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## Editorial

**Dear Readers!**

The consensus National Parliament resolutions marking 5th February, 2026 expressed the unwavering resolve of the People of Pakistan to leave no stone unturned to win back the self determination of the people of Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir from tyranny of India. The last ditch Indian efforts by 2019 forced constitutional changes in article 370 A and keeping the entire Kashmiri leadership behind bars for years has neither been accepted by international community but it has exposed India's miserable failure to break the will of Kashmiri people for their born right of self determination. This Issue of the PIPS Parliamentary Research Digest includes analytical article highlighting the same in addition to text of the Resolutions passed by the National Parliament.

This month PIPS provided intellectual support to Provincial Assembly of Sindh by providing research papers for the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference hosted by them in Karachi. In addition a week long training on Social Graces and Protocols was also hosted for more than 100 officials. PIPS also held parliamentary studies sessions with faculty and students of GCU Faisalabad in February at Islamabad as well as with AJK Assembly in Muzaffarabad. PIPS successfully organized promotional course for officials of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as well as sessions for civil servants on working of Parliament.

This issue also includes absorbing papers on Kashmir's Legal and International Law Perspective, Blue Economy and Digital Populism and Misinformation in Asia and text of final Karachi Declaration at the conclusion of 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference; Hats off to the Provincial Assembly of Sindh for an immaculate hosting of the historic event. We welcome feedback of our invaluable readers. Wishing all our prized Readers a Blissful Ramadan ul Mubarak!

**Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka**  
Director General (Research)



Group Photo of participants of Orientation on Functions of Committees and Parliamentary Questions for officers from various Ministries, Divisions, at PIPS, January 20, 2026

## Parliamentary Studies Initiative



PIPS parliamentary studies sessions in Islamabad for GCU Faisalabad February 12, 2026



PIPS parliamentary studies sessions for GCU Faisalabad hosted by President of AJK Muzaffarabad, February 18, 2026

## PARLIAMENTARY BUSINESS

## Resolutions in the National Parliament

On Kashmir Day 2026



قرارداد نمبر 601

یوم یکجہتی کشمیر (5 فروری 2026)

☆ نوٹ کرتے ہوئے کہ ہر سال 5 فروری یوم یکجہتی کشمیر کے طور پر منایا جاتا ہے جس کا مقصد کشمیر کی مظلوم عوام کے حق خود ارادیت کے حصول کے لیے ان کی منصفانہ جدوجہد میں ان کے ساتھ اظہار یکجہتی کرنا ہوتا ہے۔ اس بات کو یاد کرتے ہوئے کہ جموں و کشمیر کا تنازعہ اقوام متحدہ کے ایجنڈے پر سب سے دیرینہ حل طلب بین الاقوامی تنازعات میں سے ایک ہے۔

☆ یہ ایوان کشمیر کی عوام کو ان کے ناقابل تمنتیخ حق خود ارادیت کے حصول کے منصفانہ جدوجہد کے لیے پاکستان کی غیر متزلزل اخلاقی سیاسی اور سفارتی حمایت کا اعادہ کرتا ہے۔

☆ یہ ایوان ہندوستان کے غیر قانونی قبضے کی مذمت اور مقبوضہ جموں و کشمیر کی عوام کی بہادری، حوصلے اور قربانیوں کو زبردست خراج تحسین پیش کرتا ہے۔ بھارت کی مقبوضہ جموں و کشمیر پر اپنے غیر قانونی قبضے کو مستحکم کرنے اور اس کی بین الاقوامی سطح پر تسلیم شدہ تنازعہ حیثیت کو نقصان پہنچانے کے لیے مسلسل کوششوں پر شدید تشویش کا اظہار کرتا ہے، خاص طور پر 15 اگست 2019 کے غیر قانونی اور یکطرفہ اقدامات کے نتیجے میں۔

☆ یہ ایوان اس بات پر زور دیتا ہے کہ مقبوضہ جموں و کشمیر کی آئینی اور تنازعہ حیثیت کی یکطرفہ اور غیر قانونی تبدیلی جموں و کشمیر کے لوگوں کے حق خود ارادیت کے استعمال کا متبادل نہیں بن سکتا، جیسا کہ اقوام متحدہ کی سلامتی کونسل کی متعلقہ قراردادوں میں درج ہے۔

☆ یہ ایوان مقبوضہ جموں و کشمیر میں انسانی حقوق کی منظم خلاف ورزیوں کی مذمت کرتا ہے اور مطالبہ کرتا ہے کہ ہندوستان مقبوضہ جموں و کشمیر میں انسانی حقوق کی صورت حال کو بہتر بنائے تمام کشمیر کے سیاسی قیدیوں کی رہائی، سخت ہنگامی اور انسداد دہشت گردی کے قوانین کو منسوخ کرے۔

☆ یہ ایوان اس بات پر زور دیتا ہے کہ جموں و کشمیر تنازعہ کا حل اقوام متحدہ کی سلامتی کونسل کی قراردادوں اور کشمیری عوام کی امنگوں کے مطابق، جنوبی ایشیا میں دیرپا امن کے لیے ضروری ہے۔

☆ یہ ایوان مزید مطالبہ کرتا ہے کہ بھارت سلامتی کونسل کی متعلقہ قراردادوں پر عمل درآمد کرے تاکہ کشمیری عوام اقوام متحدہ کے زیر اہتمام منصفانہ اور غیر جانبدارانہ استصواب رائے کے جمہوری طریقہ کار کے ذریعے اپنے مستقبل کا تعین کر سکیں۔

محکم انجینئر امیر مقام، وزیر برائے امور کشمیر اور گلگت بلتستان اور ریاستیں و سرحدی علاقہ جات، بروز جمعہ 6 فروری 2026 کو ایوان سے متفقہ طور پر منظور کی گئی۔

**RESOLUTION****3-02-2026**

The Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, in its meeting held today, adopted the following resolution:

The Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir reaffirms that Jammu and Kashmir remains an unresolved international dispute and that the people of Jammu and Kashmir continue to be denied their inalienable right to self-determination, in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir;

Expresses its unwavering solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir, who continue to suffer under prolonged occupation and repression by India;

Welcomes and appreciates the presence of British Member of Parliament Honourable Imran Hussain, and lauds his consistent and principled efforts in raising awareness and forcefully advocating the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in the Parliament of the United Kingdom;

Welcomes and acknowledges the debate held in the UK Parliament on Jammu and Kashmir, initiated through the efforts of Honourable Imran Hussain, Chairman of the All Parties Parliamentary Group on Kashmir, in House of Commons as a positive step towards international awareness of the dispute;

Strongly condemns the ongoing Indian atrocities and grave human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir;

Notes with serious concern the report of the United Nations Special Mandate Holders released in November, 2025, which highlights systematic violations of human rights in Jammu and Kashmir;

Condemns India's draconian laws such as Public Safety Act (PSA), Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA)- illegally and indiscriminately use to suppress political dissent, restrict fundamental freedoms;

Pays rich tribute to the brave and resilient people of the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, who continue their struggle for self-determination despite severe repression and atrocities by Indian forces;

Strongly condemns India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2019, through which it abrogated Articles 370 and 35-A, in blatant violation of international law, United Nations Security Council resolutions, and the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir;

Resolved that the Committee demands that India immediately reverse its illegal actions of 5<sup>th</sup> August, 2019 and refrain from any measures aimed at altering its demographic, political, or legal status.

