

NEWS LETTER

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Connecting People Through Ideas, Innovation and Research.



Dr. Syed Raghav Ali
Executive Director

Introducing LIRA

The Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA) is a non profit, non-partisan research organization dedicated to quality research, meeting international standards based on empirical investigation and systematic inquiry.

Committed to openness, fairness, and impartiality, we aim at generating high-value and actionable research-oriented solutions matching the requirements of stakeholders across various disciplines. Our focus areas include Economy, Governance, Climate Change, Education, Health and Gender. Connecting people from across the globe, we aspire to create a 'LIRA Community' linked through ideas, innovation and research.

Focus Area

- > Introducing LIRA
- > Research Wing
- > LIRA Activities
- > LIRA Journal
- > LIRA MOUs Signing Ceremony
- > LIRA Interviews

Highlights

From the Desk of Executive Director
(LIRA International Symposium 21st Century
Challenges: Future of South Asia.)

Information

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The Shifting Realities: Pak-India Face-off and Its Implications.

Dr. Syed Raghab Ali
Executive Director (LIRA)

The recent military confrontation between Pakistan and India, which began on May 7, 2025, and concluded with a ceasefire on May 13, marks a watershed moment in modern warfare. Though brief, this conflict has set unprecedented precedents—most notably, the first-ever use of artificial intelligence in live combat—and its repercussions will reverberate across regional and global geopolitics for years to come.

The clash not only demonstrated the evolving nature of warfare but also signaled a potential reconfiguration of power dynamics in South Asia and beyond.

Historically, conflicts between two strategically balanced adversaries—such as Pakistan and India—have often ended in stalemates. Both nations have spent decades countering each other's advancements, ensuring that neither gains a decisive upper hand. However, this recent skirmish defied expectations. Pakistan's successful downing of India's advanced French-made Rafale jets—valued at 250 million dollars each using comparatively

cheaper Chinese-made J-10C fighter aircraft (price 40 million dollars) has rewritten the rules of aerial warfare. The Rafale, equipped with the sophisticated Spectra electronic warfare system, was long considered invulnerable.

Yet, Pakistan's J-10Cs, equipped with Chinese AI-assisted targeting algorithms, land-based sensors, and early warning systems, managed to lock onto and destroy at least two to three Rafales using PL-15 missiles.

This outcome is not merely a tactical victory for Pakistan but a strategic one with far-reaching implications. For the first time, Chinese military technology has outperformed Western systems in a live combat scenario, challenging the long-held dominance of U.S. and European defence industries.

The psychological impact of this cannot be overstated. Nations reliant on Western arms may now reconsider their options, especially as China's defence technology proves itself in real-world conditions. Beyond the military sphere, the conflict has tilted the regional balance of power in Pakistan's favor. The damage inflicted by Pakistan's Fateh-1 and Fateh-2 missiles on 26 Indian military sites—compared to India's limited retaliatory strikes—has bolstered

Pakistan's deterrence credibility. This shift could accelerate Pakistan's diplomatic and economic integration with neighbouring states such as Iran, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, countries that have historically maintained cautious or even strained relations with Islamabad. A more confident Pakistan, backed by China, could emerge as a stabilizing force in the region, provided it leverages this momentum wisely.

China, meanwhile, stands to gain immensely from this episode. The effectiveness of its military technology in a live conflict enhances its credibility as a global power capable of rivaling the U.S. This could accelerate the emergence of a multi-polar world order where Beijing plays an equally decisive role in international affairs.

The success of the J-10C and PL-15 missiles will likely boost Chinese arms exports, further eroding Western market dominance. Additionally, China's strategic partnership with Pakistan will deepen, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) becoming even more central to their alliance. As Western influence wanes in South Asia, China's economic and military footprint will expand, reshaping regional alliances.

For India, the conflict presents a moment of reckoning. Its reliance on Western military hardware has been exposed as a potential vulnerability, raising questions about its defence strategy.

The Rafale's failure to dominate the skies against cheaper Chinese-Pakistani alternatives may force New Delhi to reconsider its arms procurement policies.

More critically, India's alignment with the U.S. could become a liability if Washington's influence in the region continues to decline.

The possibility of India realigning itself with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—a block dominated by China and Russia—can no longer be dismissed. Such a shift would have profound implications, including a potential re-evaluation of the Kashmir dispute.

If India moves closer to the Sino-Russian block, it may find itself compelled to engage in more substantive negotiations over Kashmir, possibly leading to a resolution that accommodates Pakistan's interests.

The broader geopolitical landscape is also set for transformation. The U.S., already overstretched in other theaters, may disengage from South Asia more decisively, leaving a vacuum that China will eagerly fill. This could hasten the formation of an integrated regional block centered around China, encompassing

Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asian states. Such a bloc would not only alter trade and security dynamics but also marginalize American influence in the region. In conclusion, the May 2025 Pakistan-India conflict, though short-lived, has set in motion a series of changes that will redefine South Asia's strategic future.

Pakistan's military success, enabled by Chinese technology, has shifted the regional power balance, while China's emergence as a peer competitor to the U.S. in defence technology signals a broader global realignment.

India faces critical choices—whether to double down on its Western alliances or pivot toward the Sino-Russian axis.

Meanwhile, the U.S. may find its role in South Asia increasingly irrelevant, marking the end of an era of unchallenged Western dominance. The world is witnessing the birth of a new order, one where artificial intelligence, shifting alliances, and rising powers redraw the boundaries of influence. The only certainty is that the old paradigms no longer hold—South Asia, and the world, will never be the same.



