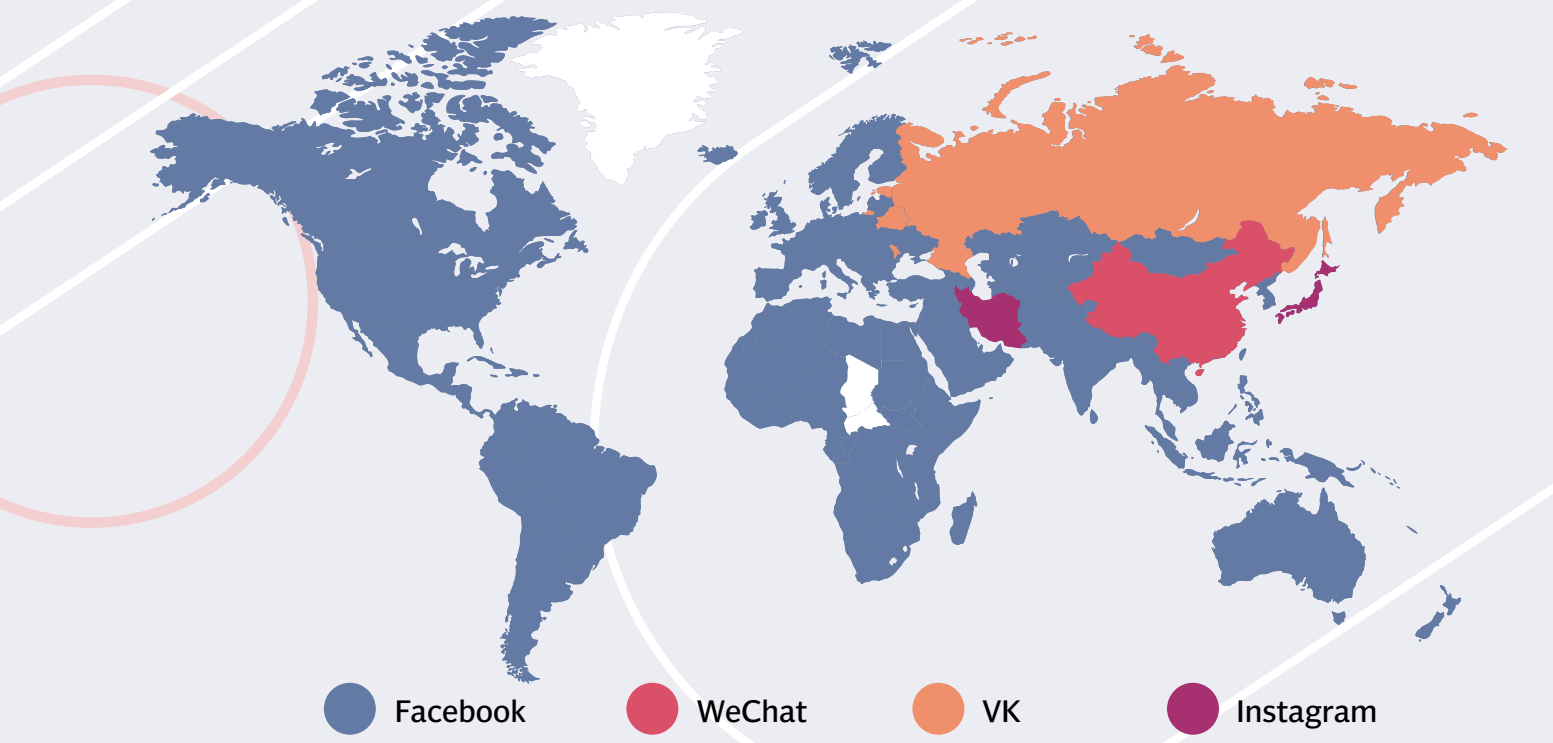
The lack of monetisation and payment options is not just a technological issue—it is deeply rooted in regulatory challenges. The government has yet to create a conducive environment for global tech companies to bring their services to Pakistan. The ban on X and restrictions on other platforms illustrate how regulatory decisions often hurt the very people they are meant to protect.

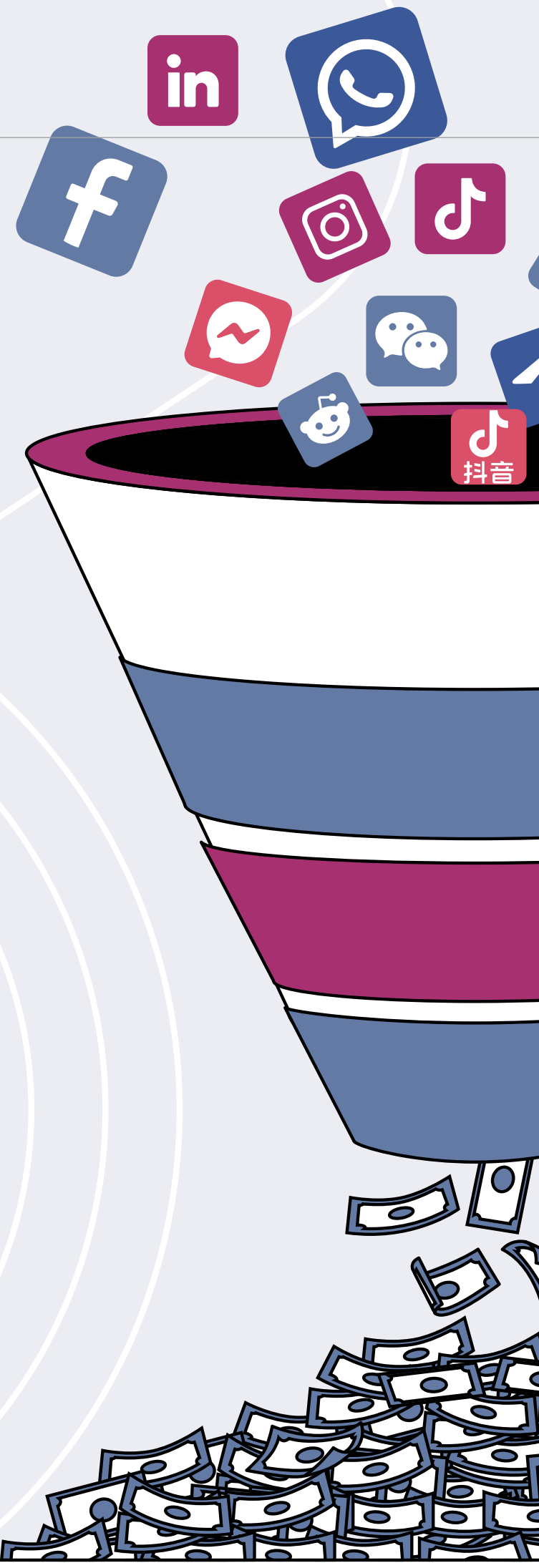
Moreover, the absence of clear policies for global payment systems like PayPal or e-commerce platforms to operate in Pakistan further discourages these companies from entering the market. This is in stark contrast to countries like India, where government initiatives and tech-friendly policies have made it easier for global platforms to integrate into the local ecosystem.

