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Pakistan hopes routine processing of US immigrant visas will resume soon after their internal review: FO

Pakistan on Thursday expressed hope that the United States would “soon” resume immigrant visa processing, adding that it viewed the recent suspension as part of an internal review.

The US on Wednesday announced the suspension of immigrant visa processing for Pakistan and 74 other countries, effective January 21, citing concerns that immigrants from these nations often rely on public welfare programmes.

In its statement, the State Department had said the “freeze will remain active until the US can ensure that new immigrants will not extract wealth from the American people”.

Responding to a query about the move

despite Pakistan’s improved relations with Washington in recent months, Foreign Office (FO) spokesperson Tahir Hussain Andrabi acknowledged coming across the “reports”.

He said, “Basically, it was a brief statement by the US State Department on their social media account about the internal review of processing immigrant visas that they are in the process of.”

The FO spokesperson added, “We are in touch with the US authorities to ascertain further details. This is an evolving news that we are following. “We understand that this is an internal ongoing process of review of US

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Get Out the Vote Rally Energizes Fort Bend County as Sara Khan’s Campaign Gains Momentum



SUGAR LAND, Texas — A surge of civic enthusiasm filled the air as community members gathered for a “Get Out the Vote” rally in support of Sara Khan, candidate for Fort Bend County Treasurer. The event, held at the Hilton Garden Inn in Sugar Land,

underscored a growing movement centered on voter engagement, leadership, and community-driven change.

With the rally’s theme — “Your Voice. Your Vote. Our Future.” — speakers and

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US says revoked 100,000 visas since Trump return

WASHINGTON: The United States has revoked more than 100,000 visas since President Donald Trump took office on an anti-migrant platform, a record for a single year, the State Department said.

“The Trump administration has no higher priority than protecting American citizens and upholding

Continued on page 12

Pakistan signs MoU with Trump-linked World Liberty Finance

Pakistan said on Wednesday it had signed an agreement with a firm connected to World Liberty Financial, the main crypto business of US President Donald Trump’s family, to explore using World Liberty’s stablecoin for cross-border payments.

Continued on page 12

In meeting with ICC, Bangladesh reiterates its refusal to travel to India for T20 World Cup

Bangladesh’s cricket board said on Tuesday it had repeated its refusal to travel to India for next month’s T20 World Cup during talks with the

International Cricket Council (ICC). Bangladesh announced on Jan 4 that it would not play its T20

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Pakistan eyes minerals to drive strategic economic growth

Pakistan sits on vast untapped mineral wealth, including copper, gold, lithium, cobalt, rare earths and gemstones yet exports remain minimal and local communities see limited benefits. In a blog published in The National Interest, the author,

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Prominent Pakistani-American Businessman Muhammad Baig’s Mother Passes Away

KARACHI / HOUSTON — The mother of prominent Pakistani-American businessman, owner of Chaat n Paan and Louisiana Chicken Muhammad Baig, passed away in Karachi, Pakistan. She was 80 years old and had been suffering from a prolonged illness.

The late Gul Bano Qadir passed away on Tuesday. Her funeral and burial were held in a local Karachi cemetery, where family members and relatives laid her to rest.

A ghaibana (absentee) funeral prayer was offered in her honor at

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2026 global health outlook: Experts warn of key challenges ahead

The landscape of global health is changing rapidly driven by numerous opportunities. However, the issues also exist. The medical experts have identified various challenges responsible for shaping the global health agenda.

Global funding crisis

The most immediate challenge

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Nobel Institute rejects Maria Corina Machado's suggestion, says 'Nobel Peace Prize' is non-transferable

The Norwegian organization or committee that oversees the Nobel Peace Prize rejected recent suggestions proposed by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Maria Corina Machado.

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KHAN SARA
for Treasurer
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New provinces?

Pakistan's centralised governance system has bred discontent. From the tales of One Unit to four federating units, the populace has longed for empowerment. Thus, the debate that the creation of more provinces will solve many of the pestering ailments is an argument which can only be substantiated with credible measures of socioeconomic indicators. If the guise is good governance, the laboratory of Pakistan is mired in myriad pathologies, inter alia, the non-implementation of the existing devolution structure. The local bodies are still emaciated, and after the 18th amendment, what little is left has been bogged down by the friction between the Centre and the provinces. So is the case with the NFC award that is indexed on

population bulge, discriminating against smaller provinces in their due share in development.

The demand from the Istehkam Pakistan Party for subdividing the four provinces into 16 units is a good proposition. The party has clubbed itself with the MQM, and likes, that have long been airing their grievances and want a perpetual settlement on the basis of income generation, ethnicity and population displacement. More provinces would be a welcome change, provided they are people-centric. Moreover, smaller provinces would also be cost-bearing on an already squeezed kitty. Demarcating new provinces or administrative units should, however, be done based on the provision of adequate resources indigenously and

empowering people with due legislation, rather than throwing them at the mercy of a cumbersome bureaucracy.

The best way to empower the masses and disseminate democracy is to implement the constitutionally assigned local tiers of government. On this premise, more provinces and administrative units should be set up. The debate that the 31 administrative units, known as divisions, should be restructured as provinces is also an interesting proposition. The good point is that such a demarcation would be purely administrative in essence rather than based on ethnic or lingual identity. It needs to be ensured that any new unit created should be financially viable and politically uncontested.

Mental health in a broken world

The medical model of mental health thrives on individualisation of systemic problems.

Murad Moosa Khan

"The stark reality for the vast majority of people in the non-Western world, transcending everything, is poverty. Currently one quarter of the global population lives in near destitution and 3.5 million children die of starvation annually. What is 'mental health' in this broken social world?" (Summerfield, 2012)

In recent years, mental health has been attracting a lot of attention — globally as well as in Pakistan. Terms like 'anxiety', 'depression', 'trauma', 'neurodivergence' and 'well-being' frequently come up for discussion on public forums and social media.

In Pakistan "increasing awareness and decreasing stigma" about mental health has become quite fashionable. Telepsychiatry, helplines, online platforms for connecting with psychologists and counsellors are making mental healthcare much more accessible to people.

