

Isn't the fault actually in our stars?

Wajid Islam | 22nd July, 2025



While the world sets its sight on mars, Pakistan is moving in a backward trajectory. The latest Human Development Index (HDI) ranking speaks volume. According to the 2025 HDI ranking, Pakistan has dropped 4 places to 168 out of 193 countries, landing in the “low human development” category.

HDI shows the socio-economic development of a nation with its three major indicators: health, education, and living standards. The lower ranking of HDI means that all the mentioned indicators are in bad condition. Overall, the low HDI translates into poor economic growth in the future. Sadly, Pakistan is flatteringly in all the three indicators.

How is a country supposed to develop when the coverage and quality of its education is below the threshold? Pakistan is one of the unfortunate countries where one-third of children are out of school — one of the highest figures globally, i.e., 26 million, and the number is burgeoning.

Despite the twice declaration of government of an education emergency in 2024, no practical steps are taken in this regard. The country only spent 0.8 percent of its GDP on education, which is lowest in the whole region.

The situation of higher education is also in a dismal state. Being the fifth most populous country in the world, and possessing one of the youngest populations, no university in the country has managed to enter the top 350 QS ranking.

There is no environment of research and development in the country. In such a situation, how can one expect that the country will ascend the ladder of development?

The youth is one of the determining factors of any country's destiny; however, the country is witnessing brain drain, with skilled professionals leaving the country in search of better opportunities.

“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves”—W. Shakespeare

The second main pillar of HDI is health. A healthy nation can work for the prosperity of a country. Regrettably, the health sector of the country paints an

equally bleak picture. The expenditure on health is only 0.9 percent of GDP. With such low spending, how will the country cope with the problem of child stunting? The country is witnessing a very disturbing number — 40 percent of its children are stunted.

The situation is further exacerbated by rising poverty in the country. A high fertility rate in the region, coupled with limited resources, leads to malnutrition and ultimately to premature mortality. According to UNICEF, 8 out of 10 children in the country do not receive the right quantity and type of food.

The health sector is in complete doldrums— Basic medical supplies are often unavailable even in emergency wards, as I personally witnessed in a DHQ hospital in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The same situation also persists in other parts of the country.

When the combined expenditure on health and education is only 1.7 percent of GDP, how can one expect a better living standard, which is the third pillar of the HDI? With exponential population growth, the already scarce resources are depleting at an unprecedented rate.

The country, with its stressed economy, is facing high unemployment and inflation. According to the World Bank's new threshold of US\$3 for the international poverty line, 44.7 percent of Pakistanis are poor, with 16.5 percent living in extreme poverty. The situation is further worsened by precarious housing availability, with a shortage of around 2.1 million units. These factors are contributing to declining living standards.

In such circumstances, where food, health, and shelter are not adequately available to citizens, how is the country supposed to improve its HDI ranking? Economic growth remains a far cry in the wilderness in the absence of human

development. If citizens receive the basic amenities of life, they will naturally divert their attention toward growth and prosperity.

Our regional competitors are progressing on both human development and economic fronts. The fault, however, lies in our own neglect not in our stars. We have overlooked human development—and this is costing future generations.

Without investing in human development, Pakistan's future is at risk. Economic growth and human development go hand in hand. The country cannot achieve anything without a significant investment in its people. There is a dire need for strong political will and commitment to prioritize human development.

The Uraan Pakistan transformative initiative is a step in the right direction towards equity and empowerment. However, its success depends entirely on how effectively it is implemented.

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