Research Wing

Shaping the Future of Education with Generative AI: Lessons from History

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This year, UNESCO dedicated the International Day of Education to Artificial Intelligence, underscoring the urgency of preparing students to navigate an increasingly AI-driven world. This global call resonated loudly and clearly. In Pakistan, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif affirmed his government's determination to harness the transformative power of AI to empower youth. Similarly, thousands of miles away, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim emphasized that AI literacy must begin in schools – not merely as an option but as a necessity.

These reflections from global leaders prompt a crucial question: what does education mean in the age of generative AI (GenAI), and how should we shape its role in higher education?

While GenAI astonishes us with unprecedented speed and capabilities, its concerns, including plagiarism, erosion of academic rigor, and challenges to traditional learning, echo familiar anxieties from history. At the recent international symposium “21st Century Challenges:

The Future of South Asia,” organized by Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA) at the University of Lahore, former Pakistani senator and federal minister Javed Jabbar aptly remarked, “History is more mysterious than the future. Unless we know history, we cannot truly shape a better future.”

This insightful statement speaks directly to the current GenAI disruption. To successfully navigate these changes, educators must reflect on historical transformations, using past lessons as a guide.

Take, for instance, the invention of Gutenberg's printing press in the 15th century. Initially feared as a radical disruptor of intellectual authority, it ultimately democratized access to knowledge previously guarded by scholarly elites. Critics feared misinformation and diluted intellectual rigor, yet the result was an unprecedented spread of literacy, critical thinking, and educational accessibility. Institutions adapted and grew stronger by embracing, rather than resisting, innovation.

A similar pattern emerged with Wikipedia in the early 2000s. Initially dismissed by academics as unreliable, it transformed into one of the world's most trusted resources.

Wikipedia thrived precisely because it championed openness, transparency, and collective editing, redefining scholarly authority for the digital age.

GenAI now stands at a similar intersection. Much like its historical predecessors, it democratizes knowledge creation, allowing students to generate research outlines swiftly or interact dynamically with intelligent chatbots. While some educators see this rapid technological advancement as a threat, undermining reflective thought and original scholarship, history instructs us otherwise. The central question is not if GenAI will transform education – it clearly has – but how educators and institutions choose to respond.

Rather than banning or ignoring AI tools, educators should approach GenAI proactively. Yes, AI-generated content can sometimes be superficial or misleading, but this presents an opportunity – not a threat – to refine pedagogical practices. Just as we once integrated citation training and anti-plagiarism awareness into education, today we must focus on AI literacy. Students must be taught to evaluate AI-generated content critically, understand its limitations, and thoughtfully engage with its ethical implications. GenAI should be viewed as an intellectual partner, amplifying human creativity rather than diminishing it.

This evolution also demands new approaches to assessment. Traditional essay assignments may lose their effectiveness if easily completed by AI, yet this situation provides educators with the chance to rethink how students demonstrate learning. Assignments focusing on the learning process – such as draft submissions, AI-usage reflections, and in-depth discussions – can foster deeper engagement.

Alternative assessment methods like oral exams, collaborative projects, and critical analysis exercises ensure meaningful learning outcomes. Equity must remain central during this transformative period.

AI's benefits currently reach unevenly, deepening the divide between technologically advanced and under-resourced institutions. Without deliberate action, this gap could significantly widen.

Universities must invest in inclusive digital literacy programs, enabling all students to confidently and ethically engage with AI tools, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Crucially, technological advancements do not determine educational outcomes; our deliberate and thoughtful choices do. Reflect on Microsoft Excel, as shared by Professor Jon Garibaldi from The University of Nottingham, initially feared for potentially replacing accountants. Instead, Excel enhanced accountants' productivity, transforming their roles rather than eliminating them.

Similarly, the emergence of online learning, initially viewed skeptically, now significantly enriches global education through diverse, accessible formats. The successful integration of technology hinges on educators' intentional, informed, and ethical engagement.

GenAI represents another transformative moment in education's continuous evolution. Universities should lead proactively – updating curricula, training faculty, cultivating innovative environments, and responsibly addressing potential risks without succumbing to panic. Ultimately, students should be equipped not just to passively utilize AI but to engage thoughtfully and responsibly with it.

Higher education flourishes when it evolves with societal needs and technological changes. GenAI is yet another important chapter in this ongoing story. Our collective responsibility is not merely to adapt to inevitable change but actively shape it, ensuring education remains vibrant, inclusive, and fundamentally human.



Research Wing

A Comparative Analysis of Southeast and South Asian Youth Aspiration

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With today's rapid geopolitical shifts and unprecedented global challenges, the perspective of youth provides hope and direction for the future. As the largest generation in history with 1.8 billion people according to the United Nations, today's youth possess the potential to reshape societal landscapes.

In the diverse regions of Southeast and South Asia, youthful perspectives present a fascinating dichotomy. Southeast Asian youth exhibit a resilient optimism fuelled by economic growth and technological advancement.

In contrast, South Asian youth navigate historical complexities and geopolitical challenges, fostering a determination to overcome obstacles.

This comparative analysis delves into the nuances of youth optimism across these regions, exploring how their unique experiences and aspirations shape their responses to contemporary challenges, ultimately influencing the trajectory of their nations' futures.

According to a survey by the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in January 2025, Southeast Asian youth are marked by a prevailing sense of optimism due to the region's dynamic economic landscape and political stability such as in countries like Vietnam and Singapore where GDP growth and rising employment opportunities paint a promising future. The proliferation of technology plays a significant role, offering unprecedented access to information and global markets.

As digital natives, these young individuals harness social media and online platforms for social and political engagement.

The emphasis on better access to information also affects their opportunities to participate in social and political change. This milieu fosters a generation poised to capitalize on opportunities, uplift communities, and contribute meaningfully to their nations' development.