On the surface, all this seems promising, but it begs a deeper question: are we medicalising human suffering and distress in ways that obscure its social origins? A new book, provocatively titled *Searching for Normal* by Dr Sami Timimi, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and psychotherapist in UK's National Health Service invites us to consider precisely this: how we understand and conceptualise distress, what are its root causes and how we respond to it.

Timimi describes a global mental health system in which distress and behavioural differences are increasingly framed as medical disorders requiring diagnosis and treatment.

Rather than viewing emotional suffering as a natural response to adverse social and economic conditions, we are encouraged to see it as a pathology — something inside the individual that needs fixing. Timimi calls this a "mental health industrial complex" (much like the military-industrial complex) and highlights how diagnoses, therapies, medications and self-help markets form a complex network of interests that benefit from ever-expanding definitions of illness.

Over the last few decades, the number of psychiatric diagnostic labels has multiplied exponentially — from attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to autism spectrum disorders to new stress and trauma classifications. While some help guide support for genuinely disabling

experiences, they are also cultural constructions rather than discrete biological entities with clear tests, like diabetes or tuberculosis. Timimi points out that psychiatric diagnoses are not grounded in objective biomarkers but in symptom clusters that vary across cultures. What counts as a 'disorder' is shaped by cultural and economic forces, not just science.

The dramatic rise in the diagnosis of ADHD and autism in recent years, Timimi observes, is linked to incentives and structures of profit-making, wherein market forces, pharmaceutical interests, and diagnostic expansion intersect. We are already seeing a similar trend in Pakistan as people are increasingly self-diagnosing based on checklists freely available on the internet and asking to be put on medication. This is not only pathologising, but is reducing complex social realities into 'conditions' to be treated. Murad Moosa Khan

This is not to deny the reality of suffering or a criticism of therapy or to be psychiatric care per se. Distress is real and suicide, self-harm, anxiety and depression affect individuals and families deeply; some individuals benefit from clinical support, and severe psychiatric conditions exist and deserve compassionate, evidence-based care. But when ordinary distress — sadness after loss, anxiety during economic struggle, restlessness in adolescence — begins to be treated as a diagnosable disorder, we must ask how we understand and respond to that suffering. Should mental healthcare be primarily about diagnosing and treating individuals or also about reshaping the social world in which they live?

A mental health strategy that focuses on treating symptoms with medication and therapy, that ignores the conditions that produce those symptoms, also ignores prevention. It forces mental health professionals to treat symptoms without improving the lives of people in meaningful ways. Societies facing economic hardship do not need more medicalisation; they need jobs, food, housing, safety and security.

The medical model of mental health thrives on individualisation of systemic problems. Focusing on individual self-management, self-care, or 'fixing the chemical imbalance' in the brain deflects attention from collective and structural

solutions, including human rights, economic reforms, and social and economic justice.

Timimi's book urges us to view people not through the lens of pathology with the goal of returning them to a vague 'normal', but to ask what is "normal in a broken social world?" It means taking an approach that goes beyond "raising awareness, decreasing stigma or including mental health in primary care" and to also focus on social welfare, education and economic opportunity. It suggests that schools, workplaces, mosques and neighbourhoods should be part of a collective mental well-being ecosystem, not just referral points to clinicians.

For Pakistan, this has important implications, as social determinants — poverty, unemployment, violence, widespread disparity, social and economic injustice, institutional corruption and lack of social protections — are powerful drivers of distress. Research shows that inequality and insecurity are strongly linked to poor mental health outcomes. In communities affected by conflict, natural disasters or chronic poverty, emotional suffering is often a response to external conditions, not an internal defect. Framing this distress as a mental abnormality diverts attention from policies that should address their root social causes.

Importantly, it forces us to question how we conceptualise distress in countries like Pakistan and whether we are conflating distress with clinical states of depression and anxiety. If distress is framed primarily in clinical terms, then we seek a medical solution — medications or counselling/ therapy (or both) — while people continue to battle the same social conditions that caused their distress in the first place.

A humane, contextual approach to mental health acknowledges that suffering is often a response to lived conditions — poverty, violence, marginalisation — much more than some chemical imbalance in the brain. It calls for policies that address these conditions upstream, while also providing care that is compassionate, culturally grounded, and socially informed.

There is need for broadening our vision — thinking of mental well-being not as a product of individual pathology, but a reflection of societal conditions. Only then can we move towards creating a society where healing is shaped by justice, solidarity and care.

Fragmented Somalia

Israel's decision to recognise Somaliland as an independent state is a calculated attempt at destabilisation

Israel's decision to recognise Somaliland as an independent state is a calculated political act that threatens to destabilise an already fragile region and undermine the foundational principles of international law. Pakistan's forceful response at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's extraordinary session in Jeddah rightly framed it as an act of political aggression that sets a perilous precedent, with ramifications extending far beyond the Horn of Africa.

Addressing the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar left little room for ambiguity. He said Pakistan "strongly condemns the illegal and unlawful recognition by Israel of the

Somaliland region of the Federal Republic of Somalia", reiterating unwavering support for Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. His remarks echoed the OIC's joint statement, which rejected the recognition of "parts of states" as a violation of the cardinal principles of international law and the UN Charter.

Somalia's territorial integrity is not a matter of political convenience but a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogation is permitted. No external actor, as Dar rightly noted, has the legal standing or moral authority to alter that reality. Worse still, the episode risks undermining regional and international counterterrorism efforts. Somalia

continues to battle the persistent threats, and its citizens have paid a heavy price in blood and resilience. By fuelling fragmentation and contestation, Israel's actions open the door to the creation of fragile political environments that extremist groups are quick to exploit.

This is not just about Somalia or Somaliland. It is about the integrity of the international system itself. If recognition becomes a tool of political expediency rather than a function of law, then no border is truly secure. Pakistan's stance, grounded in principle, is a reminder that in a fractured global order, adherence to international law remains the last meaningful line of defence against chaos.