Falling behind

The impact of these challenges extends beyond finances. For freelancers and creators who see their peers in neighboring countries thrive, the sense of inequality is deeply disheartening. Many feel demotivated and unappreciated







Pakistan ranks 4th globally in freelance earnings but struggles to access international payment methods

Source: Payoneer Global Gig Economy Index 2021

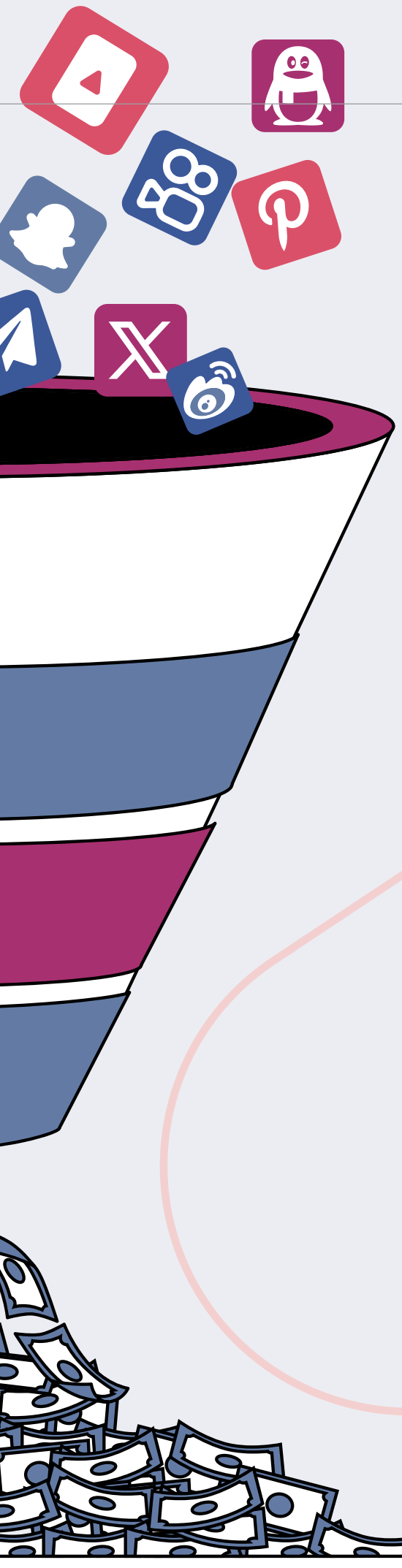
Global digital economy projected to grow to **$20 trillion by 2025**

Source: World Economic Forum (WEF) Digital Economy Outlook

YouTube monetisation in India enabled creators to **earn $50+ for 100k views**. In Pakistan, creators rely on alternative sponsorships due to blocked monetization

Source: Google

Over 5 million registered freelancers in Pakistan struggle to access platforms like PayPal, Etsy, and Amazon



despite their hard work and talent. For small business owners, the inability to expand globally often leads to stagnation or even closure, affecting families who rely on these businesses for their livelihood.

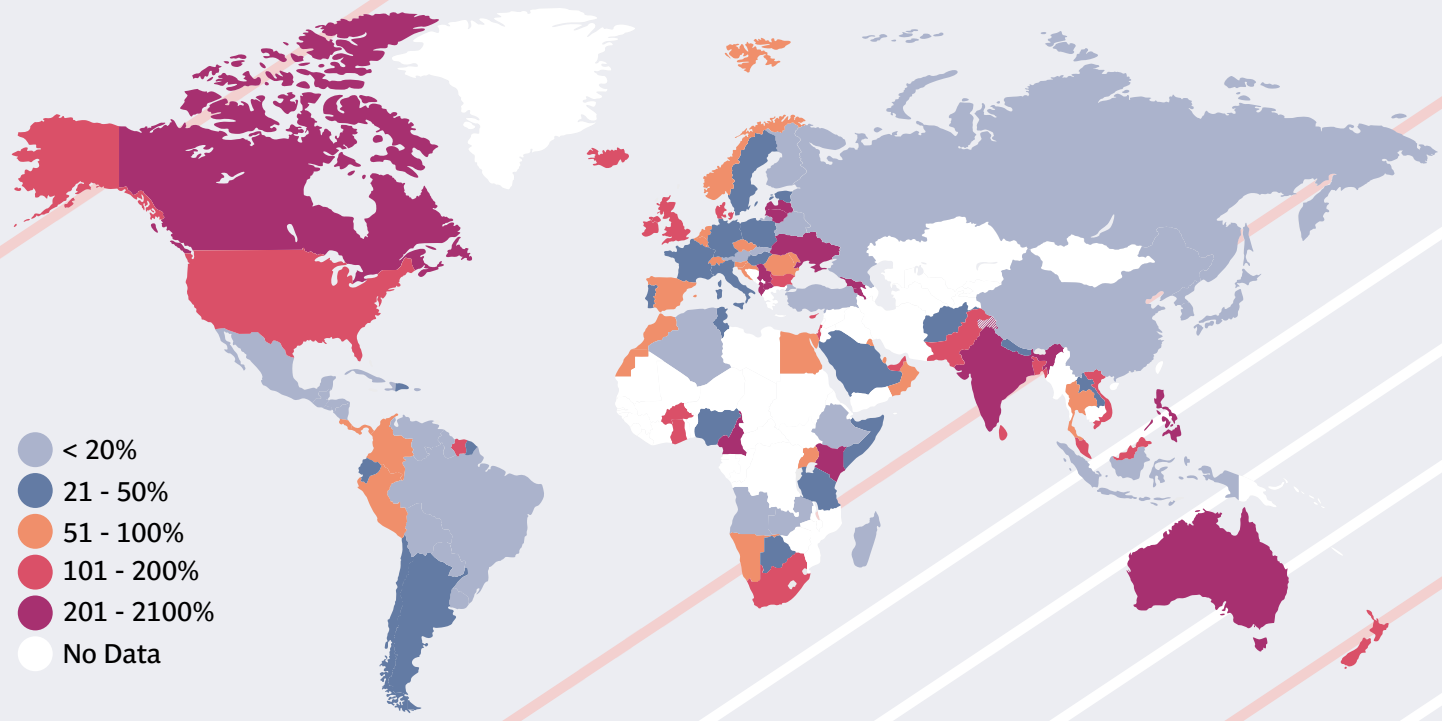
This frustration is driving an exodus of talent. According to Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (Pakistan), 2023 report, in 2023 alone, over 765,000 Pakistanis left the country, many of them young professionals seeking better opportunities abroad. This brain drain further weakens Pakistan's economy, robbing it of the very talent that could drive digital transformation.

As per the World Economic Forum (WEF) Digital Economy Outlook report, the global digital economy is projected to grow to $20 trillion by 2025, and with this Pakistan risks falling further behind. While neighboring countries invest in infrastructure and policies to support their digital talent, Pakistan remains stuck. The lack of platforms to monetise content, process payments, and access global markets is not just a missed opportunity—it's a systemic failure that affects millions.

Until these challenges are addressed, Pakistan's freelancers, creators, and entrepreneurs will continue to face barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. The question remains: how much longer can Pakistan afford to overlook the untapped wealth of its digital talent?

AVAILABILITY OF ONLINE WORK IN RELATION TO WEALTH

Share of open vacancies in the global market as a proportion of the share of Global GDP Wealth in September 2016



Behind the statistics

While the numbers paint a stark picture, the real impact of these challenges becomes evident in the personal stories of those navigating this broken landscape.

For content creators like Kazi Akber, the absence of robust monetisation options in Pakistan has been a persistent frustration. Kazi, who primarily creates content on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, acknowledges the allure of YouTube's monetisation program, which remains inaccessible to many Pakistani creators. "YouTube's monetisation metrics are fascinating because they consider the average purchasing power of your audience, making it appealing for creators like me to aim for markets with a higher CPM [cost per mille]," he explains.