Southeast Asia is blessed by relative peace among neighbours. The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** plays a pivotal role in ensuring regional stability through its mission of promoting cooperation among member countries. By fostering dialogue and collaboration, ASEAN has been successful in mitigating conflicts and enhancing economic ties. Strategic partnerships and policies, such as the ASEAN Economic Community, bolster trade, investment, and infrastructure development, ensuring sustainable growth and stability.

ASEAN's proactive stance on regional security challenges further strengthens peace efforts. In 2025, Malaysia takes over as the Chair of ASEAN with the theme of "Inclusivity and Sustainability."

Through different channels, ASEAN not only contributes to regional stability but also empowers the next generation to sustain and enhance these achievements.

On the other hand, South Asian youth often experience a cautious sentiment, shaped by persistent socio-economic challenges. High unemployment rates and limited access to resources impact their career prospects and long-term optimism despite equally being digital natives. In nations like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, systemic issues such as poverty and disparity in opportunities exacerbate these concerns.

Political instability and governance issues further influence youth perspectives, as frequent governmental changes and corruption scandals breed distrust in leadership. Young people, witnessing governance failures, may feel disillusioned about their future.

Moreover, key geopolitical tensions in South Asia significantly impact youth outlook. Ongoing conflicts, such as the India-Pakistan war following the terrorist attack near Pahalgam in the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir in which 26 civilians were killed in April 2025, highlight persistent regional strains.

The climate of uncertainty these tensions create inhibits growth and employment prospects as resources are often diverted to defence rather than development. While international diplomatic efforts aim to ease these tensions, the youth remain in a precarious position.

ASEAN stands as a model of effective regional cooperation, contrasting sharply with the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.

ASEAN's diplomatic approach, emphasizing consensus and non-interference, fosters strong economic ties, leading to tangible benefits such as robust trade agreements and infrastructural investments.

This offers more opportunities and stability for the youth. In contrast, SAARC struggles with political tensions, primarily between member nations like India and Pakistan, hindering cohesive action and mutual progress.

The regular diplomatic conflicts result in stagnation, affecting regional integration efforts and limiting collaboration in areas like education and technology.

Consequently, the youth in SAARC region often face restricted opportunities compared to their ASEAN counterparts. For effective progress, SAARC must overcome geopolitical barriers to emulate ASEAN's success.

The potential for youth leadership in South Asia is immense, with young people poised to drive transformative regional change.

The success story of the youth-led coup in Bangladesh in 2024 leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Hasina in August serves as an example of what the youth can achieve even under challenging circumstances.

This event showcased the power of organized, visionary youth leadership in advocating for democracy and reform.

In Pakistan, for example, students protested in October 2024 in Lahore over allegations of rape at a Punjab College for Women campus.

These hostilities directly affect youth aspirations and mobility, limiting cross-border exchanges and opportunities for collaboration.

The willingness of the youth to challenge the status quo and demand justice fosters hope for a more equitable future.

Encouragement for the youth to continue leading change is crucial. By leveraging modern technology and social media platforms, young leaders can amplify their voices, reach broader audiences, and gather support for their campaigns.

Their dedication to tackling issues such as climate change, education, and social justice can pave the way for comprehensive regional reforms.

As South Asia faces numerous challenges, the involvement of its youth is instrumental in shaping a future that aligns with the aspirations of its people. Young leaders have the potential to transform South Asia into a region of opportunity and progress for the benefit of current and future generations.



Research Wing

Evolving Communication Trends in South Asia and Saudi Arabia: Innovations, Challenges, and Future Prospects

Muhammad Sirajul Huda Khan

In the digital age, communication is no longer confined to conventional means.

South Asia and Saudi Arabia—regions rich in culture, tradition, and diversity—are witnessing transformative shifts in how individuals, institutions, and governments connect, collaborate, and convey information.

The rise of digital platforms, the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the widespread adaptation of educational technologies are redefining communication landscapes with both promise and complexity.

One of the most notable innovations in recent years is integrating educational technology in universities, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

The implementation of Blackboard, a robust Learning Management System (LMS), stands as a powerful example.

Universities such as Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University (PMU) and King Saud University have adopted Blackboard to bridge the gap between instructors and students.

This digital platform facilitates real-time virtual classrooms, assignment submissions, discussion forums, and automated assessments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Blackboard became an academic lifeline, enabling uninterrupted learning despite global disruptions.

Even post-pandemic, it continues to revolutionize pedagogical practices by fostering interactive, student-centered learning environments.

In South Asia, a parallel shift is visible. Countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are rapidly digitizing communication across sectors. In education, platforms such as Google Classroom and Edmodo are gaining traction, especially in urban centers.

Governments have launched digital literacy campaigns and e-governance portals, making public services more accessible. However, the digital divide remains a significant barrier, with rural populations often lacking stable internet access and digital skills.

Saudi Arabia's focused investment in digital transformation, as part of Vision 2030, offers valuable lessons for countries like Pakistan.

With clear policy direction, substantial funding, and a strong emphasis on training and infrastructure, Saudi Arabia has created a modern communication ecosystem that supports innovation in both education and governance.

Pakistan should take inspiration from this model by institutionalizing the use of systems like Blackboard across universities, particularly public sector institutions, and by prioritizing teacher training and e-learning infrastructure development.

Learning from Saudi Arabia's successes can help Pakistan accelerate its journey toward educational and digital excellence.

Social media, too, plays a transformative role across both regions. In Saudi Arabia, platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Snapchat are not only entertainment outlets but also tools for diplomacy, business marketing, and civic engagement.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's Vision 2030 underscores the need for digital transformation, and communication technologies lie at the heart of this vision.

Meanwhile, in South Asia, social media activism is reshaping political discourse. From farmer protests in India to election campaigns in Pakistan, digital platforms are amplifying voices and triggering social movements. However, the challenge of misinformation and cyber harassment remains a growing concern, necessitating stronger regulatory frameworks and media literacy initiatives. Another promising development is the integration of AI-powered chatbots in public service communication.