2025: a year of constitutional genocide

A mutilated democratic structure, an eviscerated judicial system, crippled fundamental rights

A mutilated democratic structure, an eviscerated judicial system, crippled fundamental rights — this is the post-27th amendment constitutional landscape of our beloved Islamic Republic of Pakistan!

Once regarded as the classical democratic and consensual charter, the 1973 Constitution has been mercilessly — indeed, shamelessly — subjected to constitutional mutilation at the hands of our ruling elite over the past 52 years, disfiguring the very spirit of constitutionalism in pursuit of their own survival and self-interest.

'Reforms' — progressively labelled, yet each amendment carved deeper wounds, transforming evolution into systematic dilapidation, and advancement into the gradual genocide of constitutional integrity.

Each successive regime has tightened its grip on the levers of power by

calculated erosion of institutional structure created to hold it accountable.

Cherished democratic principles — sanctity of fundamental rights, independence of judiciary, supremacy of parliament, rule of law — once the proud emblems of our constitutional promise, now lie buried beneath the triumphant march of our self-proclaimed 'chosen representatives', who mistake tyranny for governance and silence for stability. Hence, this day, we stand amid the ruins what was once a democratic promise.

However, the latter half of the preceding year witnessed what may rightly be described as the most brutal constitutional crime committed under the deceptive agenda of 'Twenty-Seventh Amendment', amounting to nothing less than the cold-blooded assassination of the apex judicial institution. What was once a source of pride for

every lawyer — the Supreme Court of Pakistan — now stands reduced to a mere "Supreme Court" (final appellate forum), stripped of its institutional majesty; moreover, the dignified title and the office of the Chief Justice of Pakistan has likewise been hung on a disgraceful see-saw.

The emerging constitutional dictatorship is evident from the fact that hand-picked, executive-appointed judges are now projected as the new protectors of valuable fundamental rights and conveniently celebrated as dynamically skilled interpreters of the sacred scripture, popularly known as the 'Constitution of Pakistan'!

The revised process for the selection and transfer of judges has 'marvelously' cemented executive dominance over judicial pillar, hence, achieving the 'remarkable feat' of completely demolishing the democratically

entrenched principle of judicial independence and craftily reshaping the judiciary from its role as the esteemed guardian of the Constitution into a 'splendidly' maneuvered appendage of the executive branch.

Thus, the foundational pillars of the rule of law and the people's supremacy, upon which the entire constitutional structure rests, have creatively been fractured, in order to axe the very surveillance gadget of accountability and to roll out a red carpet for those who hold the reins.

Being an integral part of judicial system, witnessing the defacement of Pakistan's long-cherished, most democratic legal framework — a product of historic national consensus — feels like a meticulously staged tragedy, a cruel joke played on the nation, engineered with precision by its very own self-styled guardians.

Thus, Constitution, once a sacred covenant, between the state and citizens, has gradually been reduced to an instrument of convenience, reframed and reinterpreted to guard the powerful and to silence the governed.

We must face the sobering truth: unless this nation rouses itself to confront the creeping decay of its own Constitution, the dream of Pakistan — envisioned as a democratic, just and lawful state — may soon linger on as ink in forgotten pages of history, or as a faint echo in the fading memories of a few wandering democrats like you and me.

As the nation turns a fresh calendar, it must recognise that this brutal deployment of the weapon of 'amendment' artfully disguised as 'reform', must be halted if we are to stop the ongoing genocide of constitutional principles and democratic values.

Suffocating existence

A NEW report by the UN strips away whatever little ambiguity remained around Israel's conduct in occupied West Bank. For the first time, a UN rights chief has explicitly described Israel's system of rule as resembling apartheid — a serious designation, but one that Palestinians have endured for decades. The report speaks of a "systematic asphyxiation" of Palestinian rights, an apt phrase for a reality in which daily life is suffo-

cated by discriminatory laws and practices. From access to water and education to healthcare and livelihoods, Palestinians in the West Bank exist under a system designed to privilege Israeli settlers while dehumanising the indigenous community. Two people living on the same land are governed by two entirely different legal systems: civil law for settlers, military law for Palestinians.

The result is predictable. Land

confiscation, home demolitions, detention, trials in military courts, and escalating settler violence often carried out with the support of Israeli security forces. That this situation has now been labelled 'apartheid' by the UN is significant, but hardly revelatory.

Independent experts, human rights groups and Palestinians themselves have long warned that segregation and domination are not accidental byproducts of occupation but

its very purpose. The West Bank has become an experiment of repression where Palestinian existence is tolerated only as long as it remains compliant and invisible. Equally damning is the context in which this report arrives. Just months ago, a separate UN inquiry described Israel's actions in Gaza as genocidal. Yet, as with countless resolutions and condemnations before, little has changed on the ground. Babies in Gaza continue to die from cold and malnutrition. Cancer patients perish for lack of treatment. Civilians are killed with impunity,

shot in the head, bombed in their homes, starved behind blockades, while the world debates semantics.

Israel dismissed the report as "absurd and distorted". But denial has long been its first line of defence, enabled by powerful allies. The real absurdity lies in the international community's response: outrage followed by inaction. The suffering of Palestinians continues as though they are, indeed, children of a lesser god undeserving of the rights, dignity and protection afforded to others. The UN's words must be followed by consequences.

People are eating less

Macroeconomic repairs are being carried out by impoverishing the people.

Zafar Mirza | Miftah Ismail

ON Jan 1, the government launched the results of the Household Integrated Economic Survey 2024-25 under the subtitle of 'Data-driven insights for inclusive growth' — though we are moving in a direction opposite to inclusive growth, as the HIES data itself shows.

Before moving further, we appreciate the fact that HIES 2024-25 has been done, and technically speaking, done well. It is statistically sound and representative as it covers 32,000 households across the country and across the five socioeconomic quantiles covering both urban and rural Pakistan. And, it's for the first time that the HIES has been done digitally. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics deserves appreciation.

