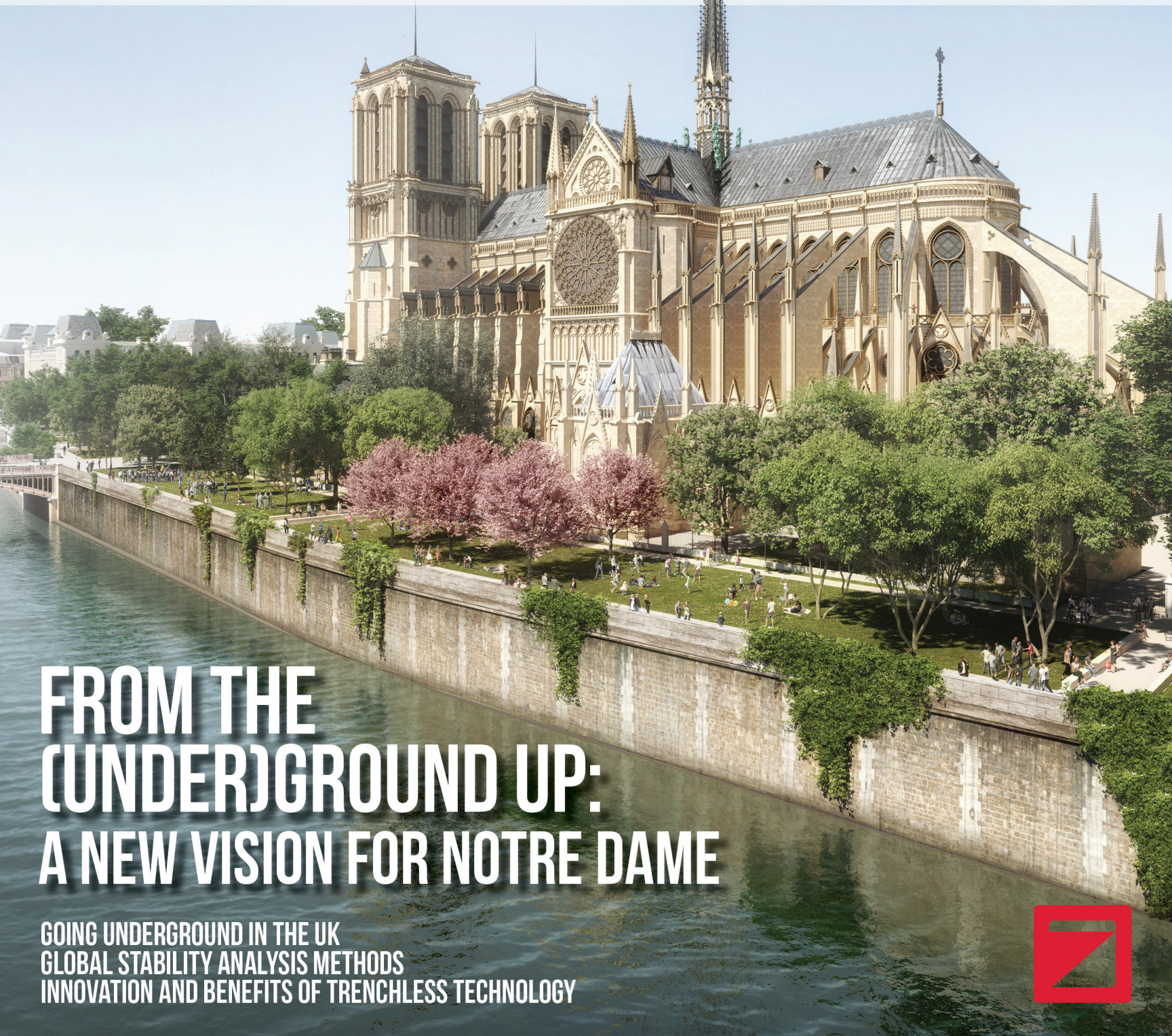


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ADDRESSING PAKISTAN'S NEEDS: THE PEC AND HILL INTERNATIONAL

By Luke Carothers

ESTABLISHED BY an Act of Parliament in 1976, the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) with the purpose of regulating the engineering profession and the education of engineers. Since this time, the PEC has served the engineering profession in Pakistan, relentlessly following and succeeding in establishing a forum within the country that serves the entire engineering community. The PEC has become an effective bridge between the Pakistani government, industry, and engineering universities/institutions. It has also become a key driving force in the country's goals to achieve "rapid and sustainable growth in all economic, social, and national groups."

Najeeb Haroon is the Chairman of the PEC, having been elected to the position in 2021. Haroon has a vast wealth of experience in the construction industry, which began in 1987. This wealth of experience is supported by a Master's degree in Civil Engineering. A major part of Haroon's efforts since being elected have been focused on improving the quality of engineering education for institutions and professional systems. To achieve this, Haroon and the PEC have been at work synchronizing these institutions and systems with the best international standards and practices.

For Haroon, the Pakistani construction industry, despite recent strides, still needs to develop in many ways. Part of the challenge blocking rapid and sustainable growth is a lack of definition and recognition. Unlike in other countries, construction is not recognized as its own industry even as of 2023. For Haroon and the PEC, this presents tremendous challenges based on the close ties between engineering and construction. Because of this close link, the PEC is responsible for not only regulating the engineering profession but also the construction profession. Haroon notes that engineers are often the backbone of consulting and construction firms, and that the organization of the construction industry will only help elevate engineering.

When it comes to improving the engineering and construction professions in Pakistan, the stakes are high, but there is plenty of opportunity. Haroon is clear about the challenges that Pakistan and these industries face. Pakistan is severely lagging behind in terms of its infrastructure and housing. When speaking about Pakistan's infrastructure, Haroon is clear that this is a wide-ranging problem, with a need for all forms of infrastructure including dams, drainage ditches, water access, electrical grids, and roads. The situation is similar when speaking about Pakistan's housing sector where the country is lacking more than five million houses.