In Saudi Arabia, government apps like Absher streamline civil procedures through automated interfaces, reducing bureaucracy. Similarly, in Bangladesh, AI-driven health advisory bots support rural healthcare outreach. These innovations improve efficiency but also highlight ethical dilemmas related to data privacy and algorithmic bias.

The prospects are promising. As 5G technology rolls out and digital infrastructure improves, both regions are poised for more inclusive and intelligent communication systems. Collaboration between South Asia and Saudi Arabia in areas like digital diplomacy, tech-based education, and cyber security can open new avenues for regional connectivity and cultural exchange.

Yet, challenges persist. Bridging the urban-rural digital divide, ensuring data protection, and adapting communication practices to local languages and cultures must remain priorities. Moreover, there is a need for continual professional development for educators, particularly in mastering tools like Blackboard, Zoom, and AI-driven analytics, to fully harness their pedagogical potential.

In short, the evolving communication trends in South Asia and Saudi Arabia reflect a dynamic interplay of innovation and tradition. The success of platforms like Blackboard in Saudi universities exemplifies how thoughtful technology integration

can enhance learning and interaction. Pakistan, in particular, must seize the opportunity to learn from Saudi Arabia's strategic approach to communication and education technology, adapting it to local needs while paving the way for a digitally empowered future.



Research Wing

Regulating Generative AI in Journalism: Global Frameworks, Regional Adaptation, and Implications for Pakistan

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Generative AI (GenAI) has heralded innovations and challenges to traditional news production methods; it has transformed the speed and efficiency with which information is disseminated and reached the audience. And while creating efficiency and automation, the type of AI currently available throws up numerous relevant issues, such as misinformation, editorial integrity, and accountability. The EU AI Act, UNESCO AI Ethics Guidelines, OECD AI Principles, U.S. AI Executive Order, and many other such regulations and frameworks worldwide promote transparency, accountability, and human supervision in AI applications. It is unfortunate, however, that the standards borrowed from these other global standards, be included but not limited to, do apply in very thin air within Pakistan. This therefore leaves some regulatory gaps that need urgent attention.

It is dire need of time to look at the changing dynamics of AI governance in journalism by focusing on how different regions manage regulation in relation to AI-injected content. The EU AI Act ties different AI systems into a risk basket and places stricter rules on the use of high-risk applications such as automated journalism.

In the same vein, UNESCO's roadmap for AI looked into the angle of human rights, fairness, and transparency in governance, higher robustness and accountability within AI-driven media by the OECD, while the focus of the U.S. AI Executive Order, 2023 is mainly on responsible use of AI against misinformation.

China has a strict AI content moderation, while India has a more innovation-centered approach to regulation. On the other hand, in Pakistan, the legal framework does not include specific directives within PECA 2016, E-Safety Bill 2023, or Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Amendment) Bill 2025 that guide GenAI in journalism, thus raising the policy vacuum that needs closure. There remains, however, the provision of gate-keeping and credibility of sources by journalists and editors for an age of AI news.

This hybrid model of bias and misinformation prevention, fact-checking enabled AI, will ensure accuracy and integrity in the editorial process. The successful embedding of AI in the Pakistani newsroom will use robust editorial policy, training of journalists in ethics, and collaboration of news organizations with international fact-checking bodies to usher in a new way of working that harnesses the potentials of technology in these areas.

Combating AI misinformation will also need investments in AI-based fact-checking tools, more strategic resource allocation, and expanded collaboration both within and between government agencies and media watchdogs. It is learnt through a study conducted in 2024 that editorial approaches among leading Pakistani media organizations, such as GNN TV, Dawn TV, Geo TV, and Daily Express, due to the face of AI has shaped the environment of newsrooms in Pakistan.

Even if all four outlets emphasized verification, fact-checking, and editorial oversight, their approaches vary due to the difference in their audience engagement, resources, and content formats. Like GNN TV, Dawn TV, or Geo TV, all these TV channels rely on real-time reporting, visual storytelling, and live audience interaction.

The Daily Express, however, as a print newspaper, follows a comparatively rigid publishing frame, laying emphasis on detailed text-based journalism. TV networks are funded by huge budgets and AI-driven monitoring mechanisms

which print media often fighter with. This only adds to the resource limitations and affects their implementing AI-driven fact-checking systems on scale. Meanwhile, the four show their commitment to preserving journalistic rigor by employing fact-checkers, utilizing AI tools for authentication of news, and working with delinked outside verification organizations.

Their reporting breathes in transparency and accountability so that culprits whose eyes have gone misinformation got detected quickly and are ready for apex correction.

Above all, they show adaptability in their flexibility with new AI challenges, which shows that it merits a constant expectation in those journalistic practices.

The digital laws in Pakistan do not provide any structured framework for regulation of AI in journalism. The recommendations from this research include an AI accountability framework tailor-made for journalism, establishment of AI-based fact-checking systems, adoption of AI literacy for journalists and awareness creation to inform the public about AI-influenced misinformation.

There is need for a balanced regulatory approach in Pakistan that ensures media transparency and accountability without compromising freedom of the press. The growing influence of GenAI in journalism is expected to bring both benefits and dangers. AI can enhance the news production and audience interaction, but when misused, it can generate fear, prejudices, and ethical dilemmas.

In this fast-changing, uncertain world, Pakistan will have to learn from the emerging global best examples to develop and adopt local AI policies, although that should involve the upholding of journalistic integrity.

Through collaboration, innovation, and strict adherence to good reporting practices, Pakistani newsrooms will be allowed to enjoy the goodness of AI while maintaining a public trust to the media. A proper balance could thereby be struck at press freedom against AI-generated misinformation through transparency and accountability in AI governance.