The six highlights adorning the official press release of the launch as milestones are: three percentile points increase in literacy; two per cent points decrease in out-of-school children and three points increase in the use of clean fuels. Household internet access has jumped from 34pc to 70pc and individuals using the internet has increased from 17pc to 57pc. These are indeed improvements. But then, full immunisation of children improving five percentage points and moving from 68pc to 73pc actually means that 27pc of our children are still not fully immunised. We also know where most of the unvaccinated children are: some 57pc of children in the erstwhile Fata agencies (now districts) and almost two-thirds of children in Balochistan are not fully immunised. But the highlights or milestones of HIES 2024-25 are still shallow waters. Real sharks lurk in deep waters. HIES has indeed been successful in "capturing real lives through real data".

One key revelation of this survey is that the average monthly household income in Pakistan more than doubled between 2018-19 and 2024-25 — from Rs41,545 to Rs82,179. This is a 97.81pc increase. How nice it sounds that, on average, households are now making more money. In terms of income distribution, in 2024-25, the poorest quintile was earning an average of Rs41,851, while the richest was earning Rs139,317 — nearly three times higher. Inequality is more pronounced in the urban areas, where the richest households earn well above Rs146,920, and the poorest remain below Rs42,412.

But then, average household consumption expenditure increased by 113pc during the same period. In 2018-19, an average household in Pakistan was consuming or spending Rs37,159 per month; in 2024-25 it was consuming Rs79,150. Overall, as compared to 2018-19, the poor households in the first quintile showed an increase of 84pc, while the rich households in the fifth quintile showed an increase of 131pc, demonstrating a widening increase in consumption between the rich and poor.

The net result of the so-called increased household income and even greater increase in consumption is that in the last six years, an average Pakistani household has become poorer and lives a more difficult life. How much poorer? Let's see.

The real story is hidden in real income values by controlling the inflation effect, i.e., comparing HIES 2024-25 income data with 2018-19 prices. This comparison shows that on average people are poorer today than they were in 2018-19. Except for the richest 20pc of rural households all others, poor and rich in both the urban and rural areas, have lost

out on their incomes.

The worst affected are the poorest urban citizens who have lost 23pc of their real income. In 2018-19, the average poorest urban household earned Rs24,365 whereas in 2024-25 the same household made Rs18,820 in 2018-19 prices. The average urban citizen became 19pc poorer and the average rural citizen 7pc poorer in the intervening six years.

Even more disturbing is how this relative poverty is affecting real lives. The major share of household income in terms of percentage is being spent on basic food items — 36.72pc, which is a bit more than in 2018-19, and yet, they are consuming less food than they were six years ago. A table (37.C) in HIES 2024-25 tells this sad story. Per capita consumption has gone down in almost all main food items. For example, in 2018-19, the average urban Pakistani was consuming 6.12 kilograms of wheat but in 2024-25 s/he was consuming 5.67 kg. All per capita consumption values of essential food items — including, rice, pulses, milk, mutton, beef, chicken, eggs, potato, onion, sugar and tea — have gone down in the last six years in both the cities and the rural areas. The only exceptions to this sad trend are tomatoes and cooking oil.

In essence, Pakistanis are spending more and eating less than they were six years ago. The prevalence of food insecurity has increased from 15.9pc in 2018-19 to 24.4pc in 2024-25, according to the survey. They are also now spending less on education than they were in 2018-19. Almost 4pc of household expenditure went into education six years ago, which declined to around 2.5pc. Household health expenditure being relatively inelastic has slightly increased from 3.22pc to

3.34pc.

HIES 2024-25 shows that macroeconomics and household economics are at odds with one another. Macroeconomic repairs are being carried out by impoverishing the people through high direct and indirect taxes and extremely high and exploitative utility bills. The salaried class is worst hit. Macroeconomic stability is destabilising the people.

The current government has to shoulder the responsibility of this sad state of affairs but the reality is that our economic woes are rooted in the extractive economic system we have been pursuing, our perennial governance issues and — the mother of all issues — our chronically unstable politics.

Pakistan desperately needs deep, consistent and sustainable structural reforms in all these domains for which a national consensus needs to be established through a national dialogue among all stakeholders. The seriousness of our social, economic and political issues is such that these cannot be left to one government alone. All parties and state institutions need to sit together and develop a long-term development plan and firewall it against any change of government and any political turbulence. Unless we do this, the people will continue to suffer. The measure of national success should be how a poor household prospers in real terms rather than how successful we are in obtaining another debt tranche from the IMF.

The writer is a former SAPM on health with ministerial status, adjunct professor of health systems and president of the Pakistan Association of Lifestyle Medicine.

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Dialogue, anyone?

Fahd Husain

Everyone is talking about talks, but no one wants to talk.

The glaring contradiction measures the difference between optics and hard reality. Within the optics domain, everyone desires to look and sound reasonable. The hard reality, on the other hand, is based on a cold and calculated assessment of the situation and the advantage that accrues in a zero-sum conflict.

So why is Fawad Chaudhry insisting all combatants sit down and talk? Is he living in cuckoo land?

This week, he, along with former PTI leaders Imran Ismail, Mehmood Maulvi and Dr Shahzad Wasim, organised the first meeting of the National Dialogue Committee in Islamabad. NDC, as it is called, has been formed to initiate some form of dialogue between important stakeholders in order to, as Fawad Chaudhry says, 'lower the temperature' in the country. The meeting was attended, among others, by former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi as well as members from MQM, Jamaat-e-Islami, other parties and senior lawyers and journalists. At the end of the meeting, a declaration was announced which urged various confidence-building measures between the government and the opposition.

So far so good.

Here's the problem, though. The establishment is in no mood to talk to the PTI. Unless on its own terms. Imran Khan is in no mood to talk to the estab-

lishment. Unless on his own terms. The PML-N is in no mood to enable the establishment and Imran Khan to talk to each other. Unless such talking burns any remaining bridges between them. The rest don't matter. Fawad Chaudhry is a smart politician. He understands the situation as it exists. Why is he chasing a fantasy? Unless he knows something others don't.

