**Why Perception Matters**

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Pakistan suffers reputational damage by being perpetually in crisis, both internally and externally, which undermines the country’s positive international image. Unfortunately, the recent events following the arrest of the ex-Prime Minister have reinforced the belief that the country is teetering on the edge of a precipice.

Days like May 9th leave lasting marks in the country’s history. The protesters, no matter how violent they may appear, were unable to distinguish between the government and the state. The government, too, was indecisive and made no effort to effectively communicate its message to the masses in order to diffuse the volatile situation. As a result, mob psychology took over.

Once again, the country was bleeding while all the stakeholders confronted one another. This further damaged the perception of the country, with hostile players taking advantage in the international market.

Retrospection is crucial. It has long been recognized that international perceptions play a vital role in a country’s reputation and its geopolitical influence in international politics, as recently mentioned by veteran writer and diplomat Maliha Lodhi in her op-ed, “Why Soft Power Counts,” published in Dawn.

[Fresh westerly wave to bring rainfall in Sindh, Balochistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/fresh-westerly-wave-to-bring-rainfall-in-sindh-balochistan)

“May 9 severely damaged our reputation as a nation across the globe. It was challenging for our international diaspora to explain to the world what was happening in the country. This will further deter investors from investing in Pakistan,” said Mian Mehmood-ul-Hassan, Honorable Consul General of Moldova and an expert in International Trade & Commerce. Rising above partisan lines, it is extremely perplexing to witness the current state of affairs in the country. While everyone seems preoccupied with their own interests, the nation is sinking like the Titanic.

Optics have never been as significant as they are now. We are living in an era where optics matter increasingly with each passing day. Even world leaders are heavily invested in projecting a positive image to the world. China, for instance, has undertaken several such initiatives. Its recent mediation in the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran has further enhanced its role as a global leader. According to the Global Soft Power Index 2023, which assesses a country’s soft power on a global scale, the USA ranks first and Canada ranks fifth, while Pakistan finds itself in the lower half. We can no longer ignore the areas where we need to direct our attention.

[Khusro Bakhtiar quits Imran Khan’s PTI](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/khusro-bakhtiar-quits-imran-khan-s-pti)

The recent World Bank review of Human Capital in Pakistan should serve as an eye-opener. Our comparison group includes countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, while all our neighboring countries surpass us. Our population growth is still alarmingly high, with too many children dying in infancy and too many mothers dying during childbirth or suffering from malnutrition. Additionally, a significant number of children grow up malnourished or stunted, 23 million children aged 5-16 years are out of school, the majority receive poor-quality education, skill development programs are inaccessible for most children, and access to safe drinking water and adequate waste disposal facilities is limited.

While maintaining law and order, the government must realize that it cannot achieve this without investing in its citizens. Given our current population growth and the absence of effective policies to curb it, we are heading toward a situation where the basic needs of a majority of the population will not be met. Pakistan is also highly vulnerable to climate change, further exacerbating the potential for anarchy. With malnourishment affecting 40% of our children, their potential is being severely hindered. What kind of adults will they grow into? What can they do for themselves, their families, and the country?

[Imran Khan challenges search warrants for Zaman park residence](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-May-2023/imran-khan-challenges-search-warrants-for-zaman-park-residence)

The colliding institutions must recognize the warning signs before it is too late. Child education, food security, and measures to combat climate change are essential for a hopeful future for the country. It is imperative for both the masses and the international community to witness our commitment to building a better future.

We must abandon the perception of perpetual crisis and institutional battles. Only astute statesmanship can keep our sinking ship afloat. It is time for sense to prevail.