Therefore, urgent policy interventions and structural reforms will resolve the regulatory and ethical challenges GenAI poses for the practice of journalism in Pakistan. Whereas internationally accepted standards

such as EU AI Act, UNESCO AI Ethics Guidelines, and An AI Executive Order in the U.S. address many governance issues related to AI, Pakistan somewhat lacks for any directive in such regard under PECA 2016, E-Safety Bill 2023, and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act Amendment Bill 2025, thus leaving an essential policy vacuum.

The path of sustainability will emanate from a hybrid model that informs editors when AI fact-checking tools are deployed to combat misinformation and enhance integrity in journalism. News organizations should build AI governance frameworks, train journalists on AI ethics, and establish collaborative partnerships with international fact-checking partners.

Complementary investments in verification tools based on AI, allocation of resources, and cross-sector collaboration are essential for the regulation of AI between government agencies, media watchdogs, and sector stakeholders alike. Equity in AI integration would require funding and technical assistance to under-resourced outlets given their disadvantage relative to TV networks in AI adoption.

In the absence of preventative regulatory action and newsroom adaptation, GenAI threatens to hamper the credibility of and heighten distrust in Pakistani journalism and aggravate misinformation.



Research Wing

The Indus Waters Treaty: A Lifeline under Threat—A Pakistani Perspective

Dr. Sapna Mumtaz

The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), brokered by the World Bank and signed in 1960 between India and Pakistan, has long been considered a rare success in South Asia's troubled geopolitical landscape. This water-sharing agreement endured for more than six decades despite wars, skirmishes, and deep-rooted hostility. It symbolized the potential for

cooperation amidst conflict and served as a vital mechanism for ensuring water security in Pakistan. However, recent developments have critically endangered this fragile framework. India has now suspended the treaty and announced that it will hold the agreement "in abeyance" due to what it describes as concerns about cross-border terrorism.

More alarmingly, India has vowed to stop the flow of water across the border into Pakistan—a move that threatens not just bilateral relations but also the fundamental humanitarian fabric of the region.

Historically, the treaty allocated the three eastern rivers—Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej—to India and the three western rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—to Pakistan.

Although the treaty allowed India limited non-consumptive use of the western rivers, such as for hydroelectric power, any design or project that could impact water flow or storage required adherence to strict treaty parameters. For Pakistan, this agreement was never a luxury but a necessity, given its overwhelming dependence on the western rivers for agriculture, energy, and drinking water.

India's recent decision to hold the treaty in abeyance is unprecedented and alarming. This suspension is not just a diplomatic maneuver; it is a clear indication that New Delhi is prepared to weaponize water, one of the most essential and irreplaceable natural resources, to exert political pressure on Islamabad.

The announcement follows violent border clashes in May 2025, which resulted in casualties on both sides, including civilians. India has once again accused Pakistan of supporting cross-border terrorism, while Pakistan strongly denies these allegations and views India's reaction as a form of coercion and strategic blackmail.

The implications of suspending the treaty are far-reaching. The IWT was designed to be apolitical, functioning even during periods of war and deep tension. Its longevity stood as proof of its resilience and mutual benefit. India's unilateral suspension sets a dangerous precedent, undermining not only the spirit of the agreement but also the fundamental principle in international law that treaties must be honored in good faith. It introduces instability into a region already fraught with environmental vulnerability, political mistrust, and historical antagonism.

Before this dramatic escalation, Pakistan had repeatedly raised concerns over India's construction of hydroelectric projects on the western rivers, particularly the Kishanganga and Ratle dams. Pakistan maintained that these designs violated the technical limits set by the treaty.

Despite bringing the matter before the World Bank and other forums, Pakistan's calls for resolution were often delayed or dismissed. With the treaty now suspended, the institutional mechanisms for addressing disputes have been rendered effectively defunct, leaving Pakistan in an increasingly precarious position.

India's growing hostility in its rhetoric toward Pakistan over the treaty cannot be ignored. Statements by Indian officials that "not a drop of water" should be allowed to flow into Pakistan as long as terrorism persists are deeply concerning.

This represents a shift from a rules-based approach to one of open confrontation. Such language signals a deliberate intention to use water as a geopolitical tool of punishment—something that goes against all norms of environmental justice, international cooperation, and basic humanity.

Pakistan, a country already ranked among the most water-stressed nations in the world, is highly dependent on the Indus River system. Its agriculture sector, which employs a large percentage of the population, relies almost entirely on irrigation from these rivers.

The electricity generated by its dams also depends on steady river flow. Climate change is already accelerating glacier melt and altering water patterns in the region. Any disruption in this delicate balance, especially as a result of political gamesmanship, could result in devastating consequences for Pakistan's food security, health systems, and economy.



The May 2025 border violence, particularly in Neelum Valley and Sialkot sectors, coupled with India's drone strikes and retaliatory artillery fire, has brought bilateral relations to a new low.

In this context, the suspension of the IWT has dramatically escalated tensions. It has removed one of the last standing channels of dialogue and trust-building between the two nations. Even technical-level meetings are now politically charged and largely dysfunctional. This has deprived both countries, and especially Pakistan, of a crucial platform for managing shared resources and preventing miscalculation.

Pakistan has shown a consistent and principled commitment to the treaty since its inception. Even during the wars of 1965, 1971, and 1999, Pakistan upheld its side of the agreement. Its record demonstrates a deep respect for international commitments and a preference for the peaceful resolution of disputes. India's recent actions, by contrast, reflect a shift toward unilateralism and short-term strategic gains at the cost of long-term regional stability. Such behaviour not only strains India-Pakistan relations but also undermines the credibility of the World Bank and other guarantors of international treaties.