What could this be? To figure it out, one needs a deeper dive into not just the present state of affairs but, more importantly, the thought process defining today for tomorrow and possibly the day after. Let's start with the foundational question: what defines Pakistan's acutest challenge: domestic or international? Consider the following: Donald Trump's transformation from isolationist to an imperialist president is re-drawing most geo-strategic calculations across the world. The so-called 'Donroe Doctrine' (a Trumpian twist to the Monroe Doctrine) has put Latin America on notice. After Trump's kidnapping of the Venezuelan president, and American control of his country and its oil reserves, countries like Colombia, Mexico and Cuba are bracing for the worst. Trump is flexing military muscle in a naked pursuit of US interests. A new and unexpected crisis is engulfing the international system. In every crisis, there are challenges and opportunities.

But what does this have to do with Fawad Chaudhry? Wait.

In Europe, a sense of acute insecurity has descended like a cold, wet blanket on a snowy night.

With each passing day, it is becoming alarmingly obvious to EU leaders that Russia will, in fact, get what it wants in Ukraine. If this wasn't bad enough, Trump's threat against Denmark-owned Greenland means Europe will, one way or another, have to bend the knee. And with NATO's future under threat because of Trump's waning interest in the alliance, European nations now have to figure out how to survive in a big, bad world without the guarantee of US protection. In a world increasingly being divided into American, Chinese and Russian spheres, Europe finds itself in neither.

But what does this have to do with Fawad Chaudhry? Wait. In the Middle East, chaos and uncertainty continue to trend. The so-called Gaza peace plan is failing spectacularly, and Israel's bloodlust remains as strong as ever.

But what does this...? Yes, wait.

Iran is rocked by nationwide protests. Pakistan has issued a travel advisory to its citizens, and Trump has threatened to take action against the Iranian regime if it starts shooting protesters. Israel is itching to take another swing at Iran and is ferociously whispering in Trump's ear to go for regime change. Dark clouds of another attack on Iran by Israel and the US are hovering dangerously. If Pakistan is on tenterhooks, it should.

Does this really have any connection — however convoluted — with Fawad Chaudhry? Wait.

A report by the respected news agency Bloomberg says that Turkey wants to be part of the

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia strategic defence pact, and details have almost been worked out. The report says this alliance could have a deep impact on the geo-strategic dynamics of the region. All this is happening when Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has said, 'if our defence deals go through, we may not need IMF for too long.' Reports suggest Pakistan is in advanced stages of selling aircraft and other military equipment to a number of countries. The Air Chief is currently in Iraq, and the Iraqis are expected to purchase JF-17 aircraft. The Saudis may also convert their \$2 billion loan into a JF-17 fighter deal. Much is happening.

And then there's India. As well as Indian-sponsored terrorism from Afghanistan. Instability on the eastern and western borders is refusing to recede. It demands an all-hands-on-deck approach.

In other words, national security fueled by global and regional instability is reinforcing the strength of the hybrid regime at home. There is little pressure on the regime to show any flexibility towards the opposition. There is even less pressure to call elections or roll back pressure on the judiciary, media or other such institutions. Barring a black swan event, the system will continue to dig in its heels for the foreseeable future. Fawad Chaudhry's initiative is an acknowledgement of this reality, and an attempt to coax others to recognise it too. It is rooted in an idealism whose time has not come. Yet. But what Chaudhry and his colleagues realise — and many others are refusing to — is that a middle way can actually be found, at some point, that belies the zero-sum nature of the present situation. Today, no one is interested. Tomorrow, some could.

Keep talking about talks long enough, and one day someone will come to the table. Or be dragged to it.

It's too political

The premise of movies like 'Anniversary' is not far-fetched.

Muna Khan

I'M surprised the lords ruling my algorithm did not alert me about Jan Komasa's film Anniversary, or that it didn't receive the media attention it deserved. I read up on it and found that the distributor Lionsgate may have buried the political thriller in November fearing a backlash from Trump supporters. It had a limited release and was low profile. "It's hard to market a political film today," one of the producers told The Wrap. "People are afraid of them."

Anniversary is about an American family that is hounded following the rise of an authoritarian government. The twist — a book by their daughter-in-law ignited the fire that ultimately saw the rise of this regime and the destruction of everything it pretended to stand for. We watch the family come undone over a five-year period.

Diane Lane plays Ellen, a professor at a prestigious university whose former student Liz publishes The Change, a

book claiming to unite a divided people by putting people in the centre. Liz wrote about a single-party rule but Ellen understood what she was advocating — authoritarian rule.

The Change gets picked up by a right-wing party that uses it as a manifesto to rise to power and Liz begins work at a think tank that champions The Change as a way of life. Things worsen when Liz marries Ellen's son, Josh, who rises in the ranks of that think tank, going against everything his progressive family stands for. His sister, a comedian, is hounded by Change supporters and goes into hiding; all kinds of pressure tactics are used on her parents and siblings to try to find her. They resist all the draconian measures this regime puts out and suffer — job losses, social ostracisation, fear of violence. The Changers want to restore order, go back to a time where "they" were right. This sounds all too familiar a story for us in the subcontinent. It is what has been said here time and again when

"democratic" governments are kicked out. A harkening to Hindutva rule is what got Narendra Modi's star to rise. In Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa claimed his actions were in the name of protecting Sinhala identity. Shaikh Hasina used the 1971 events to consolidate her power.

'You are either with us or against us' has become a way to govern, threaten, harass, disappear, jail, hurt and hurt badly. And just like authoritarians have allies in the form of the media across the region, we see think tanks manufacturing consent for the Change regime in the film. The American flag is redesigned in Anniversary with the stars placed in the centre to reflect a more unified nation, when nothing could be further from the truth. We're all too familiar here with the way symbols have been used to further a narrative, 'strengthen' an identity, redefine what it means to be Indian, Bangladeshi, etc.

State surveillance in Anniversary has a familiar ring. Census takers enter

Ellen's home threatening to use one daughter's photos at a protest unless the couple endorses the regime. Ellen capitulates to save one child. It is not dissimilar to midnight knocks across South Asia, our families disappeared, our journalists killed, dissidents exiled.