Rejects the cosmetics changes in the IIOJK and reaffirms that Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally recognized dispute, this is not the integral part of India, the final settlement of which awaits implementation of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions;

Calls upon the international community to force India to immediately end human rights violations in IIOJK, lift all repressive measures, release all political prisoners and allow unhindered access to international human rights organizations and observers;

Further calls upon the international community, including the United Nations, to play its due and effective role in resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people;

We welcomes the US President Donald Trump's initial offer of mediation in third country to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute after May, 2025 conflict between Pakistan and India.

Reject any unilateral decision by India regarding the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) and stresses that such actions threaten regional peace and stability; and considers this illegal step as an "act of war".

This Committee declares its complete and unwavering solidarity with the Kashmiri People and pledges to stand with them in all circumstances until their legitimate aspirations are realized in accordance with the wishes of the people as enshrined in the relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

Sd/-

Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon  
**Member National Assembly**

## ANALYSIS

### Kashmir: Legal and International Law Perspective

Sunaila Ahmed Ansari

Associate Lawyer at Proconsult International

#### 1. Understanding the International Law Framework in the Kashmir Dispute

##### 1.1 Why International Law Matters for Kashmir:

The dispute over Illegally Indian Held Kashmir (IIHK) is not just a political disagreement between India and Pakistan. It is a question that sits at the heart of international law. The reason is simple: the status of this territory was never fully resolved at the time of partition. When the Indian subcontinent was divided in 1947, hundreds of princely states had to decide where to go. Some chose clearly, while some were torn by geography, identity, or politics. Jammu and Kashmir, one of the largest and most diverse princely states, was the most complicated of them all. It had a Hindu ruler, a Muslim-majority population, and borders touching what would become both India and Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh signed a temporary accession agreement with India in return for military assistance. That agreement from day one triggered chaos, pushing the issue into the international arena. India took the matter to the United Nations in 1948. From that moment, Kashmir no longer remains just an internal question. It became a subject of UN deliberation, guided by Security Council resolutions, ceasefire agreements, and promises of a future plebiscite.

The refusal to hold the promised plebiscite directly implicates the people of Kashmir's right to self-determination. Around the same mid-20th century period, many territories under colonial rule were being given the chance to decide their future, based on the principal of majority population naturally deciding fate for new independent states. Powers like France, for example, eventually allowed several of their colonies to determine whether they wished to remain connected to France, associate differently, or become independent. When compared to these developments, the continued denial of a similar opportunity in Kashmir, and the maintenance of control without a free and fair vote, raised clear legal and moral concerns. It made the Kashmir question not only a regional dispute but a matter tied directly to global principles of justice and international legal commitments.

International law provides a shared language and a neutral standard. Without it, the narrative of Kashmir would risk being told by whoever has more power on the ground. International law prevents that. It ensures that the rights of the indigenous Kashmiri people, the commitments made by states, and the principles protecting disputed territories are all judged according to the same global principles of justice and with a human-centric approach.

##### 1.2 Key International Law Concepts Applied in the Case

**a. Self-Determination:** Under international law, self-determination refers to the right of all peoples to freely decide their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development. It was first articulated as a legal norm in the UN Charter<sup>1</sup> and later strengthened in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)<sup>2</sup>. This principle is important for Kashmir because the region was explicitly promised a plebiscite under UN supervision, yet that pledge remains unfulfilled.

**b. Occupation:** The term occupation in international law refers to a situation where a territory is placed under the authority of a foreign military without becoming legally part of that state. The occupying

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, art. 1(2).

<sup>2</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art. 1; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 1

power must comply with the Hague Regulations of 1907<sup>3</sup> and the Fourth Geneva Convention<sup>4</sup> of 1949, both of which require protection of civilians and prohibit altering the demographic or legal character of the territory<sup>5</sup>. Many scholars argue that post-2019 changes by India in Illegally Indian Held Kashmir resemble measures that occupation law prohibits.

**c. International Armed Conflict:** An international armed conflict (IAC) exists when hostilities occur between two or more states. Under the Geneva Conventions, any conflict involving the armed forces of two states regardless of intensity is considered an IAC. The Kashmir dispute has historically involved open warfare between India and Pakistan, multiple times placing it squarely within the domain of international humanitarian law. Most imperatively it has become a nuclear flashpoint which if remained unattended by international community can trigger a catastrophic nuclear war in world's most thickly populated region.

## 2. United Nations Resolutions and Legal Obligations

India invoked Article 35 of the UN Charter in January 1948, requesting the Security Council to address what it described as external aggression. By doing so, India transformed a territorial disagreement into an international dispute falling under Chapter VI<sup>6</sup> of the UN Charter. This step is legally significant: once a dispute is placed before the Security Council, the parties assume a duty under Articles 33–36 to pursue a peaceful settlement in cooperation with UN mechanisms. This created binding expectations of good-faith compliance, even though Chapter VI resolutions are not coercive.

What followed was a series of UN Security Council resolutions that collectively established the legal architecture governing the Kashmir issue. These resolutions remain central because the Council has never withdrawn or superseded them. Under international law, this means they retain continuing validity.

### 2.1 Key United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions:

#### a. Resolution 47 (1948)<sup>7</sup>: Establishing the Plebiscite as the Legal Mechanism:

Resolution 47 is the foundational legal document which established that the future status of Jammu and Kashmir must be determined through a "free and impartial plebiscite" conducted under UN supervision. The resolution also laid down a three-stage process: (1) ceasefire, (2) troop withdrawal and demilitarisation, and (3) organisation of a plebiscite. Legally, this resolution recognised the people of Kashmir as the entity entitled to decide the territory's final status. It also placed demilitarisation obligations on both India and Pakistan, creating an internationalised conditional process, not a unilateral one.

#### b. Resolution 51 (1948)<sup>8</sup>: Confirming UNCIP's Supervisory Authority:

Resolution 51 instructed the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to proceed with implementing Resolution 47. This resolution confirmed that the Council expected active follow-through, not passive observation. It strengthened the legal effect of the plebiscite framework by requiring regular reporting and continued international oversight.

#### c. Resolution 80 (1950)<sup>9</sup>: Refining the Demilitarisation Obligations:

Resolution 80 is legally significant for its attempt to balance responsibilities. It required both countries to withdraw forces to the "minimum strength required for law and order." This is important because

<sup>3</sup> Hague Convention (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, with Annex of Regulations, 1907, arts. 42–56.

<sup>4</sup> Geneva Convention (IV) Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949, arts. 47–78

<sup>5</sup> Geneva Conventions of 1949, Common Article 2.

<sup>6</sup> UN Charter (Articles 33–38); "Pacific Settlement of Disputes"

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 47," S/726, April 21, 1948

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 51," S/772, June 3, 1948.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 80," S/1469, March 14, 1950

demilitarisation became a precondition, not an optional political agreement. In international law, when a condition is set by the Security Council to enable a self-determination process, the parties cannot unilaterally bypass it.

#### **d. Resolution 91 (1951)<sup>10</sup>: Invalidating Domestic Political Substitutes:**

Resolution 91 made a critical clarification when India sought to hold constituent assembly elections in the region. Local elections or legislative measures cannot decide the territory's final status. This resolution therefore nullified any claim that domestic constitutional or political processes could replace the promised plebiscite. It established the principle that international supervision, not internal legislative acts, is the legitimate basis for determining Kashmir's future.

#### **e. Resolution 122 (1957)<sup>11</sup>: Reaffirming the Prohibition on Unilateral Changes:**

Resolution 122 reiterated that any attempt to alter the status of Jammu and Kashmir through domestic measures "would not constitute a disposition of the State" in accordance with the agreed international process. This remains one of the strongest legal statements on the record, effectively confirming that constitutional changes such as India's legislative actions in August 2019 do not possess any authority or legal standing whatsoever to alter Kashmir's international status.