Islamabad is now actively engaging international forums such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to highlight the seriousness of the issue. It has called for immediate third-party mediation to restore the treaty and re-establish a framework for cooperation.

However, while diplomatic efforts are underway, Pakistan must also look inward. The crisis is a wake-up call to invest in water governance, modern irrigation techniques, and domestic water management systems. Building internal resilience is crucial if Pakistan is to withstand such external shocks.

At its core, the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is not just a legal or diplomatic concern—it is a humanitarian and environmental emergency. For Pakistan, the treaty is a lifeline. It sustains agriculture, provides drinking water, supports energy infrastructure, and upholds the livelihoods of millions.

India's vow to stop water flow into Pakistan is not just a breach of agreement—it is a provocation that threatens the very stability of the region.

The international community must recognize the danger in allowing one country to hold another hostage over water, especially in a region already vulnerable to climate insecurity and political volatility.

For peace, security, and sustainable development in South Asia, the Indus Waters Treaty must be preserved, not politicized or suspended. Pakistan continues to uphold its obligations and calls for India to resume its commitments under international law.

While the road ahead may be difficult, Pakistan remains firm in its resolve to protect its rights, ensure its water security, and prevent the weaponization of a resource that belongs to all humankind. Water must remain a source of life, not leverage.



Research Wing

The Social Security conundrum in Pakistan: Challenges, Inefficiencies and urgent need for inclusive reforms.

Sawan Zubair (Research Fellow LIRA)

Social security is a cornerstone of a civilized society, designed to protect individuals from the economic hardships caused by unemployment, old age, illness, and disability.

In developed nations, well-structured social safety nets ensure a minimum standard of living for all citizens. However, in Pakistan, the concept of social security is both underdeveloped and underfunded, presenting a critical challenge for national development, social justice, and poverty alleviation.

Pakistan's formal social security system dates back to the Employees' Social Security Ordinance of 1965, which aimed to provide health and financial benefits to industrial and commercial workers.

Other instruments such as the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI), Workers Welfare Fund (WWF),

and the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) have since been introduced. While these mechanisms have some reach, they cater to a small fraction of the population mostly those in the formal sector, which constitutes less than 30% of the workforce.

Pakistan's informal economy is a major obstacle to effective social security coverage. Over 70% of the labor force is employed in informal or semi-formal settings, including agriculture, small-scale retail, domestic work, and unregistered businesses.

These workers are typically outside the framework of state regulations and are not eligible for benefits like pensions, medical insurance, or unemployment aid. The result is a massive gap between those who need support and those who actually receive it.

Even within the formal system, mismanagement and corruption severely limit the efficacy of social security programs. Institutions such as EOBI have been marred by scandals involving embezzlement and misuse of funds. Additionally, weak monitoring mechanisms and outdated data systems mean that many eligible beneficiaries are either unaware of their rights or unable to access them.

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), and more recently the Ehsaas Programme, have marked efforts to expand the reach of social safety nets.

These cash transfer programs target the poorest segments of society, particularly women, and have received praise for improving household consumption and access to healthcare and education.

However, these are short-term alleviations rather than long-term solutions. Without integrating these programs into a broader strategy for employment, healthcare, and social inclusion, their impact remains limited.

Pakistan's fiscal limitations are a significant constraint on expanding social security. With a narrow tax base, high debt servicing costs, and chronic budget deficits, the government struggles to allocate sufficient funds to welfare programs. Moreover, political instability and short-term policy planning hinder the development of a coherent, long-term social protection strategy.

WayForward

To resolve the social security conundrum in Pakistan, a multi-pronged approach is essential:

1. **Formalizing the Informal Sector:** Introducing incentives for registration, simplifying tax procedures, and offering micro-insurance can bring informal workers under the social security net.

2. **Digital Infrastructure:** Leveraging technology for biometric identification and digital payments, as seen in the Ehsaas initiative, can improve transparency and reduce leakage.

3. **Institutional Reforms:** Enhancing governance, accountability, and professional management of social security institutions is vital for rebuilding public trust.

4. **Inclusive Legislation:** Policies must be designed to include women, home-based workers, persons with disabilities, and rural populations, who are often the most vulnerable yet the least protected.

5. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Engaging NGOs, civil society, and the private sector can foster innovative models for service delivery and resource mobilization.

The social security system in Pakistan is plagued by structural inefficiencies, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic disparities. While recent initiatives signal a shift in political will toward greater social protection, meaningful reform requires sustained commitment, policy coherence, and inclusive development. Ensuring the dignity and well-being of all citizens is not just a moral imperative—it is a prerequisite for national progress and stability.



Research Wing

The Robo-Shoulder: Can AI Replace a Human Listener?

Hanial Ilyas

In an age of digital overload, where everyone is linked but few actually feel heard, mental health is becoming a silent epidemic. The need for therapy is increasing but access remains limited, particularly in underdeveloped nations such as Pakistan. Entering in the world of artificial intelligence from Chabot like Woebot and Wysa to more complex platforms like Replika, AI provides an unexpected level of comfort: someone—or something—who listens. But can a machine really replace a human listener?

Mental health problems are becoming more prevalent worldwide. Millions of people suffer from loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression. Things are made worse in Pakistan by a lack of resources and cultural shame. The World Health Organization estimates that, out of the nation's 240 million residents, there are only roughly 500 psychiatrists. Many people view treatment as a luxury because it is too costly, too remote, or too socially unacceptable.

The use of digital therapy fills this gap. AI-powered chatbots and mental health applications offer a safe, open and judgment-free environment for self-expression. No appointment is required. You don't have to be concerned about criticism. You simply launch the app and begin conversing.