Despite this potential, Kazi finds himself relying almost entirely on brand collaborations to sustain his craft. "In Pakistan, creators with a smaller audience cannot survive on platform monetisation alone due to the low CPM. That's why 99 per cent of my earnings come from branded work," he shares, adding that this reliance places him in a precarious position given the unpredictable nature of the market.

Kazi also highlights a key systemic issue—Pakistan's restrictive regulatory environment. "We in Pakistan operate from the need to control, not the hope to understand. This approach is severely myopic, especially for technologies evolving as rapidly as digital platforms," he notes. The absence of international payment gateways further compounds the issue, limiting his ability to monetise a global audience. "Just getting payments from YouTube is difficult," he says, underscoring the logistical challenges faced by creators in Pakistan.

Yet, despite the frustration, Kazi remains hopeful. "The latent potential in Pakistan is immense. Industries here would grow exponentially if they were fostered and protected. I'm optimistic, perhaps to the point of naivety, that common sense will eventually prevail," he remarks, reflecting the resilience shared by many creators in the country.

SMBs in Pakistan are eager to expand globally, but face significant barriers. According to the Payoneer report, 62 per cent of Pakistani SMBs believe that having a diverse global vendor network is crucial to their success. However, establishing such networks is often challenging due to high international costs.

"We want to expand our business globally, but the cost of doing business internationally is a major obstacle," said a Pakistani SMB owner, Rafay Paracha who runs a sports gear business. "We struggle to establish relationships with global vendors due to high shipping fees, foreign transaction rates, and tariffs. These costs eat into our profit margins, making it difficult for us to compete with businesses in other countries."

The Payoneer report also highlights that 39 per cent of Pakistani SMBs consider the cost of doing business internationally as a major obstacle to expansion. Access to capital is also another hurdle, with limited personal and professional networks (48 per cent), high debt-to-income ratios (44 per cent), and inconsistent financial performance (35 per cent) being major barriers.

"The lack of access to capital and high international costs are significant barriers to our growth," said Paracha. "We need support from the government and financial institutions to overcome these challenges and expand our business globally. We want to create jobs, generate revenue, and contribute to the country's economic growth, but we need the right support to do so."

Moreover, the limitations on digital platforms and financial services also affect the ability of SMBs in Pakistan to innovate and stay competitive. With limited access to global markets, SMBs are often forced to rely on traditional business models, which restrict their ability to innovate and stay ahead of the competition.

"The limitations on digital platforms and financial services restrict our ability to innovate and stay competitive," said Paracha. "We want to adopt new technologies, explore new markets, and develop new products, but the lack of access to global markets and financial services makes it difficult for us to do so. We need the government and financial institutions to support us in overcoming these challenges and achieving our growth potential."

Despite these obstacles, Pakistani freelancers and SMB owners continue to innovate and adapt. The country's 5 million registered freelancers brought in $400 million in export revenue during FY 2022-23, placing Pakistan 4th globally in freelance earnings. Yet, this impressive ranking belies the systemic issues they face.

Freelancers in Pakistan face significant challenges in accessing international payment services like PayPal. This limitation restricts their ability to receive payments from global clients, forcing them to rely on alternative methods that often come with higher fees and longer processing times.

"The absence of PayPal in Pakistan has made it difficult for me to receive payments from international clients," said a Pakistani freelancer, Sabah Muhammad. "I have to use alternative methods, which often charge higher fees and take longer to process. This not only affects my earnings but also my reputation with clients who expect timely payments."

Foreign transaction rates also reduce the earnings of freelancers in Pakistan. With limited access to international payment services, freelancers are often forced to use local banks to receive payments, which results in higher transaction fees and lower earnings.

"The foreign transaction rates are a significant burden for me," said another Pakistani freelancer, Hassan Latif. "I lose a significant portion of my earnings to these fees, which makes it difficult for me to sustain myself. I have to work harder to earn the same amount of money, which is unfair considering the value I bring to my clients."

Furthermore, the lack of access to international payment services also limits the growth potential of freelancers in Pakistan. With limited options to receive payments, freelancers are often forced to work with local clients who pay lower rates, restricting their ability to earn a decent income.

"The absence of international payment services has restricted my growth as a freelancer," said Latif. "I am forced to work with local clients who pay lower rates, which limits my earning potential. I want to work with global clients who pay higher rates, but the lack of access to international payment services makes it difficult for me."

The lack of official recognition for digital professions is a recurring theme. As Kazi points out, "In 2024, I still can't go to a bank and open an account based on my occupation. I need to be labeled something more conventional. This mindset needs to change."

The voices of Pakistan's creators, freelancers, and SMB owners all point to the same concern, Pakistan's digital economy is being held back by systemic barriers that demand urgent attention. The untapped potential in Pakistan's digital economy is staggering. As Kazi puts it, "There's no actual way of calculating how quickly industries would grow here if they were fostered and protected." Until those changes come, the country risks losing its most talented creators and entrepreneurs to a global stage that recognises their worth. "For that very reason, I feel like I am hopeful. Not in any particular governmental policy per se, but in the prevalence of common sense, eventually," says Kazi.

A roadmap for growth

Pakistan's digital economy is ripe with potential, but systemic reforms, technological advancements, and a shift in mindset are necessary to unlock its full potential. Addressing the barriers faced by freelancers, SMBs, and content creators will not only drive economic growth but also establish Pakistan as a competitive player in the global digital economy.

Pakistan must adopt a regulatory environment that fosters innovation and reduces bureaucratic hurdles. Government bodies must collaborate with industry stakeholders to craft policies that support digital businesses, from freelancing to e-commerce. Facilitating access to platforms like PayPal, Amazon, and Etsy could drastically expand opportunities for small businesses and freelancers.

Recognising digital creators and freelancers as legitimate professionals in banking and taxation frameworks will also reduce financial hurdles. Policies should focus on ease of doing business, simplifying the process of setting up and managing businesses, and encouraging entrepreneurs to formalise their ventures and tap into international markets.

Collaboration with global tech platforms like YouTube, Meta, TikTok, and PayPal is essential. Pakistan can learn from countries like India, where regulatory bodies worked with platforms to introduce localised monetisation options. By negotiating with these companies to address local payment challenges and enable monetisation, Pakistan can empower its creators and entrepreneurs.

Initiatives like dedicated creator funds, training programs, and co-sponsored campaigns can also bolster digital participation. These partnerships should aim to educate and equip Pakistani creators with the tools and knowledge to thrive in the global digital economy.

Strengthening digital infrastructure, such as expanding high-speed internet access, is a prerequisite for growth. The government, along with private sector partners, must invest in reliable digital payment gateways, cloud services, and cybersecurity measures.