#### **All the Resolutions passed have binding legal implications for several reasons:**

- i. **Article 25 of the UN Charter:** This Article obliges all UN member states to "accept and carry out" the decisions of the Security Council. While Chapter VI resolutions are not enforceable through sanctions, states are still expected to comply in good faith.
- ii. **The Principle of Good Faith (Pacta Sunt Servanda):** Under general international law, once states accept a dispute resolution mechanism, they must honour it. Both India and Pakistan participated in the plebiscite framework negotiations and submitted proposals which means they accepted UN involvement hence making the commitments legally consequential.
- iii. **Absence of Termination:** The Security Council has never withdrawn, replaced, or declared the Kashmir resolutions obsolete. Under UN practice, this means the framework stays in force. Even bilateral agreements like the 1972 Simla Agreement cannot displace obligations arising from the UN Charter.

### **3. Self-Determination as a Jus Cogens Right**

Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), declare that "**all peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and to pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.**" This provision is considered foundational because it underpins all other human rights and collective freedoms.

The principle was reinforced through UN General Assembly resolutions, notably Resolution 1514 (XV) of 1960, the *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*, and Resolution 2625 (XXV) of 1970, the *Declaration on Principles of International Law: Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States*. These resolutions interpreted the UN Charter's references to equal rights and self-determination and applied them to peoples under foreign domination. Over time, self-determination has come to be recognised as a jus cogens norm, meaning it is a peremptory principle of international law from which no derogation is permitted. The Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969) confirms that any treaty in conflict with a jus cogens norm is void<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 91," S/2077, March 30, 1951.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 122," S/3793, January 24, 1957

<sup>12</sup> Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, 1969, art. 53.

### 3.1 Legal and Moral Obligations of the International Community:

The international community has both moral and legal duties to support peoples residing in disputed territory or occupied regions to exercise self-determination. Morally, states and international bodies should acknowledge the Kashmiri people's inherent right to determine their own future by recognising Jammu and Kashmir as a disputed territory under UN resolutions. Legally, multiple human rights instruments reinforce this right, including Article 1 of the ICCPR and ICESCR. Scholars such as Cassese and Crawford<sup>13</sup> emphasise that the right to self-determination is the "mother of all rights", forming the legal basis for protecting other fundamental rights in contexts of occupation or disputed sovereignty.<sup>14</sup>

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has repeatedly affirmed that violations of human rights, including suppression of self-determination, constitute obligations *erga omnes*, i.e., responsibilities owed to the international community as a whole. Cases such as *East Timor (Portugal v Australia)* and *Western Sahara* demonstrate that all states are obliged to refrain from acts that compromise the political will of the people concerned.<sup>15</sup>

Kashmiri people have the right to territorial integrity as enshrined in Article 2 of the UN Charter. It upholds the inviolability of state borders and the non-interference in internal affairs, while UN resolutions support the people's right to determine their political future. However, in practice, the UN has historically favoured the territorial sovereignty of states over active enforcement of self-determination in Kashmir<sup>16</sup>. The UNCIP, established to facilitate the plebiscite, largely treated the dispute as a bilateral territorial issue, neglecting consultations with Kashmiri political actors and failing to ensure a genuine exercise of the people's will. The result is a protracted deadlock.

The UN's role in enforcing self-determination post-decolonisation has been uneven. While resolutions supported independence for former colonies, the organisation gradually prioritised state sovereignty under the principle of *uti possidetis*, allowing newly independent states to retain territorial boundaries inherited at the time of independence.<sup>17</sup> This approach, while stabilising for new states, has often restricted the practical application of self-determination in disputed regions like Kashmir.

### 4. Negative Constitutionalism and the Erosion of Kashmir's Autonomy

While drafting its Constitution, India had to be mindful of the UN Security Council's direction that Kashmir's future could not be decided unilaterally. To navigate this, India introduced Article 370 as a temporary provision. It exempted Jammu and Kashmir from most Indian constitutional provisions and limited Parliament's authority to defence, foreign affairs, and communications. The Constituent Assembly debates explicitly described Article 370 as an interim arrangement, meant to respect the ongoing UN process and ensure that a plebiscite could later determine the will of the Kashmiri people.

Article 370 was meant to balance India's domestic goals with international obligations. On paper, it granted autonomy and preserved self-determination. In practice, it created ambiguities. In 1951, India convened a Constituent Assembly for Jammu and Kashmir. The International Commission of Jurists later questioned its democratic legitimacy. The UN Security Council, through Resolutions 91 (1951) and 122 (1957), stated that the Assembly could not replace a free plebiscite. Despite this, the Assembly

<sup>13</sup> Madiha Rathore and Hejab Akhtar, "Kashmir through the Lens of International Law: Self-Determination or Sovereignty," *ASSA Journal* (2025)

<sup>14</sup> Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); James Crawford, *The Creation of States in International Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> International Court of Justice, *East Timor (Portugal v. Australia)*, Judgment, 1995; International Court of Justice, *Western Sahara*, Advisory Opinion, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> Syed Murad Ali Shah, Syed Muhammad Farrukh Bukhari, and Khawaja Noor Ul Ain, "From Occupation to Accountability: International Legal Remedies for the Kashmir Crisis," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2025): 111–122,

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

declared Kashmir an integral part of India. This early move revealed a conflict between India's domestic sovereignty claims and its international obligations.

Over the following decades, Article 370 was systematically weakened. Through 47 Presidential Orders, hundreds of constitutional provisions were extended to Kashmir. Most of the Union List was applied, effectively removing the state's special status. This incremental approach shows a deliberate legal strategy. It allowed the central government to expand its authority while avoiding open confrontation with the UN or international law.<sup>18</sup>

The events of 5 August 2019 marked the final stage of this erosion. India imposed a security lockdown, restricted communications, and placed political leaders under house arrest. Presidential Order C.O. 272 reinterpreted the Constitution (Application to Jammu & Kashmir) Order, abolished Article 35-A, and substituted the Legislative Assembly for the now-defunct Constituent Assembly. This removed the safeguards that had protected local residents from displacement and demographic changes. By redefining the powers of the state and ignoring the need for consent from a representative body, India bypassed long-standing procedural and constitutional protections.<sup>19</sup>

Analytically, these measures highlight a critical tension in international law. Article 370 was meant to secure autonomy and respect the *jus cogens* right of self-determination. Yet, by altering legal and political structures without local consent, India undermined this principle. The 2019 changes did not just affect domestic governance; they also challenged international norms, showing how national legal instruments can be used to circumvent obligations under UN resolutions and human rights law. The Kashmir case illustrates how domestic law can erode autonomy, even when international law and earlier commitments prescribe protection.<sup>20</sup>

## 5. Way Forward for Pakistan

The analysis above shows that India's actions from diluting Article 370 to resisting UN-mandated self-determination have created a serious gap between international law and on-ground reality. Pakistan has continued to raise the issue globally, but sustained pressure has been difficult because India's economic weight and political alliances limit international responsiveness. This does not weaken Pakistan's legal position; rather, it highlights the need for strategic recalibration.

Since international law operates largely through political will rather than strict enforceability, Pakistan must build broader coalitions instead of relying on traditional partners, many of whom are currently unwilling to challenge India. Issue-based alliances and diversification of support blocs should be prioritised. Pakistan should especially utilise the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, originally designed for resolving border disputes, to push for a peaceful settlement reflecting the Kashmiri people's wishes. At the same time focus should be on building incremental trust with India to help revive space for dialogue. Pakistan can along with hectic diplomacy in consultation with the elected Legislature of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, initiate negotiation for a credible offer United Nations to hold the plebiscite in the territories of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This would ultimately put enormous pressure *viz a viz* international law and it will have to give way to implementation of UNSC resolutions to give the Kashmiris their foremost right of self-determination. Otherwise, the recent May 2025 war clearly manifests yet another conflict where borders could change, an option that may end in human catastrophe but eventually, "Tyranny cannot endure."