AI therapeutic tools are no longer futuristic science fiction. They are here today and in widespread use. Many apps use cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) strategies to help users navigate emotional challenges. They enquire, "How are you feeling today?" or "What's making you anxious?" They measure your mood, recommend breathing exercises and even offer motivational information.

These techniques can be especially beneficial to those who are timid, reside in rural regions or are uncomfortable opening up to others. Speaking with an AI makes them feel safer and more at ease. There's no judgement, no pressure and no cultural expectations. Just a responsive screen and some kind wording. There are some Advantages of AI Therapy which are following here:

Accessibility: It's available 24/7, anytime someone needs it—even at 3 a.m.

Affordability: Many apps are free or cost much less than a traditional therapy session.

Anonymity: You don't have to reveal your identity.

This removes the social stigma often tied to seeking mental help.

Consistency: AI will never get tired, bored, or distracted. It listens with the same attention every time.

For young people especially—digital natives who are already used to expressing themselves through screens—this form of therapy feels natural.

But here is the real question; Can AI Really Listen? Despite the progress, we must ask a deeper question: Is AI truly listening—or just reacting? In its purest form, listening is an incredibly human activity.

Understanding emotions, body language, pauses and even silence is just as important as simply hearing what is being said. When your tone changes or your tears speak louder than words, a human therapist can tell. Although AI is capable of only analyzing speech patterns and tone of voice so it lacks human emotions.

AI is not empathetic. Phrases like "I understand that must be hard" and "You are not alone" can be used to mimic empathy but they are programmed and not genuine. That does not imply that they are worthless. Even when a bot says something encouraging, it can be reassuring at times. However, it's critical to understand the distinction.

Although many users say AI treatment helps them deal with daily stress, they still seek human connection when more serious problems like trauma, loss or suicidal thoughts occur.

Actually, certain AI programs are meant to recognize warning signals and if needed, reroute users to emergency contacts or licensed therapists. This highlights a fundamental reality: AI can supplement but it cannot replace. Although it may be the initial phase of a person's healing process, it is not the end goal.

There are also severe issues with data privacy and mental safety. What happens to consumers' sensitive conversations with AI? Are they preserved, analyzed, or sold for a profit? This is especially concerning in nations where data privacy regulations are weak.

Another hazard is over-reliance. If people start relying only on AI for emotional support, they may isolate themselves deeper or avoid seeking actual help. Emotional growth frequently

necessitates challenge, contemplation, and interaction, which AI cannot fully supply.

Additionally, there is the matter of cultural context. A lot of AI therapy applications are created in the West and don't usually take into account the distinct emotional environments of nations like Pakistan.

The stresses of joint family relationships, gender roles, and religious sensitivities that influence mental health in South Asia might be too much for a Chatbot trained in English and American culture to understand.

AI alongside humans rather than AI against humans, may be the way of the future for mental health services. AI can help therapists rather than replace them by gathering mood data, offering early support, or assisting with regular mental health examinations.

This hybrid approach may be particularly effective in nations with a shortage of human capital. Imagine AI as a helpful buddy who encourages you to think, take a deep breath, or write down your thoughts, rather than as a therapist. That in and of itself can be immensely restorative.

Pakistan has huge potential for digital therapy. With rising smartphone penetration, mental health awareness, and a tech-savvy youth population, AI has the potential to overcome the therapeutic gap for millions of people. However, this requires rigorous planning, ethical norms and cultural adaptability.

We need local developers, psychologists, and policymakers to collaborate and create platforms that reflect Pakistani realities. We need Urdu and regional language support. We require safe, secure and emotionally intelligent digital environments that mirror who we are.

AI isn't a miracle cure. It cannot take the place of a genuine hug or the warmth of a human voice. But for someone who feels isolated, it might be a ray of hope. When no one else will listen, it can.

Even bionic ears can have an impact in a society where people talk a lot but rarely listen. Remember that any Chatbot must have a human safety net behind it who should be ready to intercept users who require more than a simple algorithm.

LIRA Activities

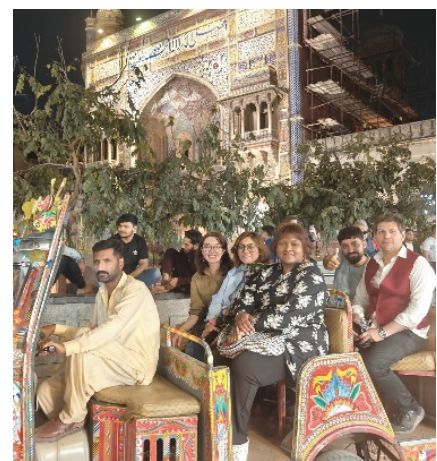
Visit1: City Tour of Old Lahore with International Delegates - A LIRA Initiative



On April 18th, 2025, the LIRA team had the honor of hosting 11 international speakers from various countries for a cultural city tour of the historic Walled City of Lahore.

The tour included visits to some of the city's most iconic landmarks, including the majestic Masjid Wazir Khan and the culturally rich Sadqain ki Bethak and Sadqain Gallery. The international guests were deeply impressed by the architectural splendor and vibrant heritage of Old Lahore.

The evening concluded with a traditional dinner at Sadqain ki Bethak, where guests appreciated the unique ambiance and authentic local cuisine. The event was graciously hosted by Dr. Syed Raghav Ali, Executive Director of LIRA, who used this opportunity to foster connections and formally establish the LIRA international community.



LIRA Activities

Visit2: A Dinner of cultural harmony at POET Restaurant

In a vibrant celebration of cultural diplomacy and international collaboration, the Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA) proudly hosted an esteemed delegation of international guests during their recent visit to Lahore. Delegates representing Malaysia, Australia, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates

gathered for an evening of cultural exchange and dialogue at the iconic POET Restaurant, located in Lake City, Lahore.