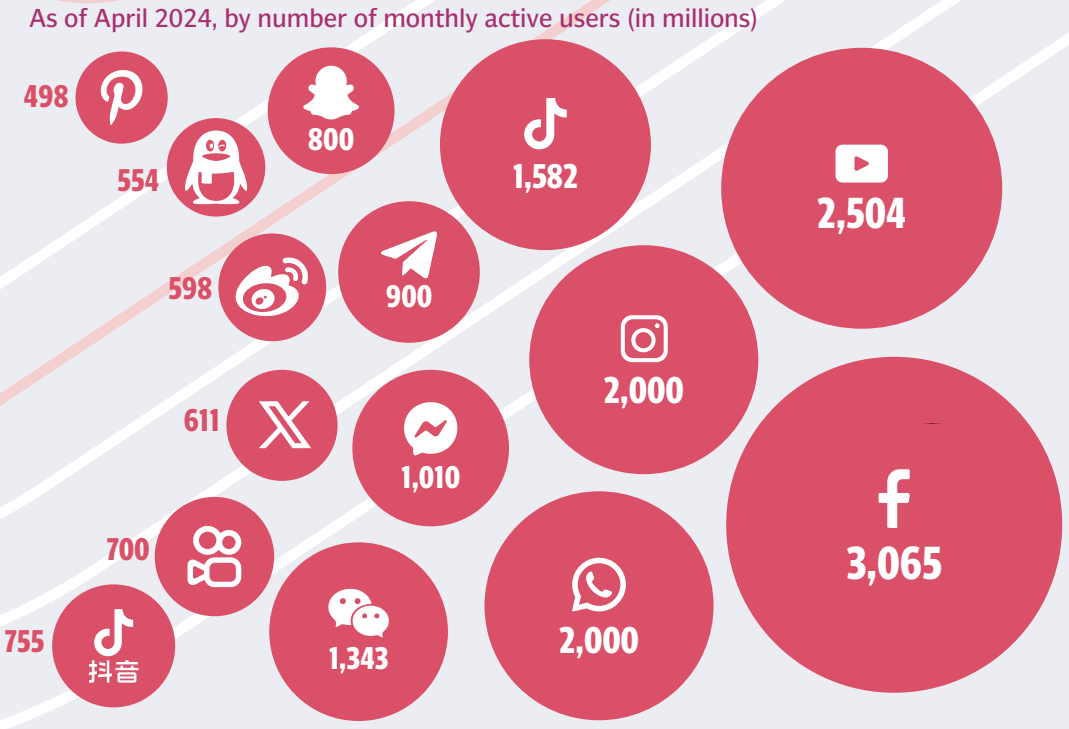
Digitisation can also help SMBs overcome barriers to international expansion. With 56 per cent of SMBs already acknowledging the role of digitisation in easing market entry, there is a clear need to make these technologies more accessible. Programs offering subsidised access to digital tools and training for businesses could significantly accelerate their global integration.

With 74 per cent of SMBs identifying AI as a significant driver of innovation, fostering AI adoption across industries is crucial. Programs to support AI-driven startups, content localisation tools, and customer service enhancements will help Pakistani businesses compete globally. Investments in AI training and development will also equip the workforce with future-ready skills.

Public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of the digital economy can build momentum for reform. Encouraging more creators and SMBs to demand policy changes will apply pressure on regulatory bodies. Additionally, workshops and webinars can educate freelancers and entrepreneurs on global best practices and alternative monetisation strategies.

MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS WORLDWIDE

As of April 2024, by number of monthly active users (in millions)



With 71 per cent of SMBs planning to hire an average of nine employees in the next year, there's a clear need to nurture local talent. Government initiatives to enhance digital skills through vocational training, coding boot camps, and certifications will ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers. Incentivising companies to hire locally can also strengthen the domestic economy.

Pakistan stands at a critical juncture. With over 5 million freelancers and SMBs contributing $400 million in exports, the country is brimming with untapped potential. Yet, outdated policies, restrictive regulations, and limited infrastructure have kept its digital economy from flourishing. The world is moving toward a $20 trillion global digital economy by 2025, and Pakistan cannot afford to be left behind. By empowering its freelancers, SMBs, and content creators, the nation has the chance to not only uplift millions but also carve its place as a formidable player in the global digital economy. The question remains: will Pakistan seise the moment?

Freelancers brought in **$400 million** in FY 2022-23

Source: State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Annual Report 2022-23

Pakistan's digital economy contributes **only 1% to GDP**

Source: World Bank Digital Economy Report 2022

Over 765,000 Pakistanis left the country in 2023, partly due to limited opportunities

Source: Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (Pakistan), 2023 Report

DESIGN BY : IBRAHIM YAHYA

MODERN MARRIAGE AND MURDER



A psychological K-drama entangled in murder mystery, The Trunk explores the power games, obsession, codependency and malice that make up the fragile thing that is marriage

BY **FAIZA SHAH**

Recently a good-natured and kind woman confessed to me that her husband is intimidated by her. Yet this came out as she shared how he hurt and tormented her. She is by no means weak and is as independent minded as a young woman can be. But such is the hold our partners or spouses can have on our hearts and minds. When it is legalised under a marriage contract, living with a person you love and chose to live with can get as messy as a psychological drama and as complex as learning to speak and understand a foreign language.

The Trunk is both. It is a psychological melodrama and it is Korean. The miniseries peels back the layers on a facet of marriage that is seldom discussed over chai in Pakistani drawing rooms; it explores the power games, obsession, codependency and malice that make up the fragile thing that is marriage.

But if that's not your thing, it's all entangled in a murder mystery that really does keep you guessing whodunit till the end of this eight part series.



> **Jeong-won is more human than his wife but the emotional baggage he lives with provides fodder for their codependency. He is as amused at this arrangement thrust upon him, as millennials are with the notion of arranged marriages. He must swallow it like a bitter pill**



Gong Yoo (you'll remember him from The Goblin, Coffee Prince – and your dreams) is the protagonist Han Jeong-won, a wealthy music producer who is clinging on to despair, childhood trauma, drug addiction and his ex-wife. Although his ex, Lee Seo-yeon, has remarried, he wants her back. And she does her part to make sure things stay that way and she holds the marionette strings.

For this end, she has the brainwave to seek the services of a secret marriage agency NM; it supplies temporary wives and husbands to the elite. She gets herself one. Then just to torture her lost and puppy-eyed, ex-husband that little bit more, she throws him a twisted challenge to endure if he wants to be with her again. As Jeong-won insists he will do anything for her, she chooses a bizarre test: he must sign a year-long secret marriage contract with a temporary wife from NM – a wife selected by her.

Jeong-won is more human than his wife but the emotional baggage he lives with provides fodder for their codependency. He is as amused at this arrangement thrust upon him, as millennials are with the notion of arranged marriages. He must swallow it like a bitter pill.

Pills, he takes plenty of them. He can't sleep at night without them. He is haunted by lucid nightmares about his mother who suffered an abusive marriage and eventually committed suicide in front of him when he was just a child. His ex wife has been an enabler and supplier for his drug addiction.



Noh In-ji, the wife hired for him, minds her business as much as his ex-wife meddles in his life. Seo Hyun-jin plays the guarded and composed In-ji. She does not act like a ray of sunshine in order to attract Jeong-won and gain his trust. She simply tries to fill the gaps in his life, he can't fill. She gives him warm and fresh meals, she is there to listen to him if he wants to share and she will hold his hand to offer comfort when he is open to her. As an employee, she comes with no expectations to play this role. She does however observe everything. She sees how her work husband is tormented and manipulated by his ex.

In-ji is the hardest to pin down because the trauma in her past is so varied. She awaits closure from an ex who has ghosted her for five years. She has a mother who ruined her relationship with another husband by outing him as a bisexual. She has a stalker who was in jail but may have escaped. So taking care of a rich self-absorbed guy is child's play for her.

Things change for everyone including Seo-yeon's fake husband when In-ji and Jeong-won start caring for each other despite themselves. How? This is a good reason to keep watching The Trunk even if the first couple episodes have you unsure about where the story is headed. The pace and plot will keep you engaged.

Since the start of the show, I felt it was wrongly titled as more than the titular trunk, it is the massive chandelier hanging in the middle of Jeong-won's mansion that is at the centre of the lives of the main characters.