<sup>18</sup> Schofield, *Kashmir in Conflict*, 2003, 112–118; Rai, *International Law and Kashmir*, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Constitution of India (Application to Jammu & Kashmir) Order, 1954; Presidential Order C.O. 272, 5 August 2019; Supreme Court of India, *Jammu & Kashmir State Cases*, 2010–2018; High Court of Jammu & Kashmir, *Article 370 Jurisprudence*, 2015–2018

<sup>20</sup> Research Society of International Law (RSIL), *Legal Memorandum on the Status of Jammu & Kashmir under International Law: The Law of Occupation & Illegal Annexation*, August 15, 2019

## ANALYSIS

## SDG 14- Pakistan Struggles to Protect Life below Water: Way Forward

Dr. Shaista Bibi

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**1. Introduction:**

As a successor to the Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals were formulated by the United Nations in 2015 to envisage framework to eliminate poverty, guarantee universal peace and prosperity and to protect the planet earth by 2030. Among these SDG-14 is aimed at to commensurate the conservation of life below the water with the slogan “conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources”. SDG-14 is the epicenter of at least 10 other goals including SDGs 1,2,3,5,6,7,11,13,15 and 16<sup>1</sup>, corroborating the term "development spaces" for oceans.<sup>2</sup> Internationally, fisheries and aquaculture sector is a major driver of the world economy with estimated total first sale value USD 472 billion from production and a valuable share of USD 195 billion in international trade of aquatic products.<sup>3</sup> However, the production of this valuable asset is hampered by several factors including; pollution, acidification, and overfishing, which is not only posing severe threats to natural oceanic climate but overfishing is leading to severe food insecurity and losses to blue economy. Implementation of SDG 14 in true letter and spirit is expected to re-sustain the oceans at both biological and economical frontiers. The targets set by United Nations, pertaining to SDG 14 are partially implemented in very few countries and many countries remain failed in achieving these targets.<sup>4</sup> As far as the progress of these goals is recognized the limitations must also be recognized. It has been observed across the globe that SDG 14 is one of the most difficult goals to be achieved.<sup>5</sup> The main reason for this failure is limited funding and research towards SDG 14.<sup>6</sup>

**2. Importance of SDG-14 for Life below Water in Pakistan:**

Judicial and wise use of marine resources is a national and global duty.<sup>7</sup> Pakistan, being a signatory of UN is also supposed to follow this international responsibility. For developing and struggling country like Pakistan, Arabian Sea can prove a vital lifeline not only for biodiversity but also a jackpot for economic prosperity. Adhering to the prospects of this important goal, Pakistan can expand its economic growth while not compromising the ecology and diversity of this geopolitically important oceanic hub which is the central concept of blue economy. The term blue economy was first coined by

<sup>1</sup> G. G. Singh et al., “A Rapid Assessment of Co-Benefits and Trade-Offs among Sustainable Development Goals,” *Marine Policy* 93 (2018): 223–231, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2017.05.030>.

<sup>2</sup> D. Pauly and R. Watson, “Background and Interpretation of the ‘Marine Trophic Index’ as a Measure of Biodiversity,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 360 (2005): 415–423, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2004.1597>.

<sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024* (Rome: FAO, 2024).

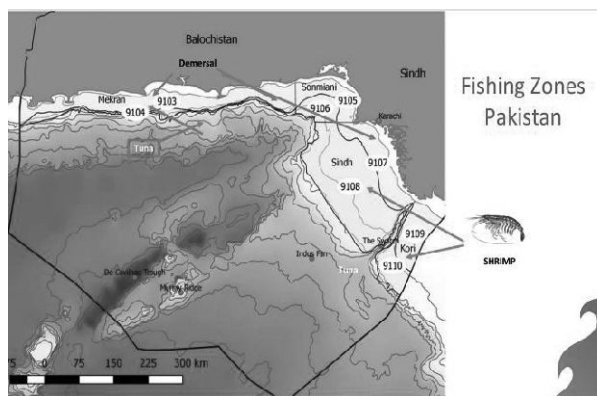
<sup>4</sup> Mialy Andriamahefazafy et al., “Sustainable Development Goal 14: To What Degree Have We Achieved the 2020 Targets for Our Oceans?” *Ocean & Coastal Management* 227 (2022): 106273.

<sup>5</sup> A. L. Salvia et al., “Assessing Research Trends Related to Sustainable Development Goals: Local and Global Issues,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* 208 (2019): 841–849, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.09.242>.

<sup>6</sup> D. F. Johansen and R. A. Vestvik, “The Cost of Saving Our Ocean: Estimating the Funding Gap of Sustainable Development Goal 14,” *Marine Policy* 112 (2020): 103783, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2019.103783>.

<sup>7</sup> M. Voyer et al., “The Role of Voluntary Commitments in Realizing the Promise of the Blue Economy,” *Global Environmental Change* 71 (2021): 102372, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102372>.

Pauli in 2012 and was explicitly defined as “the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems” by world bank.<sup>8</sup> On a broader perspective it is encapsulating the field of renewable marine energy, maritime shipping, aquaculture, fisheries, marine biotechnology and coastal tourism.<sup>9</sup> Although FAO has declared that global well-being is integrated to marine ecosystems, Pakistan has not harnessed the full potential for Arabian Sea for its socioeconomic prosperity and it is still an untapped frontier for Pakistan. Pakistan is blessed with vast marine resource, 1046-kilometer coastline with 350 nautical miles (NM) along with a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which covers 290,000 sq. km area of the sea.<sup>10</sup> Marine resource of Pakistan is distributed among two of its provinces, Sindh (Coast line-370 km) and Baluchistan (Makran Coast line- 760 km).



Source: Stephen Akester<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Pakistan is blessed with world’s 7<sup>th</sup> largest Indus Delta and has a number of bays, lagoons, creeks, mudflats and estuaries. Fisheries is the major contributor in marine sector production of Pakistan with 41% share and 34% share is from mangrove ecosystems, shipbreaking industry (14%), marine transportation (11%) and marine tourism (0.003%).<sup>1</sup>



<sup>8</sup>The World Bank, “What Is the Blue Economy?” June 6, 2017, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/infographic/2017/06/06/blue-economy>.


<sup>9</sup> Shahid Husain Komboyo, “Localization of SDG 14: Opportunities for Blue Economy,” *The Express Tribune* (Pakistan), December 23, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Aneel Salman and Muneeb Shah, *Gross Marine Product of Pakistan: Revisited* (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Akester, *The Blue Economy in Pakistan: Pathways to a Sustainable Blue Future* (Fisheries Governance and Management, 2021).