The event served as a dynamic platform for building academic and diplomatic bridges, as attendees engaged in meaningful conversations surrounding regional cooperation, research opportunities, and shared heritage.

The ambiance of POET Restaurant, rich with traditional architecture and authentic Pakistani cuisine, provided the perfect backdrop for fostering cross-cultural understanding and camaraderie.

The evening concluded on a warm and memorable note, with delegates expressing appreciation for the hospitality and vision of LIRA in advancing global partnerships through scholarly and cultural engagement.



Conferences

International Symposium 21st Century Challenges: Future of South Asia

The Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA) proudly hosted a two-day **International Symposium** on 17-18 April 2025 that brought together scholars, policymakers, researchers, and youth leaders to explore the pressing challenges and transformative opportunities shaping South Asia in the 21st century.

Held under the overarching theme of **“The Future of South Asia,”** the symposium featured three core sessions: Youth Empowerment, Climate Change and Renewable Energy, and Emerging Trends in Communications.

The first session, **Youth Empowerment – Future of South Asia**, focused on the vital role of youth as agents of change. Participants engaged in meaningful dialogue on strategies to enhance youth involvement in governance, education, and economic development, emphasizing the importance of inclusive platforms and leadership opportunities for young people across the region.

The second session, **Climate Change and Renewable Energy – Future of South Asia**, addressed the urgent environmental issues facing the region.

Experts discussed the adverse impacts of climate change, shared best practices, and highlighted innovative approaches to advancing renewable energy as a path to sustainability and regional resilience.

The final session, **Emerging Trends**

in Communications – Future of South Asia, explored the transformative power of communication technologies in shaping public discourse and social development.

Discussions centered on the evolving media landscape, digital inclusion, and the role of technology in fostering connectivity, transparency, and informed citizenry.

The symposium concluded with a renewed commitment to collaboration, knowledge exchange, and actionable solutions aimed at securing a sustainable and inclusive future for South Asia.

LIRA extends its sincere gratitude to all participants, speakers, and partners for contributing to the success of this impactful event.



Book Launch

The book *Pakistan: Geopolitical Economics and Politics of Economics & Trade Corridors* features a significant chapter authored by Dr. Syed Raghav Ali, Executive Director of the Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA), highlighting Pakistan's evolving role in regional trade and economic integration. The launch event brought together a distinguished panel of scholars and experts, including former Senator Mushahid Hussain, as well as Chinese experts and practitioners, who engaged in meaningful discussions on the strategic importance of Pakistan in emerging trade corridors and regional connectivity. The dialogue underscored the growing significance of collaborative economic initiatives in reshaping geopolitical and geoeconomic landscapes across South and Central Asia.



LIRA Journals

The Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis Journal under the auspices of The University of Lahore addresses public policy issues facing nation states and international organizations, including governments. It applies various theoretical frameworks and concepts derived from the social sciences to pertinent socio-political and economic issues and to the processes that lead to the formation of public policies. The literature published in this journal addresses the concerns realized by established public policy scholars nationally. The multidisciplinary of the journal emanates from the innate nature of the field of public policy to address emerging problems in society. The journal is peer reviewed by a dozen social science scholars from across the country, which enhances the analytic rigor and accuracy of producing national policy-oriented literature.



LIRA MOU Signing Ceremony

1. MOU with LIRA and CEERAT

LIRA (Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis, the University of Lahore) and CEERAT (Centre of Engineering Research Advancement and Technology) enter into this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 11th November 2024 to establish a framework for mutual collaboration in areas of research, innovation, and technological advancement. Both parties recognize the value of combining their expertise and resources to pursue joint projects, share knowledge, and promote academic and professional growth. This MOU signifies the intention of LIRA, a research arm of the University of Lahore, and CEERAT, a center dedicated to engineering research and technology, to work together in good faith to achieve shared goals that contribute to the development of scientific and engineering solutions for societal benefit.



2. MOU with LIRA and UniSZA

On 18th April 2025, the Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA), University of Lahore, and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), Malaysia, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a strategic partnership aimed at fostering academic cooperation, collaborative research, and the mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise. This MOU signifies the shared commitment of both institutions to work together in areas including, but not limited to, joint research projects, faculty and student exchange programs, co-hosting of academic events such as conferences, seminars, and workshops, and the development of joint academic programs or training initiatives. The collaboration is intended to enhance the quality of education and research output by leveraging each institution's strengths, resources, and regional perspectives. Both LIRA and UniSZA recognize the importance of global academic engagement and aim to build a strong and sustainable relationship that contributes to the advancement of science, technology, and innovation in both countries. This MOU is not legally binding but represents the intention of both parties to engage in constructive cooperation and may lead to future formal agreements detailing specific projects and responsibilities. Through this understanding, LIRA and UniSZA aspire to create a dynamic platform for academic excellence, internationalization, and impactful research that addresses regional and global challenges.



LIRA Interview

In a thought-provoking interview, Dr. Syed Raghav Ali, Executive Director of the Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis (LIRA), sits down with renowned opinion leader Qasim Ali Shah to discuss the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan and their far-reaching impact on the future of South Asia. The conversation delves into Pakistan's evolving position amid the realignment of global powers, highlighting the country's strategic importance in the emerging New World Order. Dr. Syed Raghav Ali offers insightful analysis on regional conflicts, shifting international alliances, and the broader geopolitical landscape, presenting a nuanced perspective on Pakistan's potential role in global leadership and international diplomacy.

https://youtu.be/ovO8llbqbpo?si=_QhmWYgv0sXQhkLI



To come up with the modern-day guidelines of research and development based on collective wisdom through linkages and innovative solutions.





LIRA

**C30/10, Main Round About, Near Jalal
Sons, Lake City, Lahore**

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