Art imitates life after Ellen's rejection of Liz's thesis as "dangerous" led to Liz destroying that family. Many authoritarian figures' stories begin with feeling rejected, unaccepted, ridiculed or feeling like a failure. Many then become driven by revenge, as is the case with dynastic politics in our part of the world where personal grievance drives a justification to control. What happens to those who attempt to oppose or challenge the Changers? They meet the same fate as the thousands who disappear in Balochistan, or Banglade-sh, or the Kashmiris in India. The wealthy can always leave, as can dual nationals. Many die trying to escape treacherous borders. Those who have nowhere to go and try to resist find

themselves isolated. Everyone is a potential whistleblower. With no one to resist the Changers, the regime's authoritarian tactics increase. Curfews, drones watching your every move, militarised police ever on the ready to take you away.

There is a warning here about our initial dismissal of the first signs of polarisation. It's just a difference of opinion we'll think even if that difference ravages our family WhatsApp groups or gatherings. Ellen is right to be sceptical of Liz and is tragically proved right.

History reminds us that the premise of movies like Anniversary is not a far-fetched idea. We already know what we can't talk about in the subcontinent so we won't make movies that reflect our reality. I salute writers making art that challenges social taboos which is deeply political but I'm talking about the topics that are off limits.

It's hard to make a political film here too.

The writer is a former journalism instructor.

‘Good night and good luck’

Political and media landscapes are witnessing their own version of McCarthyism.

Muhammad Amir Rana

MCCARTHYISM is a ghost that survives within political and institutional systems. It thrives on witch-hunts, rejects scrutiny, and shields itself with distorted logic, manufactured fears, and convenient lies. It brands itself as the custodian of ‘true patriotism’, while relegating all dissenters to the category of the less loyal. Today, this spectre is once again dominating parts of the world, including the US and Pakistan.

George Clooney’s *Good Night, and Good Luck* captures this phenomenon by revisiting the confrontation between journalist Edward R. Murrow and Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s. The term ‘McCarthyism’ itself emerged from the senator’s methods, which included wild accusations hurled without proof, careers destroyed on suspicion, and a climate of fear promoted to silence critical voices.

Yet the film does not unfold McCarthy’s character as much as it peels back the layers of the newsroom. It shows how editorial boundaries, commercial pressures, and fear of losing business gradually suffocate journalistic courage. It reminds us that compromises do not arrive abruptly but creep in quietly. But it also shows that there is always a way out, a path that begins with vigilance, integrity and the refusal to accept intimidation.

Though set in the 1950s, *Good Night, and Good Luck* resonates with today’s local scenario in which political and media landscapes are witnessing their own version of McCarthyism where narratives are policed, loyalties questioned and fear weaponised. The film invites us to reflect not only on history, but on our own moment.

An op-ed piece cannot do a full film review, and there is no plan to act as spoiler for those who have the film on their watch list. However, Cole Porter’s famous 1940s’ song, *I’ve Got My Eyes On You*, which also has the line ‘I’m checking all you do from A to Z’ has been masterfully used in the film and one can easily understand the context.

These are difficult times for journalism, especially the

kind that once stood firmly against McCarthyism. The challenge intensifies when the media landscape drifts towards sensationalism and embraces the notion, as referenced in the film, that ‘yellow is better than red’. Those who attempt to expose strong-arm tactics today face familiar reprisals: loss of advertisements, government pressure, accusations of being unpatriotic, and even direct threats.

Yet vigilance makes all the difference. Logic, objectivity and professional reporting covering all essential angles of a story remain possible, though not without hardship. Whether in Gaza during Israel’s genocidal campaign against Palestinians, the recent events in Venezuela or the tragic incident in Minneapolis that law enforcement and President Donald Trump attempted to cover up, segments of the media have continued to perform their professional responsibilities despite immense pressure.

The world over, those subscribing to the tenets of McCarthyism, in every age, remain obsessed with the idea that hidden forces or subversive actors are out to destroy a nation. They believe only a coercive approach can confront such imagined threats. Witch-hunts become their tool; ‘witchcraft’ their political art. For those unfamiliar with the origins of this mentality, Europe’s experience between the 15th and 17th centuries is instructive. That era saw widespread accusations of witchcraft amid political instability, famine, disease, economic crises, and religious conflict. The clergy scapegoated ‘witches’ — mostly poor women — and Heinrich Kramer, a priest, authored the *Hammer of Witches*, a manual that claimed that the devil targeted women, especially those who defied husbands and social norms. Kramer weaponised fear with pseudo-logic, legitimising the witch trials that haunted Europe for nearly two centuries.

The ‘McCarthyism’ of any age depends on the same logic of ‘witchcraft’ and witch trials. If journalists or media groups anywhere come under pressure, the reason is often simple: they are challenging the McCarthyism of their time.

Pakistan has a long history of confronting a similar staled approach — from sanctions and censorship under the

Press and Publications Ordinance of 1960, which empowered the state to shut down newspapers and arrest journalists, to the pre-publication censorship imposed during the Bhutto and Zia regimes, and later the clampdowns, bans, and channel closures witnessed under Nawaz Sharif and Gen Pervez Musharraf. Since then, restrictions have only become more layered, whether under the PTI government or the PDM-led administrations.

Although a large proportion of media groups and even well-known journalists have compromised at various stages, a small but resilient community of journalists, along with a few strong-nerved media owners, has continued to challenge these pressures. Zameer Niazi documented much of this struggle, but in recent years, two important accounts have emerged from senior journalist Hussain Naqi. The first is his memoir, *Mujh Se Jo Ho Saka*, and the second is a compilation of an extended interview conducted by Dr Syed Jaffar Ahmed, published under the title *Jurat-i-Inkaar*. Both works capture not only Naqi’s personal journey but also the collective struggle that defines Pakistan’s political, social and journalistic history over the last seven decades.

This is, in many ways, a Pakistani version of *Good Night and Good Luck*, a narrative that deserves equal praise and could well be adapted into a screenplay. Hussain Naqi’s story makes one truth abundantly clear: subscribers to the McCarthy approach in successive Pakistani regimes have believed that the media is responsible for creating political instability and chaos. They succeeded in silencing the press for years, sometimes for entire decades, yet the country never escaped chronic instability.