### 3. Overall Performance of Pakistan Towards Achieving SDGs:

In recognition of importance of SDGs, Pakistan was amongst the first countries in the world to approve 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the year 2015 and was given prodigious endorsement by the Parliament in February, 2016 as the "National Development Agenda".<sup>12</sup> In addition, five-year plan named "National Initiative for Sustainable Development Goals" was initiated by Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives at federal level, Planning and Development Departments" of provincial governments and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).<sup>13</sup> For timely implementation of SDGs Targets and for inter and intradepartmental technology transfer, "Federal SDGs Support Unit" was also established at the national level. The national forum for relevant policy approval is National Economic Council, led by the Prime Minister, which has approved the "National SDGs Framework in 2018".<sup>14</sup>

Sustainable Development Goals	National Priority Targets	National Priority SDG Indicator			
			National Baseline 2014-15	Target 2030	Required Policy Support
 and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development	Target 14.1: By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution	14.1.1 Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density		Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protection of rights of small fishers to marine resources and markets but at the same time educate them for sustainable use of marine resources</li> <li>• Conserve at least 10% of coastal areas</li> <li>• Prohibit overcapacity and overfishing through elimination of subsidies</li> </ul>
	Target 14.2: By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans	14.2.1 Proportion of national exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches			
	Target 14.b: Provide access for small scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets	14.b.1 Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries			

Source: SDG-14 Framework by NEC, 2018

<sup>12</sup> M. H. Latif et al., "Nexus Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Sustainable Public Sector Buildings in Pakistan," *Journal of Building Engineering* 52 (2022): 104415, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.job.2022.104415>.

<sup>13</sup> K. Ghaus et al., *Implications of Implementing SDGs at the National Level: A Case of Pakistan*, Southern Voice Occasional Paper 32 (Southern Voice on Post-MDG International Development Goals, 2016), <https://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SV-Think-Piece-32.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> A. Isgut, "Towards an Integrated National Financing Framework for Pakistan," paper presented at the ESCAP workshop on *Public Finance for SDGs in Pakistan: An Integrated National Financing Framework Approach*, co-organized with UNDP-Pakistan, SDG Finance Academy, and INFF Facility, Islamabad, Pakistan, February 2024.

The country’s progress toward the SDGs has been limited overall.<sup>15</sup> Out of 167 countries Pakistan ranked 137<sup>th</sup>, indicating a decline in performance compared to neighboring countries. Pakistan’s SDGs score increased by only 5.6 points during the year 2000 to 2024, however there was an increase of more than 10 points in most of the countries during the same period.<sup>16</sup> The progress is moderate regarding SDG 14 (life below water), as the percentage of "protecting key areas in marine sites important to biodiversity" decreased from 39.3% in 2020 to 14.6% in 2024.<sup>17</sup> The table given below shows Pakistan’s performance viz a viz SDG 14.

**Table 1: Performance of Pakistan Towards Achieving SDG 14**

SDGs	SDGs Goal (Scale)	2020	2024
14. Life Below Water	Protecting key areas in marine sites is essential for biodiversity	39.3%	14.6%

Source: SPDC, 2025

#### 4. Challenges to SDG 14 Target Achievements

The main targets pertaining to SDG-14 are reduction of marine pollution, protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, reduction of ocean acidification, promotion of sustainable fishing ensuring conservation of coastal and marine areas, check on overfishing and illegal fishing by ending subsidies, and enhancement of economic benefits from the ocean with focus on sustainable usage of marine resources.<sup>18</sup> Pakistan has been facing several challenges to implement the targets pertaining to SDG 14. Life below water is being severely affected by overfishing, habitat degradation, pollution and unregulated coastal development.<sup>19</sup>

##### i. Overfishing

It is a matter of concern that Pakistan’s marine ichthyofauna has been considerably affected due to overfishing. According to the government-commissioned FRAP stock assessment around 60% to 90% of Pakistan’s marine fish stocks have been overexploited.<sup>20</sup> Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is aggravating the situation. An estimate suggests that Pakistan has already lost 80% of its fishery stocks due to IUU fishing practices. In addition, bottom trawlers, old-fashioned traditional fishing, and wrong netting techniques have exacerbated these issues. One estimate suggests that a single trawler is netting

<sup>15</sup> A. R. Cheema, “Measuring Progress Through Numbers: Pakistan's First SDG Status Report,” *SDG Knowledge Hub*, May 13, 2022, <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/measuring-progress-through-numbers-pakistans-first-sdg-status-report>.

<sup>16</sup> A. Begum, N. Noman, and M. Noman, “Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan: A Comprehensive Analysis, Progress Review and Emerging Challenges,” *International Journal of Management Research and Emerging Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2025): 73–98.

<sup>17</sup> Social Policy and Development Centre (SPDC), *Pakistan Struggles to Make Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*, Policy Brief, February 2025, <https://spdc.org.pk/publications/pakistan-struggles-to-make-progress-on-sustainable-development-goals>.

<sup>18</sup> S. Zeenat, “The Challenges of SDG-14: Pakistan’s Struggle to Protect Life Below Water,” *Paradigm Shift* (2024).

<sup>19</sup> M. S. B. Khetrn, *Revitalizing Pakistan’s Fisheries Sector for Sustainable Growth* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2025).

<sup>20</sup> *Fisheries Resource Appraisal in Pakistan Project (FRAP) Report* (2015)

out 80,000 kg of juvenile fish in a single trip as a bycatch,<sup>21</sup> leading to ecological, biological and economical losses. This havoc is being practiced at Somiani and Damb, and depleting stocks are pushing fishermen to proceed deep into the sea, increasing life risks and operational costs. Although Pakistan had declared Astola Island and Churna Island as Pakistan's marine protected areas (MPAs) in order to represent its commitment under SDG-14, however, it only makes up 0.21% of the 10% of coastal and marine areas that was committed to be achieved by 2020.<sup>18</sup>

Fisheries subsidies, a subject matter of SDG-14.6 is aimed at to benefit fishermen community but this facility can also lead to overcapacity and overfishing in marine ecosystems. For instance, research by NIMA has shown that for sustainable fishing, Pakistan requires only 1000 boats, but it has 28,000 functional fishing boats. To support poor fishermen, the Balochistan Government distributed 2,000 boat engines among them in 2022, but this favor is proving as a curse to our ocean.<sup>18</sup> Hence rationalization is mandatory for both the provincial and federal governments in Pakistan before deciding any new subsidy or incentive taking into the account, all sides of the dice.

## ii. Pollution and Habitat Degradation

Coastal pollution and habitat destruction pose significant threats to Pakistan's marine ecosystems. Industrial and plastic waste pollution is degrading vital marine habitats such as mangroves and coral reefs that are essential for the breeding and sustenance of many fish species. Climate change, including rising sea levels, coastal erosion and ocean acidification, further threatens livelihoods and ecosystems. In addition, untreated industrial effluents, sewage discharge, and plastic waste contribute to the degradation of water quality, affecting fish health and spawning grounds. Urban development and encroachment have resulted in mangrove deforestation and creeks filling leading to loss of critical habitats affecting fish breeding and natural replenishment of the fish stocks.<sup>22</sup>

## iii. Infrastructure and Post-Harvest Constraints as Export Barriers

Post-harvest losses are one of the serious concerns, which must be addressed as it not only results in loss of marine resources but also wastage of effort. The lack of basic infrastructure such as processing units, ice plants, cold storage and transport logistics contributes to high post-harvest losses, thus hinder access to high-value export markets. To mitigate the post-harvest losses fish are mostly sold fresh with minimal processing. This temporary management further limits the fish industry to compete in the international markets. The inadequacy of logistics and interrupted supply chain is forcing many fish processing plants to operate at only 20% capacity.<sup>23</sup> The competitiveness of Pakistani seafood is further reduced due to absence of modern landing sites, improper grading, and non-hygiene ambience, when compared to regional peers like India and Vietnam. The crux is that Pakistan's seafood exports face challenges in meeting international sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, limiting access to high-value markets such as the European Union (EU).<sup>24</sup>

## 5. Way Forward

To harness the full potential aligning strictly with the aims and targets of SDG-14, following recommendations are proposed here:

<sup>21</sup> "Pakistan: Juvenile Fishing Wreaking Havoc on Fisheries Sector," *International Collective in Support of Fish workers (ICSF)* (article), accessed March 3, 2026, <https://icsf.net/newss/pakistan-juvenile-fishing-wreaking-havoc-on-fisheries-sector>.