Despite these challenges, Haroon and the PEC are confident that better days are on the horizon. With the continued improvement of the engineering and construction professions, Pakistan can position itself to attract new international investors. Haroon cites examples of geographically similar countries such as Turkey and Malaysia, believing that as those markets become saturated, investors will search for new markets to enter. Said Mneimne, SVP of Hill International's Asia and Pacific region, further adds that one of the biggest challenges in attracting international investment is managing risk. Mneimne notes that nearly non-existent construction funding in Pakistan increases risk on the schedule and delivery of projects. One potential solution to managing this risk would be the establishment of a national construction bank that would guarantee construction bonds. Haroon is keen on the idea that, whatever solutions are developed to manage this risk and attract international investment, they must be Pakistan-specific solutions. By "putting [their] house in order", Haroon is confident that Pakistan can reap the benefits of this international investment.

While Pakistan faces significant challenges in their infrastructure and housing sectors, there is equal cause for optimism moving forward. As the engineering and construction professions continue to be organized and improved, the capital risk associated with improvement projects will likely decrease. Furthermore, Mneimne is confident that the country's strong engineering background can be harnessed to improve local projects. While Pakistan is known internationally as exporting skilled engineers, Mneimne believes that this process is a "brain drain" on the local economy. Thus, better organized engineering and construction professions as well as programs and improved living conditions can be a way of attracting these workers to stay or return home, which would in turn lead to a better trained local labor force.

Working with firms such as Hill International, the PEC has made significant strides towards improving not only the state of the engineering and construction professions in Pakistan but also the standard of living. Haroon says that they are not trying to reinvent the wheel to accomplish these tasks. Rather, by following similar examples and figuring out how the same processes can be customized to benefit local economies, Pakistan can improve and organize their engineering and construction professions which will have a cascading effect on the sectors that most need improvement.

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