The palatial house Jeong-won is bound in provides the perfect element of noir to the setting. At its heart is a circular stairway going up to the bedroom and over the staircase is the said intricate glass chandelier which Seo-yeon has imported from France. The house plan has corridors that are labyrinthine and curiously domed archways that make them look like tunnels and bring a surreal effect to the set. The design of the house is such that some corners are half-hidden from each other and you can watch without being seen. It was built by Seo-yeon and it has her personality stamped on it. She created a private prison for her husband, with an ostentatious material life and dark corners of secrets that she keeps. She controls everything as she watches through a secret cam installed in the colossal light fixture. From the outset, the chandelier is the object of her ex husband's sense of discomfort but he doesn't know why. He remains in the dark about his ex-wife's surveillance until the end of the show.

> **In-ji is the hardest to pin down because the trauma in her past is so varied. She awaits closure from an ex who has ghosted her for five years. She has a mother who ruined her relationship with another husband by outing him as a bisexual**

The drama has hardly any light moments and is filmed in dark tones that were a bit unnecessarily heavy to begin with. The performances are spot on across the board, from the trio of lead characters to the supporting roles.

Kim Dong-won (Squid Game) plays Eom Tae-seong a psychopath and murderer from In-ji's shadowy past. He hounds her still and she has spent her life running scared from him. Because of the trunk, their paths cross again. His re-entry creates a ripple effect which forces Seo-yeon to readjust her schemes for In-ji and Jeong-won. All their lives become interconnected in a web of lies and manipulation.

One of the tensest scenes is a dinner party that Seo-yeon conspires to have at Jeong-won and In-ji's place, bringing along her husband. She uses the opportunity to show her dominance over both men, by coddling her ex as if they were still married and disregarding her current NM spouse and treating him as a trophy husband. The host couple is ill at ease for the latter's sake and he himself is seething internally. He happens to be in love with Seo-yeon after all despite knowing her dark secrets and malintent.

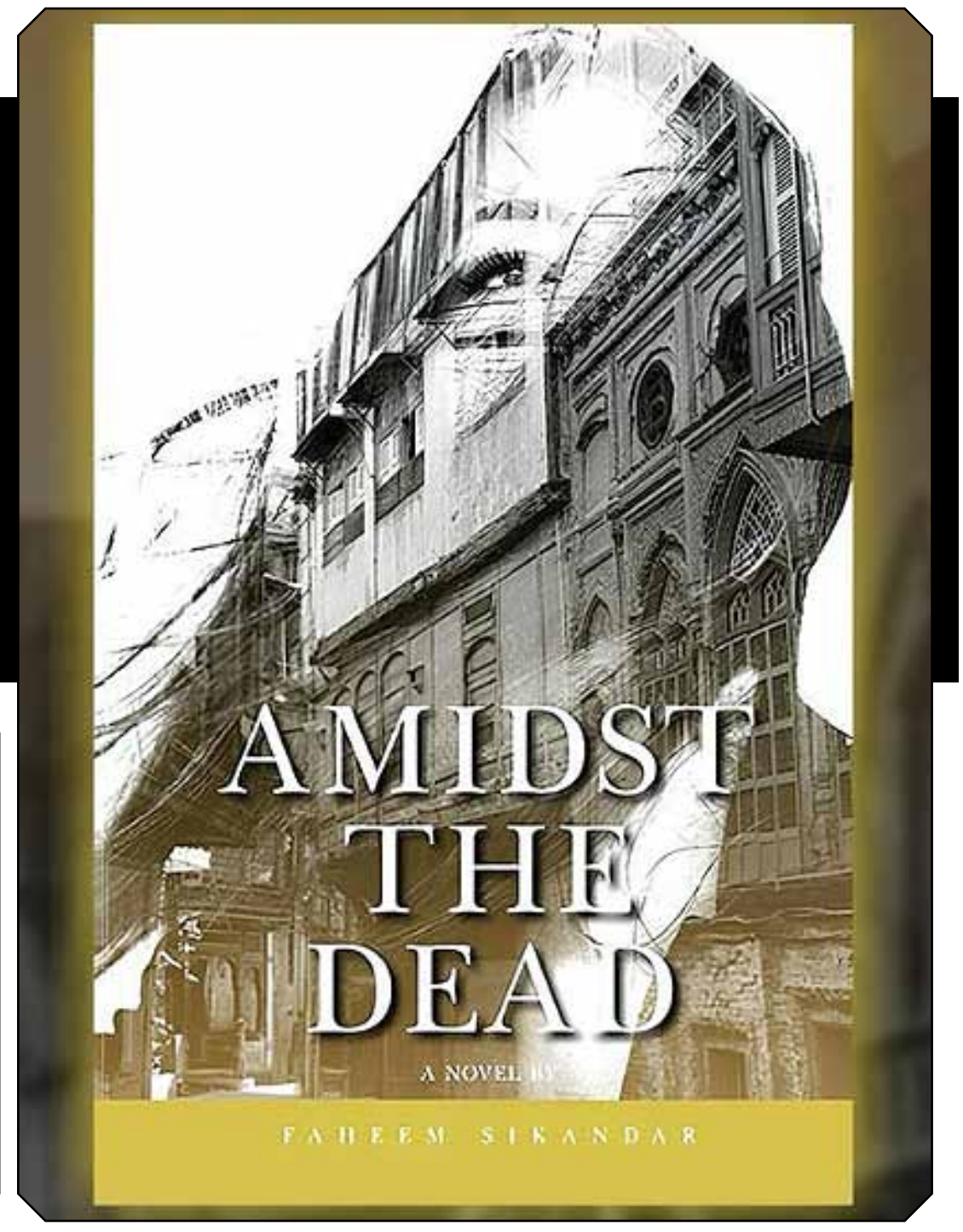
It's a feat accomplished by few miniseries to explore as many relationships between so many characters as The Trunk does. It places a magnifying glass on the similarities that bring people together and the differences that create discontent between them. Although largely it is a bold commentary on modern marriage, it still weaves in a murder mystery from the outset. The drawback is that, in the last two episodes, the non-linear flashbacks become frequent and confusing as the loose ends of various story arcs are tied up. There are a number of likey suspects for the murder at the heart of it and the truth is revealed in flashbacks. The time line by the end has become butter because of the said flashbacks so it is hard to keep a tab on the present.

Having said that the ending is fleshed out as fully as the characters. It is not abrupt and in fact gently leads to an optimistic if not completely satisfying end. The dark hues have lifted for the leading characters and the beautiful city of Seoul is filled with colour and other people again.



TORN HEARTS AND TROUBLED STREETS

Faheem Sikandar's debut novel Amidst the Dead explores love, loss and self-discovery against the chaotic backdrop of conflict-stricken Peshawar in the 2000s



By **RIZWANA NAQVI**

Some books are worth reading not just because of their storyline but also because of their characterisation and the feelings and thoughts of the characters, the psychology behind their actions, the light shed on various aspects of society and the up close and personal presentation of the realities of the society we live in.

One such book is Amidst the Dead by Faheem Sikandar. Sikandar has a Master's in English Literature and Linguistics from Peshawar University; after a brief stint at teaching at Peshawar University, he joined the Civil Services of Pakistan. Amidst the Dead is his debut novel. The author calls it a work of literary fiction, though to some it may appear to be crime thriller due to the high content of crime investigation in the story.



The main protagonist, Ahsan, is a superintendent of police in Peshawar in 2020s. Like the author himself, he is passionate about literature and after completing his Master's had begun teaching at Peshawar University, though he left it and joined the Civil Service to meet the expectations of his family. True to his ideals and principles, which is not a common and preferred commodity among civil servants in Pakistan, he is not in the good books of some of his seniors in the police force. He is posted as SP (Special Investigations), though, as the author clarifies in the introduction, it is not an actual designation in the police force and "is just for the sake of the story."