<sup>22</sup> Pakistan Business Council (PBC), *Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture in Pakistan* (2025).

<sup>23</sup> *Enhancing Pakistan Fish Cold Chain Energy Efficiency Analyses* (World Bank, 2026), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099172001312321916/pdf/P1743960d2372707409ac605d91d6c93e6a.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Pakistan Business Council, *Saving Our Seas, Farming Our Future: Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture for Pakistan*, Policy Brief (2025).

- i. A **blue economy authority or marine authority** should be established at national level to bridge up government and the private stakeholders within the maritime sector, achieving economic sustainability while ensuring conservation of marine resources.
- ii. More areas should be identified by the National Coordinating Body (NCB) of Mangroves under the administration of Ministry of Climate Change as MPAs to ensure and maximize their conservation
- iii. To discourage the bycatches, Pakistan should also adopt suitable fishing gears along with best and modern practices, as recommended by Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC).
- iv. To regulate small-scale fisheries (both artisanal and industrial within 12 nautical miles) in the context of SDG-14 a coherent and balanced procedure with economic viability and sustainability should be adopted at national and provincial level. For deep sea fishing, federal government should empower provinces for issuance of licenses for sustainable use of deep-sea fisheries resources as per IOTC guidelines.
- v. Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA) should be strengthened by recruiting technical experts of maritime domain for technical and professional assistance for formulation and implementation of rules and regulations
- vi. To evaluate the maritime industry's actual role in the country's economy, estimate and forecast the potential of marine sector, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics should officially adopt modern tools like Gross Marine Product (GMP), rather than traditional manual practices.
- vii. Maritime technology institutes should be established in coastal cities like Gwadar, Pasni, and Gadani aimed to adopt specialized maritime technology and operations skills.
- viii. Government should provide support (both technical and logistical) to National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) for fish stock assessment in our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf. In addition, to replenish the depleting stocks, initiatives like establishment of hatcheries for commercially important marine fish species should be taken by the Government of Sindh and Baluchistan in their coastal areas.
- ix. To make use of tidal and wave energy, renewable ocean energy projects should be envisaged.
- x. Pakistan has immense potential for eco-tourism. Development of infrastructure and promotion of community engagement can attract global visitors and preserve natural habitats at the scenic beaches of Gwadar and Kund Malir.
- xi. Protecting mangroves and coastal ecosystems is crucial for carbon sequestration and climate resilience as they serve as vital nursery grounds for numerous fish species. They are also needed to be included in MPAs.

These policy interventions aligning to the aims and targets of SDG-14 can transform Pakistan's Marine sector to a sustainable, conserved, economically viable and well managed avenue.

## OPINION

**Digital Populism and Misinformation in Asia: The Role of Parliamentarians****Dr. Zahid Asghar**Professor, School of Economics,  
QAU Islamabad**Abstract**

Digital change is happening rapidly in Asia and it brings both good and bad effects. It offers both opportunities and challenges. This note tries to explain major factors behind digital populism and what is the role of parliamentarians in this regard at the regional level. Major reasons for rapid digital penetration are- rapid spread of information such that governments are unable to keep up, it is very cheap and easy to create content, many people don't have enough skills to check if something is true. Institutions are not really prepared for this shift, countries are handling digital problems by themselves without working together and also, many online platforms use algorithms that share content without proper checks or control. To deal with these problems, the paper suggests that this dilemma is transnational and cannot be solved by individual countries without cooperation from others. First and foremost, parliaments have to play an active role in managing and sharing information. There is a need to work for having a system that is not only useful for individual countries but also manages fact checking transnational system. Moreover, this paper proposes to have some common charter so that countries in the region can work together effectively. These steps can help strengthen democracy during this digital age.

One of the biggest challenges is to have enough digital literacy at all tiers so that manipulation and fact can be differentiated. This is undoubtedly a herculean task. Politicians and lawmakers have an important role to play in this regard. They have to enable themselves to deal with such challenges and also being their role as active leaders, they need to help shape digital democracy in a better way.

**1. Introduction**

Over the last two decades, democratization of internet and smartphones, social media have changed how people live, work, and take part in society. This has been the fastest digital shift in history. On one hand it helps in providing better public services and more chances for people to speak up. On the other hand, it poses serious challenges for governments to meet heightened public expectations as latter are now more aware about their rights. There are other risks as well because when information moves faster than systems can handle, it becomes easier for fake news and emotional posts to spread everywhere.

As Jonathan Swift observed centuries ago, "Falsehood flies and truth comes limping after it".<sup>1</sup> Some researchers maintain that false information spreads not because people are not smart, but because digital platforms are designed to promote content that makes people feel strong emotions. Nate Silver once said democracy works only when good and useful information— what he calls the "signal"— is louder than the "noise," which is useless or misleading.<sup>2</sup> But today, there is so much noise that many people cannot make a distinction between what is real or fake. In Asia, the situation is even worse because digital literacy levels are very different across populations. Perceptions built on rumors have already done enough damage until reality emerges.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Swift, quoted in various sources on the rapid spread of misinformation.

<sup>2</sup> Nate Silver, *The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012).

Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West in their book "Calling Bullshit" also talk about how today it's much cheaper and easier to make fake content than to check facts and produce real, verified information.<sup>3</sup> They point out that pseudoscience dressed in scientific language is more dangerous as it is not easy for ordinary people to make a difference.

With large digital populations, not enough rules and political leaders who, sometimes, benefit from spreading emotional content, the problem keeps growing. That's why this is no longer just a media issue— it's now also a problem for how countries are run.

Governing a country means having clear and trustworthy communication between leaders and citizens. But if the communication system is faulty, people stop trusting it, and democratic systems start to break down. Hence, relying on mere fact-checking or removing bad content is not enough. Without understanding who owns the means of digital infrastructure, it is not possible to deal with combating issue of misinformation.

Since Asian region has huge variation, so one size does not fit all. Even within a country, dealing with challenges and benefiting from opportunities in digital era needs customized solutions. Nevertheless, this paper talks at Asia level which can serve as guidelines at local level.

Misinformation and digital populism are not only the innovation of some random algorithms but these are linked to deep rooted under the influence of those who have means of this prediction. Maximilian Kasy in her book "The Means of Prediction" mentions that data, energy, computational power and technical expertise are means of prediction for AI.<sup>4</sup> And we all know some big giants, all sitting outside Asia, have control over these resources. So real conflict is not between humans and machines but between regions and groups of societies.

To understand digital populism and misinformation in Asia, it is also important to look at how modern digital and AI systems are designed and governed. Many problems that appear as technical failures are actually linked to power and inequality. Digital systems, including social media algorithms and AI tools, are built to optimize certain objectives. Main concern is not whether these systems work, but who decides what they are meant to achieve. Who controls the resources such as data, computing infrastructure, technical expertise and energy? Tech giants like Google, Meta, Microsoft and others have these "means of prediction" and have the power to shape what information becomes visible and what remains hidden.

It is not just an issue of conflict between machines, digital devices and humans; it is a conflict between different groups in society. Those who possess the means of prediction have real power to decide while others are just passive consumers. This issue cannot be solved if some individuals protect their data as algorithm depends on data from everyone. When platforms are so designed to reward emotionally charged or sensational content, noise invariably replaces meaningful content. Governance has become difficult because democracy depends on clear and trustworthy communication. Therefore, addressing digital populism and misinformation is not only about fixing content or educating individuals rather it requires collective and democratic governance of digital systems. Institutions have to actively shape incentives so that useful, truthful information is promoted, and public trust is protected.