Instead of reassessing their approach, they continue to rely on the same tactic of suppressing dissent, a strategy that has never produced the desired outcomes, nor is likely to in the future. The title of the film is borrowed from the famous line in *Romeo and Juliet*, ‘Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow’. But the film also subtly invokes another Shakespearean truth: “The fault ... is not in our stars, but in ourselves.”

Living in interesting times

Against the international backdrop, Pakistani foreign policy has so far delivered well.

Abbas Nasir

SINCE the so-called rules-based order is crumbling in whatever flawed form it existed, those with power are asserting themselves in the most unbridled of ways, with the only restraining factor being power itself or its quantum at the disposal of one player or the other.

The phenomenon is not limited to the big powers’ actions on the global stage but is mirrored by developments in the region and even within countries, with domestic politics being shaped by the ‘might is right’ principle, if it can be called a principle. The resultant scenario is scary to say the least.

This must be the reason that some of the ‘rattled’ middle-ranking economic-military powers are now forging alliances and concluding pacts so that their collective strength or power enables them to better negotiate the challenges and come out relatively unscathed from the reshaping of the world that seem underway. Let me get into the specifics.

The US-backed Israeli attack started against the around two million Palestinians in the tiny and largely defenceless Gaza Strip ostensibly triggered by the October 2023 Hamas attack. It has continued, despite the murder of thousands of civilians including children, in the face of worldwide demonstrations and calls for an immediate ceasefire by international institutions such as the UN. (In fact, the US sanctioned International Criminal Court judges and its prosecutor examining war crimes charges against Israeli leaders.)

But the October Hamas attack was only an excuse, as before the brutal Gaza bombing campaign was over, Israel also attacked Lebanon, annexed more of the Syrian Golan Heights and not just attacked Iran itself but also sucked in the US to bomb Iranian nuclear sites (by this time Donald Trump had moved into the White House).

This was the beginning of the reshaping of the Middle East, the move towards the realisation of the ‘Greater Israel’ dream. Those still defiant and seen as obstacles were attacked too like the Houthis in Yemen; allies were encouraged to increase their influence and footprint in non-Houthi-controlled parts of Yemen from sites overlooking the Red Sea water routes in the southwest to the northeast of the country.

The fighting in Sudan and the Israeli recognition of Somaliland across the Red Sea in the Horn of Africa are aimed at the same strategic objective: to have oversight of shipping routes south of the Suez Canal whether for transport of oil or other essential supplies.

But in the power game, even states with smaller militaries can apply economic levers effectively to be heard. And this assumes greater significance in the ‘transactional’ Trump era. So when the Israelis attacked targets on Qatari soil, it was seen as an overreach by even those countries in the region which restricted their reaction to lodging verbal protests during the Gaza genocide.

It also brought home the truth that American bases and troops on their soil were not there for their protection but served US interests and were there to project US power. This led to a flurry of activity and saw a defence pact inked between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Now a Bloomberg report suggests, citing unnamed sources, that Turkiye may join the pact too.

Of late, Saudi Arabia has reasserted its power and re-established itself as the main backer of forces in the non-Houthi parts of Yemen, bombing and evicting the South Transitional Council from areas the latter had taken over from the Saudi-backed Yemeni government in Sanaa after rebelling from the governing coalition.

Zooming out of the region, we can see the US reviving the Monroe Doctrine (Trump has rechristened it the ‘Donroe doctrine’) and applying it to Venezuela, after kidnapping its president and his spouse on the flimsiest of charges, some of which were amended between their snatching in Caracas and their

indictment a day later in New York City.

Trump says the US will “run Venezuela” now, having left the regime in place, after an apparent deal with interim president Delcy Rodríguez and will sell their oil to who he likes but the country itself cannot sell oil, for example, to China, Cuba and Russia.

Donald Trump is also making similar noises about ‘hitting’ other South American countries, such as Colombia and Mexico, whose leaders do not conform to his (far) right-wing worldview. He also keeps repeating his desire to take over Greenland one way or another. Given the collapse of the rules-based order and US military might, who knows what he does next.

No different is the use of military power by Russia to make inroads into Ukrainian territory. Ukraine is a country that gave up its nuclear arsenal after the collapse of the Soviet Union primarily on account of US security guarantees.

Now under Trump, the US is telling Ukraine to pretty much forget about its lost territory and do a peace deal with Russia. It has nearly halted all military aid to Ukraine and also told Nato states in Europe that they must step up their defence spending dramatically because the leader of the so-called Free World is done underwriting their defence.

Against this backdrop, one must say, Pakistani foreign policy has so far delivered well with the three major world military powers the US, China and Russia seemingly onside, along with the well-resourced Gulf states. With Pakistan responding robustly and effectively to an Indian attempt to project power in South Asia by missile attacks on Pakistani soil without legal justification in May last year, Islamabad’s stock has risen in the world.

With the rules-based order becoming more of an irrelevance, Pakistan too appears to be taking inspiration from how domestic dissent particularly over Gaza has been handled in the US and Europe. Perhaps, Pakistan feels that when established democracies can get away with it, why shouldn’t a hybrid government? The answer is some distance away. The old order may be crumbling but what will rise from its ashes is still to take concrete shape.

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Community Awareness Event Promotes Organic Backyard Gardening and Healthy Living

Community leaders, activists, and residents are seen in various moments during a community awareness meeting organized to promote backyard gardening and organic living. Former Federal Minister and Senator Babar Ghouri, community leader Shakeel Khan, Faheem Akhund and Sara Khan, Candidate for Fort Bend County Treasurer, are pictured interacting with attendees and highlighting the importance of transforming home backyards into organic vegetable gardens. The event emphasized healthy, chemical-free food, the farm-to-table concept, and encouraged families to adopt sustainable gardening practices for a healthier future.





Get Out the Vote Rally

Showcases Growing Support for Sara Khan in Fort Bend County
Supporters and community leaders gather at a high-energy "Get Out the Vote" rally in Sugar Land, demonstrating strong grassroots support for Sara Khan's campaign for Fort Bend County Treasurer and encouraging voter participation ahead of the election.





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Who owns Greenland?