He is disconsolate and depressed as "despite all his achievements, he couldn't accomplish what he ardently wished for. The mundane part of his life had overwhelmed him so thoroughly that he had to forego the emotional part of his being. He was living a lifeless existence." While his job doesn't give him much satisfaction, he has also lost the love of his life, Ada. In this state of mind, he falls for another woman, Serena, with whom he has a tumultuous relationship, which he himself is not ready to accept as love but calls it infatuation yet is not ready to give up and is so obsessed with her that he not only visits her house but even goes to the mental facility to look for her. The mental turmoil that he experiences in his relationship with Serena is depicted in the book in terms of Jungian and Freudian psychology.

His life takes a turn when he reconnects with Ada but soon learns that the prime suspect in the kidnapping case on which he is working is the beloved cousin brother of Ada who she holds in great esteem. He is torn between his love and his ideals. He is not ready to give his pursuit of his suspect and Ada is not ready to hear anything against her so-called brother and defends him, though she herself is deeply in love with Ahsan and afraid of losing him again.

Belonging to an established family with values and knowing that values and traditions were supposed to be preserved and continued, he could not think of disappointing his parents. He does not share much of his personal problems with his parents, rather tries to hide them. He is highly emotional and sentimental and his younger brother who is his confidant and more practical has to often step in to steady him.

Ahsan is on special assignment of bursting a criminal gang, and is not ready to make any compromises. When Ahsan insists on taking action against his prime suspect who is a big businessman, the IG tells him, "'There is a term 'Career officers'. I hope you have an idea about that. They are those officers for whom the path of their career is very clear. They get their promotions on time as they get inducted in service on the right time. Such fine officers never do these type of reckless activities which you are doing at the moment.'" This shows the functioning of our police force.

The IG warns him, "I am giving you a chance. Prove yourself now. … If you are proven wrong, I will throw you out of this province with a bad report. You will never get a field posting for the rest of your career."

Whether he will finally succeed and is united with his love, will he be able to nab his prime suspect and bust the kidnappers gang and elevate himself in the eyes of his superiors, are questions that linger in the readers' mind for a while though much before the end things become somewhat predictable.

During the narration of the story, Sikander makes many literary references throughout the book bringing to light his and Ahsan's passion for literature. Ahsan is often found to be thinking of literary character; for instance, when he is unable to decide whether to go and meet Ada when he is finally reconnected with her after many years or to go after his prime suspect, "He thought of Hamlet's indecision and remembered how he used to criticise Hamlet vehemently for his inability to decide; … he felt himself indecisive like Hamlet though he had no luxury to procrastinate."

Similarly, when a bullet grazes his lung and he falls to the ground, he thinks of Ada and then imagines meeting John Keats whose poetry he admires, and finds himself in the same situation. This chapter shows his love for literature as in his misery when he thinks he is again about to lose Ada he relates with Keats who is mourning the loss of his beloved. To a casual reader the chapter may seem irrelevant but to someone interested in literature it holds deep meaning as it portrays his feelings in literary terms.

Though the story is primarily based in Peshawar, it moves between Islamabad/Rawalpindi, Taxila, Peshawar, and London. The book moves from the past to present alternately, or should we say half the story is in flashbacks, and the reader moves along sharing Ahsan's love life, his career, his mental turmoil, and his experiences and feelings.

The book presents an insight into the police setup and its working; how they often turn a blind eye and even ask their subordinates to forego things if an influential person—be it a politician or a businessman—is involved. He, too, is advised to do the same but he is too strict to his ideals. At the same time, we get a glimpse of how influential people support each other and make use of their contacts to gain power and cover up their misdeeds.

The reader is on the receiving end of a bit of history on and off—of Peshawar, Balahisar, and Taxila—though it is not hard on the reader. Since the story is based in Peshawar (the author too is from Peshawar), he talks about terrorism which has made life uncertain and vulnerable, about traffic—"the city's traffic was amongst the worst of South Asian metropolitans"—, power outage and load shedding but then is quick to say, "However Peshawar was not always like that" and talks about it glorious days since the fourth century BC.

The book depicts the realities of Pakistani society. A stark reality touched upon is the lowly position of teachers in the eyes of the public. When Ahsan passed the Civil Services exam, he noticed a change in the attitude of people around him; "People's perspective changed, they met him a little differentially. … In a power oriented society that was a fait accompli, … He wondered what had happened to the people. He was already in a good job, earning a handsome salary but nobody cared a fig, but when he was about to enter a service that was offering a very meagre salary, people were all dotting on him."

Explaining the biradari (kinship) system, through Ada, the author writes, "Kinship is no ordinary thing in our social set up. It's a combining factor which strengthens a community against all odd. … Violating the norms of kinship is like a social suicide which no one can afford in our social set up." She tells how important decisions marriages, land inheritance issues, and even voting for a particular candidate in election are decided by kinsmen having influence. …"

"As someone said, 'All politics is power politics' and that is the rule of thumb here. …" she says, adding, "The patronage for getting things done and seeking jobs puts wrong and incompetent people at important slots. The result is dysfunctional government machinery. It is a sheer murder of merit in the country and … and outright crime."

A subject which is not usually talked about, rather swept under the carpet, i.e. mental illness, is given some place in the book as towards the end Serena's condition is discussed. Though from her actions and behaviour a vigilant reader can suspect that she has some problem, her behaviour is explained as a result of her illness for which she later seeks treatment.

Since the author has taken pains to not just narrate the story but also talks about various aspects of society, he has not forgotten to mention the deplorable treatment of minorities, though it does not have any bearing on the life of the main character or the flow of the story. Jasmine, Serena's loyal assistant, is a Christian woman and through her Sikandar comments on the treatment meted out to the minorities in the country in terms of lack of employment opportunities and upward mobility.

While the story is narrated in the third person, the main characters at some point take over the narrative and talk about themselves and their feelings and actions in the first person. This gives the reader an insight into their feelings and thoughts from their perspective.

A lot of effort has been made to portray the psychology behind the characters' actions, especially Ahsan's, who is interested in psychology besides literature and one finds many references to Jung and Freud.

One may wonder at the title of the book but then one should keep in mind that it is based in the disturbed city of Peshawar where besides street crimes the wave of terrorism had made life uncertain and vulnerable and bomb blasts were a routine thing, killing and maiming people for no fault of their own.

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All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

T Magazine's picks

Binge this week: Pantheon

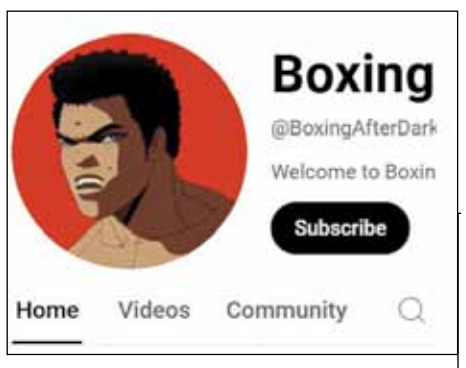
TV Show



An incredible voice cast with Katie Chung leading alongside Paul Dano, Daniel Dae Kim, Aaron Eckhart, Taylor Schilling and Ron Livingston, was assembled for the series that deals with heady sci-fi concepts in a way that is fully grounded in relatable human drama. The soundtrack, art style, voicing, pacing, crisp animation and intriguing storyline are completely on point. Lots of digital imagery connects with the online world a fair bit. For anyone who enjoys a bit of science and mystery, it promises a deeper dive into what makes us humans.