## 2. Critical Focus Areas to Counter Misinformation in Asia

The following sections outline major factors needing urgent attention for combating misinformation in Asia.

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<sup>3</sup> Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West, *Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World* (New York: Random House, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Maximilian Kasy and Rediet Abebe, "Fairness, Equality, and Power in Algorithmic Decision-Making," in *Proceedings of the 2021 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (2021). Note: The reference to "The Means of Prediction" may relate to work on algorithmic power and control.

### **i. Velocity of Information:**

Speed of information, in digital era, is faster than ever before and our conventional institutions' structure is unable to keep pace with this speed. Digital platforms are super spreaders of information whether correct or incorrect because production and dissemination of information is relatively inexpensive. When false stories go viral, they erode public trust and make it harder for lawmakers to work together or hold anyone accountable. This problem has been aggravating by every passing day because digital access has grown faster than regulation and public awareness.

Social media and various technology-based apps focus more on keeping people engaged to get maximum business through advertisements. Using individual data, they create emotionally charged content, because that gets more clicks and shares. As a result, people stay and visit those contents. Outrage is rewarded, while calm discussion or facts don't get much attention.

### **ii. Algorithmic Contents:**

Until recently, Asia had a very strong tradition of face-to-face storytelling when people gathered in groups, after work, to share stories and experiences. Any news source or story was often linked by citing a credible person, like "my uncle told me" or "my friend told me this" serving as markers of credibility. Similarly, propaganda was also through person-to-person contacts. But now, with the help of modern technology, manipulating information has become not only more advanced but more rewarding as well. Even print media headlines now often provoke click rather than providing useful information. The main objective of companies possessing power to generate digital content is not to inform but to engage people in clicks for maximum ads.

This type of manipulation is not only bigger in scale but also harder to detect. Populist groups are starting to use these digital tools to spread messages quickly and influence public opinion.

One famous example of such misinformation consequence is:

In December 2016, a false AWD News website quoted a threatening statement of Israeli Defense Minister about Pakistan which created anxiety among decision makers. The report was later found to be entirely false as no such statement was originally issued.<sup>5</sup>

Social media: firehouse strategy, our trust in friends and institutions erode. Gary Kasparov summarized this approach in a post on Twitter: "The point of modern propaganda isn't only to misinform or push the agenda; it is to exhaust your critical thinking and annihilate truth."<sup>6</sup>

Another well-known example from around the world is the disinformation campaign during the 2016 U.S. election. Russia was reported to have used platforms like Facebook and Twitter to influence how people thought and voted.<sup>7</sup> This example shows how digital systems can be used by both outside and local actors to change how people see political events.

### **iii. From Individual Information Use to Political Mobilization**

Digital populism is not only about false information. It is also about how political mobilization has changed in the digital age. It has posed a serious challenge for political leaders and governments to focus on real issues. Noise seeks attention of media and as a result exert extra pressure on political leadership to deal with day-to-day issues rather focusing on issues which have long-term social benefits. Similar, those leaders having strong ethics prefer not to go for cheap digital popularity are suffering more than their opponents. A political actor only needs a smartphone, an emotional message, and support from

<sup>5</sup> Dawn.com, Dawn, December 25, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1304400..>

<sup>6</sup> Garry Kasparov (@Kasparov63), Twitter post, December 13, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, "Report on Russian Active Measures Campaigns and Interference in the 2016 U.S. Election," 116th Congress (2019-2020).

social media algorithms to reach a very large audience. This myopic need has been damaging both society fabrics and genuine development.

Main challenge is that our institutions are still learning how to manage this new space as speed of people moving to online is exponential. Media literacy is uneven, and transparency tools are limited. In such conditions, digital populism finds fertile ground.

### **3. Why Digital Populism Grows So Fast in Asia**

There are three main reasons for very rapid digital populism in Asia. Firstly, as mentioned above the speed of information is growing very fast. Secondly, there is lack of digital literacy. Thirdly, institutions have not enhanced their capabilities to meet these challenges. This leads to more and more confusion. Rumors and emotional contents fill the gap before facts are clarified. I do not mean institutions are not working but issue that tech giants have all means of this information which even governments have not as latter has to be extra careful. This requires relatively slower communication system. Digital platforms act as super-spreaders. Information spreads widely regardless of whether it is correct or incorrect.

According to Bergstrom and West, producing false information now costs almost nothing, while producing verified information requires time, money, and expertise. This creates a serious imbalance. When false stories spread quickly, they damage public trust and make governance more difficult.

As a result, every positive and calm discussion is either ignored or taken with a grain of salt. This environment is ideal for populist narratives. Asia is not immune to these risks. Similar patterns are emerging in different countries, especially where regulation is weak and public awareness is low.

### **4. The Role of Parliaments and Regional Cooperation**

Digital misinformation has no borders. Misinformation by sitting at another place has also same or in some cases even bigger impact for another country. Countries are trying to deal with this issue at their own level while issue demands collective response as disinformation shifts to countries with weaker regulation.

Parliamentarians have to lead from the front and it is a big task for them as they have dual role to play. Firstly, they have to invest in themselves to understand these modern-day digital intricacies and then lead people to overcome misinformation issue. They cannot afford to be silent observers of digital change. They need to manage information better, improve transparency, and respond quickly when false narratives spread. They should work on building regional fact-checking systems that work across borders. Digital platforms should cooperate with governments instead of operating without accountability. Digital literacy must be strengthened so citizens can better judge what they see online.

It is proposed that there should be some common charter on the matter. This would help countries share responsibility, coordinate responses, and protect democratic systems together.

### **5. Way Forward for Combating Digital Populism**

Given these challenges, following suggestions can be helpful in combating digital populism and misinformation in an effective way:

Firstly, there is need for establishing transnational fact-checking network and common digital governance mechanism. This can through creation of some shared database of duly verified information that is quickly accessible by fact-finders across all countries of Asia. This joint network will reduce duplication of effort and enhance response time for dealing with false stories generated/spread in multiple countries. Common digital governance should design some fundamental principle that how digital platforms should operate within the region. Governments should develop way out to respond quickly in case of any emerging crisis.

Secondly, governments invest heavily in digital literacy programs. Education is the most sustainable long-term solution. As mentioned earlier that it has become difficult to distinguish between noise and fact.

Only an integrated digital literacy program can help to overcome the issue. Besides promoting digital literacy, governments could provide grants or recognition to organizations doing excellent fact-checking work. The goal is to make truth-telling and thoughtful discussion more attractive than spreading noise.

Thirdly, there should be a group of IT legislators. Each legislator should have complete assessment and understanding of the current situation in one's own country. This may range from digital literacy to mapping of existing misinformation patterns with identification of some misleading platforms. Once they have this complete set of information, they can seek cooperation from regional bodies like ASEAN, SAAR among others to start working to resolve this issue. This group will help in establishing pilot digital literacy platform at country, regional and Asia level including both in-person and online learning.

Finally, as digital landscape changes rapidly, so policies must evolve continuously. Parliamentary committees in each country and the above-mentioned forum should review progress every six months, adjust strategies based on what's working, and remain flexible to address new challenges. Regional forums should meet annually to share lessons learned and update collective approaches.

As mentioned above, there is need for AI legislators as parliamentarians must create forward-looking legislation that balances free expression with protection against harmful manipulation. Laws should focus on transparency and accountability rather than censorship. Legislation must be flexible enough to adapt as technology evolves, while being specific enough to be enforceable. Cross-party cooperation is essential — digital governance should not be a partisan issue.