Follow this week: @Boxing After Dark

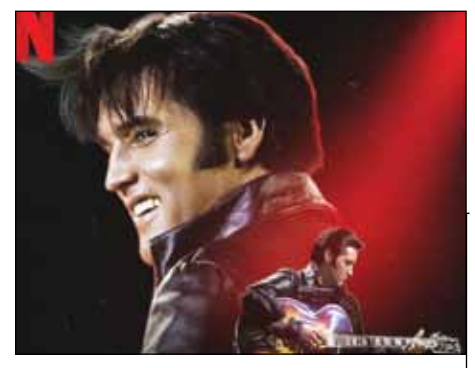
Instagram



Boxing After Dark (BAD) provides an educational and insightful perspective, and a deeper understanding and appreciation of boxing, especially around the years of 1940's to the early 2000's. The distinctive writing and editing style and a unique voiceover offers a fresh take on the sport. This innovative approach aims to inform, engage, and inspire both boxing enthusiasts and newcomers. The primary goal of this channel is to share the stories of every boxer who deserves to be heard, so with over 300 years of boxing history, it's quite a journey.

Watch this week: Return of the King

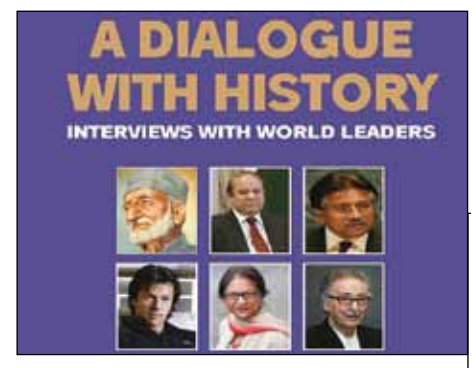
Movies



Directed by Jason Hehir, it looks back nearly 60 years to a pivotal point in Elvis Presley's career. Including appearances by Priscilla Presley, Baz Luhrmann and Bruce Springsteen, it traces Presley's biography up to and including his participation in the '68 Comeback special. One of the best parts is the audio of impromptu jam sessions led by Presley during down moments while shooting the special. The documentary may not cover a lot of new ground, but it explores the life of a legacy artist, his career and his vulnerabilities well.

Read this week: A Dialogue With History by Zahid Hussain

Books



Zahid Hussain's collection of 39 interviews with influential leaders and personalities who have shaped the world in various fields, from politics and education to social activism. These visionaries, many of whom have passed on but left an indelible legacy, share their insights and experiences. A memorable conversation with the legendary Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Bacha Khan) and interviews with Ghaus Bakhsh Bizenjo, Asif Ali Zardari, Imran Khan, General Pervez Musharraf, Asma Jahangir are included in the highlights. A historical document that preserves the voices of the past for future generations.

POLICING THE NEWLY MERGED DISTRICTS

Re-designating geographical boundaries has not changed tribal outlook. The long-standing problems of FATA have just been handed down to the NMDs and its police force

By **MANZAR ZAIDI**

Once upon time, there was a place called FATA, at times called the most dangerous place on earth. It was the picture of ultimate disparity compared to rest of Pakistan, backwards in regard to every conceivable human wellness indicator. Then, in 2018, it was merged into the national mainstream in Pakistan, and re-branded as newly merged districts (NMDs). The draconian law of Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) was repealed, and FATA got the laws and policies of Pakistan- people got the same constitutional protections as every other citizen.

And then, all was well.

Or, was it?

The recent killings in Kurram and continuing instability from terrorism highlight the insecurity in these newly formed districts. This is symptomatic as well of a deeper, underlying problem that plagued FATA and continues to plague NMDs: weak governance frameworks. Glaringly among this governance deficit, a nascent police stands out.

NMDs did not just get rights; they also got a police force, theoretically. However, just as an apple by any other name is still an apple, and just as NMDs are still FATA in their outlook, so is their police force: a rag-tag conglomeration of tribes, headed by more experienced police officers. Re-designating geographical boundaries has not changed tribal outlook. The worldview and the long-standing problems of FATA have just been handed down to the NMDs and its police force.

The context

Before the merger of former FATA into the K-P province and the creation of regular districts out of the former frontier regions and tribal agencies, the area was being administered under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). Under FCR, collective responsibility and collective punishment for crimes committed by individuals were the norm, as per the tribal traditions. There was no separation of executive from judiciary. Every individual was treated as an integral part of a tribal community, and his actions would also affect his tribe.

Jirga was (and still largely is) the form of dispensing justice. There was no formal investigation, prosecution and trial as we associate with the modern-day criminal justice system. Coercive force was rarely used to arrest suspects; under the spirit of tribal responsibility, tribes were expected to bring the offenders before the Jirga.

Justice provision in NMDs is thus attuned to dispute resolution because of the long-standing tradition of Jirga. Foreseeably, this propensity for dispute resolution will remain for some time, as it gradually, painfully, transitions into a more individualised rule of law. However, old habits die-hard in the tribal areas; habits become tradition, and tradition is sacrosanct. Thus, when the police opt to make arrests, because of lack of knowledge or legal skills or the system of the area, they usually come back after partaking in a Jirga. This is because the system of the tribal areas has always been based on collective responsibility, rather than on responsibility for individual offences committed by someone.

Entities maintaining law and order in these areas were divided into the Levies, the semi-formal police organisation under the political agent, and the Khasadars, the honorary police officers, serving on behalf of their tribes. Their nomenclature and rank-structures were inspired by military organisation. For Khasadars, there was no standard of recruitment except their tribal origin, and they were more numerous than the Levies. Both Levies and Khasadars have been now integrated into the Police force. A judicial system has also been notified, replacing FCR, ostensibly, with Pakistan's criminal justice system; this is easier said than done.

Supposedly, under the Constitution, individual criminal liability, investigation and prosecution as provided under the Criminal Procedure Code, and punishments as provided in the Pakistan Penal Code, are now applicable to NMDs. Application of Police Rules and Police Efficiency and Discipline Rules also apply. However, enforcing these laws and rules even in Pakistan's settled cities and districts has been a major challenge for policing, despite the Police forces in Pakistan having decades of experiential learning.

How will the almost illiterate and untrained new police force in NMDs fare? Can they even be trained, even though K-P police has been directing one training after another, at them?

NMDs have a force of 25,000 officers comprising the Levies (that had some formal training), and the Khasadars. Both lacked proper regimentation and discipline as we associate with regular police. Under the FCR, Levies and Khasadars, now suddenly becoming Police officers almost overnight, had very limited roles and duties. Since there was no formal criminal justice system based on modern concepts of investigation, prosecution and trial. Jirga was the means of dispensing justice. There was no separation as such of executive and judiciary, either.

There were no strict recruitment criteria, training regime or career planning or career progression rules. Award of ranks was also arbitrary. The Khasadars particularly were an honorary rank, and a large number of them were not physically present in the country, but were still enrolled and drawing salaries. They provided their 'replacements', or 'Iwzis' to work when needed. The nature and scope of duties allotted to them was also very limited, unlike the modern civilian law-enforcement. They were doing either the 'Phatak' or barrier/check-point duty to stop and search vehicles, or the 'Badarga' duty, which means security, escort, or arrest duty. However, now the police are supposed to do much more.

As we all know, security is the most basic issue in NMDs, but the capacity of NMD police officers is debatable in enforcing rule of law in these highly troubled areas. Police still cannot operate without the active involvement of military. The security situation in Pakistan's newly merged districts remains highly volatile, marked by frequent terrorist attacks and instability. Despite efforts, the police face severe capacity challenges, including limited resources and training, hampering their ability to effectively control the situation.

New policing duties and new public expectations are staring the former Levies and Khasadars in the face, and most of them are baffled by the change and disoriented in the face of new challenges. Policing in NMDs requires development of new attitudes, behaviours, policing practices, codes of conduct, discipline and accountability if the police officers are going to step up to the challenge of deteriorating security problems.







How will that happen?

Well, it won't, at least not until the foundational issues of the rag-tag police force in NMDs are solved.

Administrative challenges

At the time of merger, there was resistance from both the Levis and Khasadars. In order to deal with this challenge, 22 points of concessions were granted. One of the most important promises made was that they would not be displaced from their present districts, and they would not be posted to the former settled districts. Similarly, they were also promised that officers from the settled districts would not be posted in the NMDs. These terms discourage re-location and adjustment of police forces to new environments, which is a time-tested method of managing transition successfully.

After the merger, all the laws, rules and procedures of the criminal justice in vogue in other parts of the country are ostensibly applicable to NMDs. However, the NMDs are not like the rest of the country, and have never been. They have been a distinct closed society within the larger Pakistani society, and expecting that they would become 'modernised' instantly after passing some laws was, putting it mildly, a simplistic assumption.

That does not mean in any way that the merger was ill advised. However, as with many things, it was the way that it was pushed through which is the issue. The new police force could not have been just re-constituted from their old structures, but it was. Some transition time should have been allocated, but it wasn't.

In order to fully implement the new system, formal police training, discipline and accountability are a must, requiring significant behavioural change, knowledge expansion and skill development. Without discipline, there can be no accountability of the police force. The former Levies and Khasadars have been assigned police ranks, but their conversion has not transformed them.

Many Khasadars are enjoying the ranks of a DSP because of their higher status in the tribe, while others, recruited at the same time, are just constables. It is thus not uncommon to witness an illiterate DSP supervising his more educated junior subordinates. This is unsustainable; in the past, their promotions have been granted without any promotion rules. Now, they are supposed to qualify all the courses required for promotion, and a large number of them being illiterate, will not qualify for these promotion courses. Will they be just 'pulled through,' or will they remain DSPs till they retire? Both options are not tenable in any smoothly functioning police force. More importantly, how will they get capable future leadership?

Change management is a big challenge in the MDs. The officers have still not fully accepted this merger and some of them hope that this whole process may someday be reversed.

There is a unique phenomenon in these regions: police unionism. The officers sometimes take out processions and protests in order to register their grievances. For instance, in the not so distant past, police in North Waziristan tribal district threatened to indefinitely stop performing their duties, unless the provincial government annulled its decision of delegating magisterial powers to deputy commissioners in the region. North Waziristan police also called a Jirga in Peshawar to address this issue. Similar incidents have cropped up in other NMDs.

Operational challenges

The lack of resources manifests in both human and equipment. Response to and registration of crime, HR management, documentation, criminal intelligence gathering, investigation, collection and preservation of evidence, chain of custody and preparing challans for prosecution and trial are still practices new to most NMD Policemen. There is no concept of community and public outreach, and public-police interface is extremely limited.

A small number of upper subordinates (sub-inspectors mainly) have been transferred from the settled districts/areas to the NMDs to take up investigation of crime in a professional manner. They are also mentoring the willing members of police in NMDs. However, there is stiff resistance by the locals in regards to what they perceive as 'forced imposition' of 'non-locals' upon them.

Inadequate policing skills, poor knowledge of laws and rules, lack of understanding of the concept of public service and individual rights and responsibilities, lack of supervisory skills, lack of operational planning skills, all impede successful police operations. In many merged districts, DSPs are simply incapable of performing duties as supervisory officers/sub-divisional police officers.

Police operations and investigation are concepts alien to the force in these regions. They are gradually learning new things, but the pace is slow and needs proactive intervention by the senior officers.

They are also not trained to be prosecution witnesses at a trial. Hence, core policing functions are in a rudimentary form. The limited use of IT for delivery of policing services is another challenge, which needs addressing.

There is a serious need for empathetic leadership that ensures inclusivity in decision-making. Senior officers may need to address genuine issues of the force on priority. All stakeholders must support the police command and give them the full authority to take the MDs' force forward. This requires constant logistical, financial and political support.

The answer has been to post experienced police officers as District Police Officers (DPOs) in these areas, sometime from the Police Service of Pakistan (PSP). However, even if the DPO was the most dedicated and experienced police officer serving in Pakistan today, he would still face almost insurmountable obstacles.

NMDs have tended to be funded by umbrella grants (read 'makeshift arrangements') as opposed to the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) in Pakistan (regular budgets for infrastructure development). Thus, adequate funds are almost never available.

On the other hand, NMDs probably have the highest number of weapons per household, as opposed to anywhere else in Pakistan. The police are outgunned almost in every district even by the tribes they are supposed to protect, and at times, arrest. This can be easily observed in Kurram and elsewhere in NMDs, whereby the only tenable option for the district administration is to negotiate for peace with the tribes, whenever there is unrest. 'Lashkarkashi' or tribal mobilisation has tended to occur, sometimes on a massive scale as was observed in Kurram recently, but arrests for what is essentially violating the writ of the state are, at best, lacklustre; that is an understatement of the highest order. Couple this with terrorism and extremism, which is fuelling continuing instability in these areas, and you, have the worst place in Pakistan for a police officer to serve effectively.

Thus, any DPO posted-in would immediately need to tackle rising terrorism and insecurity in the region, for which he requires an effective, trained, police force. All he gets is a lop-sided response from his juniors, and more often than not, gets so mired in administrative issues that he rarely has chance to address foundational problems of his police force. Most of his time is spent meeting 'Musheeran' (local influential maliks amenable to the state) to sort one problem or another, or having meetings with military to bolster his weak police force.

Priority areas

The capacity needs of the operational field officers within both police and district administration are different from their supervisory and command tiers. Operational tiers of Police are dealing directly with the public in distress looking for redress of grievances, as victims of crime, or as citizens in need of a driving license or a character certificate. People also come into contact with police while passing through police checkpoints, while driving, engaging in a protest, or sometimes as suspects.

Therefore, in addition to enhancing service delivery skills, police essentially have to handle conflicts that are germane to everyday policing. Every administrator and police officer finds himself among parties fighting over claims and counter-claims. Conflict resolution is an essential skill for field officers at all levels, but especially at the level of upper-subordinates (ASI to Inspector). At the same time, since this essentially never happened, police in NMDs need to be attuned to the issues of public dealing and conflict management.

Is the implementation of these suggestions even possible? Imparting knowledge and training to illiterate officers, some of who are DSPs, is no small task, is it?

Probably not—so what is the way forward? We cannot simply set them aside, as that would ruffle too many feathers, which is not tenable in the current environment of the NMDs.

Well, one approach might be to gradually and subtly redirect these officers to purely tactical units. Modern policing skills require field craft, which in turn necessitates literacy, which is in short, supply in NMDs. Thus a viable strategy would be to assign less literate officers to roles like handling weapons, conducting raids, and supervising field operations. At the same time, robust recruitment drives would promote intake of more educated police officers. In time, the literacy levels of police in NMDs would skew in the favour of educated young men and women.

The organisational culture of police in NMDs might evolve to be slightly different from other police forces, but that is absolutely acceptable — police leadership needs to be flexible, creative, and adaptive in implementing change. Thus, when a certain specific outcome is pushed (i.e., the police force must operate in a particular way in NMDs) as the only possibility, progress is hampered. Police leadership might need to understand that there might be nuances to policing in the NMDs, unique from elsewhere in the country. Alternate dispute resolution and mediation as added police functions immediately come to mind, given the tribal structure and mindset of the society, found no where else in Pakistan to the same extent.

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All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the author