As representatives MPs have responsibility to maintain high standards in their own communication with constituents. Every tweet, post, or statement they make sets an example. When parliamentarians spread unverified information or use inflammatory language for political gain, they legitimize these practices for everyone else. When parliamentarians will demonstrate responsible digital citizenship, they help create a culture of accountability.

Besides having close coordination with people in their constituencies, politicians and lawmakers have to invest their energies in restructuring institutions so these become faster, cooperation becomes stronger, and citizens become more informed. But it is also inspiring work. Parliamentarians who rise to this challenge are literally shaping how democracy will function in the digital age. They are determining whether future generations will live in societies where truth matters and informed deliberation is possible, or in information chaos where manipulation triumphs. That's a responsibility worthy of the office they hold.

But it's not all negative. Given the fact that Asia has huge youth bulge, and if this generation is taught how to think critically and understand media better. There can become strong defenders of truth online. Some countries have made good progress but I shall focus on collective policy. For example, Singapore has laws like POFMA to handle false content, Taiwan teaches media literacy in schools, and the ASEAN Digital Literacy Programme is trying to raise awareness across Southeast Asia. These examples prove that Asia can lead the world in creating better digital rules.

## **6. Conclusion**

To conclude the main challenge for Asia is not just using digital tools rather it's changing how governments work with them. The goal should be to build systems that increase trust, not confusion. The future depends on digital spaces where truth (signal) is stronger than the noise, where institutions protect good information, and where people have the skills to deal with the digital world in smart and resilient ways.



**7th CPA Asia Regional Conference / 2nd Joint CPA Asia & South-East Asia  
Regional Conference- 2026**

*“Parliaments of the Future: Redefining Democracy through Trust, Inclusion, Innovation  
and Peace”*

*Karachi, Pakistan | 3–7 February 2026*

**KARACHI DECLARATION**

**Preamble**

We, the Speakers, Presiding Officers, and Delegates of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) branches of Asia and South-East Asia, convened in Karachi from 3 to 7 February 2026 for the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference and the 2nd Joint CPA Asia & South- East Asia Regional Conference, reaffirm our shared commitment to democratic governance, constitutionalism, parliamentary accountability, inclusivity, responsible innovation, and sustainable peace, in accordance with our respective national constitutional frameworks, CPA principles, and the Charter of the United Nations.

We recognise the indispensable role of parliaments in upholding democratic trust, ensuring executive accountability, protecting fundamental rights, and responding to the evolving aspirations of citizens. We take cognizance of the complex challenges confronting democratic institutions, including declining public confidence, political polarisation, misinformation, climate vulnerability, social exclusion, and the rapid pace of technological change.

We affirm that the future of democracy depends on parliaments that are inclusive, participatory, transparent, and forward-looking, capable of strengthening social cohesion, embracing responsible innovation, and promoting peace and resilience within and across societies.

We recognise multilateralism and parliamentary diplomacy as foundational pillars for building trust, advancing peace, and reinforcing democratic resilience in an increasingly interconnected world, grounded in sustained dialogue, mutual respect, shared democratic values, and adherence to international norms and collective responsibility.

## Declarations

### 1. Democratic Trust and Parliamentary Oversight

**Affirm** our commitment to democratic norms, constitutional principles, and parliamentary supremacy as the foundation of legitimate and effective governance.

**Underscore** the critical role of parliamentary oversight in ensuring executive accountability, ethical governance, and public trust.

**Support** the strengthening of committee systems, including Public Accounts Committees, to promote fiscal discipline, transparency, and responsible management of public resources.

**Endorse** evidence-based debate, constructive political dialogue, and cross-party cooperation as mechanisms to rebuild democratic credibility.

**Promote** initiatives that enhance citizen engagement with parliamentary institutions.

### 2. Inclusive and Participatory Parliaments

**Commit** to promoting equitable representation and meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, religious minorities and marginalised communities in parliamentary processes.

**Resolve** to review and reform parliamentary rules, procedures, and institutional practices to eliminate systemic barriers to inclusion.

**Support** parliamentary education, civic literacy, and public outreach initiatives to instill democratic values and principles in the hearts and minds of our future generations.

**Endorse** mentorship, capacity-building, and leadership programs that empower underrepresented groups within parliamentary institutions.

**Contribute** to national and regional efforts aimed at fostering inclusive governance, social cohesion, and participatory democracy.

### 3. Innovation and Responsible Use of Technology

**Recognise** the growing influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on governance and parliamentary processes, and underscore the importance of ethical, transparent, and human-centered frameworks.

**Affirm** the need to counter misinformation, hate speech, deep fakes, and digital manipulation while safeguarding freedom of expression and democratic discourse.

**Support** the development of Open Parliament initiatives and digital governance tools to enhance digital access to information, transparency and accountability.

**Promote** capacity-building programmes for parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and citizens to enable informed and responsible digital participation.

**Encourage** measures to ensure safe and equitable digital engagement, including protection against online harassment.

### 4. Peace, Climate Resilience, and Social Cohesion

**Affirm** that peace, justice, and inclusive development are mutually reinforcing and essential for sustainable democratic progress.

**Recall** that right to self-determination, as recognised under international law, remains essential to democratic legitimacy, peaceful coexistence, and durable political solutions.

**Note** with concern the evolving challenges to the international order, marked by growing unilateralism and the gradual narrowing of space for mutual respect, sovereign equality, and adherence to international norms.

**Recognise** the role of parliaments as platforms for dialogue, reconciliation, and peaceful conflict resolution within and across communities.

**Support** legislative initiatives to strengthen climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and protection of climate-vulnerable regions.

**Endorse** community empowerment, local governance engagement, and participatory policy-making to enhance social cohesion.

**Contribute** to regional and national efforts that advance justice, equity, and sustainable development as cornerstones of democratic stability.

## **5. Regional Parliamentary Cooperation**

**Affirm** the importance of parliamentary diplomacy and collaboration among CPA member parliaments as instruments for trust-building and regional stability.

**Support** structured capacity-building programs, knowledge-sharing platforms, and best-practice exchanges among regional parliaments.

**Endorse** partnerships with civil society, academia, and private sectors to advance inclusive, innovative, and sustainable parliamentary development.

**Encourage** regional initiatives that address shared democratic, social, economic, and environmental challenges.

**Recognise** that timely CPA regional conferences are central to sustaining parliamentary partnerships, and commend the Provincial Assembly of Sindh, Pakistan, for hosting the 7th CPA Asia Regional Conference within one year of the previous conference.

## **Conclusion**

As we conclude our deliberations in Karachi and adopt this Declaration on February 6, 2026, we reaffirm our shared resolve to strengthen parliaments as trusted, inclusive, innovative, and peace-building institutions. Guided by democratic values, CPA principles, and international commitments, we commit to translating the spirit and intent of this Declaration into concrete legislative and institutional action within our respective jurisdictions, in pursuit of democratic resilience, collective well-being, and a peaceful future for our peoples.

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Group photo of officers of the Mid-Career Management Course (MCMC), Training Management and Research Wing, SGA&CD, Government of Sindh with Executive Director, PIPS Mr. Asim Khan Goraya, Monday, February 02, 2026



PIPS Training on Koha and System Migration for Sindh Assembly, February 20, 2026



Group photo of participants of Mandatory Training for the Officers of the Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Secretariat (1st Batch), January 30, 2026



Group Photo of Executive Director PIPS and team with Leadership of Mustehkam Parlimaan  
on Project closing, February 16, 2026



## PAKISTAN INSTITUTE FOR PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES

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