Denmark's claim is unimpeachable. In the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement with Denmark, the US unambiguously recognizes 'the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark' over Greenland.

President Donald Trump has suggested that Denmark's claim to Greenland is doubtful, reflecting the public musings of his Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller. Rather than the 'niceties of international law,' Miller added, the issue should be determined according to the power relations among nations and their security needs.

President Trump has now amplified that sense, insisting in an interview with The New York Times that international law has little relevance for him. What counts instead is his own sense of morality, he asserted, adding somewhat incongruously that 'I don't need international law' as he is not looking to hurt people. Instead, the threat or even use of force appears to be a bargaining tool in pursuit of US national and security interests, along with his increasing reputation for unpredictability.

The Greenland episode may teach him differently. While Denmark is no match for the US in military terms, it does hold good title to the island, along with the right to self-determination of the local population. In this instance, international law does play an important strategic role, balancing the relative power of both sides.

The united and strong European response to US threats against Denmark – a brand leader in compliance with international law along with other Nordic states – offers an indication that others remain committed to the international rule of law and will, eventually, be willing to speak up in favour of an international system governed by rules and principles that by and large yield stability and security for all, whether weak or strong.

In opting out of this consensus, the US risks assuming the position of a rogue state within the international system. It seems unlikely that Denmark, or others, will in the future be keen to come to agreements or settlements with a state that so openly claims the right to disregard what has been agreed as a matter of law.

1721

The Danish claim is unimpeachable. It reaches back into the 18th century. Then, territories that had not yet been colonially occupied were considered 'terra nullius' – lands belonging to no one, irrespective of the fact that indigenous populations had lived there for millennia. Title would be founded on 'discovery,' taking possession and then effective administration of the claimed territory.

Denmark can point to the arrival of missionary Hans Egede on the island in 1721. It claims to have administered the islands ever since. International law accepts that evidence of the actual effective occupation can be light where the territory is remote and inhospitable.

In view of the complicated relationship between Denmark and Norway at the time, and some Norwegian activity in Eastern Greenland later on, Oslo challenged the Danish claim early in the 20th century.

However, the Permanent Court of International Justice ruled in 1933 that Norway's Foreign Minister Nils Claus Ihlen had given up any claim to Greenland. He had declared in 1919 that the Danish claim 'would be met with no difficulties on the part of Norway'.

Second World War

The US took over the defence of Greenland during the Second World War. However, this did not affect sovereignty over the island. After the war, Denmark was pressed into listing Greenland as a 'non-self-governing territory' – a colony – with the United Nations.

However, in 1953, Denmark informed the United Nations that Greenland had now become an integral part of the Kingdom, with constitutional representation in the Danish parliament and other benefits. Hence, its colonial status had ended.

The UN General Assembly determined in Resolution 849 (IX) that 'Greenland freely decided on its integration within the Kingdom of Denmark on an equal constitutional and administrative basis with the other parts of Denmark.'

This result has been universally accepted. However, since then, campaigners have argued that the indigenous population of Greenland did not approve this move in a referendum.



Image — Traditional coloured Greenlandic homes in Nuuk in 2025.

In resolution 849 (IX), the General Assembly in fact expressly commended the participation of Greenland representatives in the process. Still, it adopted another resolution immediately afterwards, Resolution 850 (IX), emphasizing in general terms the need to validate a decision on integration with a colonial power through an expression of the will of the people.

Self-government

Any doubts have, however, been removed by Denmark which has progressively increased the level of self-government for Greenland, first in the Home Rule Act of 1979 and then in the Self-Government Act of 2009. This latter instrument was approved in a Greenland referendum by a majority of 75.5 per cent.

The Self-Government Act transfers virtually all powers of governance to the Greenland local authorities, with the exception of defence, monetary policy and external relations. In fact, Greenland can even conclude treaties independently of Denmark. However, this does not extend to agreements affecting its status within Denmark.

Crucially, the Act recognizes Greenland as a self-determination unit. It can freely decide to change its status through a referendum among its population of around 57,000. If there is a decision in favour of independence, negotiations with Denmark about the terms of the divorce would need to follow. The results would then need to be endorsed by the Danish parliament, which retains authority to approve any change to the territory of Denmark.

This process is in accordance with international legal procedures on implementing a right to self-determination enshrined in domestic, constitutional law or practice. This includes the criteria enunciated in the important pronouncement of the Canadian Supreme Court on Quebec. Like the UK in relation to the Scottish referendum of 2014, Denmark has committed itself to implementing a decision favouring independence through legislative action.

The US is no stranger to large purchases of land from other sovereigns, having acquired Louisiana from France, Florida and the Philippines from Spain and Alaska from Russia. Denmark, too, transferred the Danish East Indies, now the US Virgin Islands, to the US in 1916.

Previous US attempts to buy Greenland

In fact, the US has attempted to buy Greenland on repeated occasions over the past centuries, most notably in 1946, when President Truman offered \$100 million in gold – a colossal sum at the time. Then as now, Denmark refused.

But the true value of the episode is that it destroys any possible US opposition to the Danish title. Why would it offer a king's ransom to Denmark, if it did not believe that Denmark was the rightful sovereign, entitled to dispose of the island?

In fact, there is even stronger evidence. In the 1951 Defense of Greenland Agreement with Denmark, the US unambiguously recognizes 'the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark' over Greenland. In the updated agreement of 2004, the US expressly notes the change of the status of the territory from colony to that of an 'equal part of the Kingdom of Denmark,' precluding any US

challenge to the lawfulness of that change of 1953.

If the US has no entitlement to Greenland, it may be guilty of bullying, but this does not yet amount to an unlawful threat of the use of force in violation of the UN Charter. This would require a specific threat of invasion unless Copenhagen complies with US demands for a transfer of sovereignty.

Options for a resolution

Short of invasion, what are the options for a resolution of this self-inflicted crisis within NATO? US Secretary of State Marco Rubio will not likely succeed in pressuring Denmark to sell during his mission to Copenhagen.

Under the present constitutional arrangement, Greenland could not instantly swap the US for Denmark as their sovereign. Instead, the US could try and persuade the people of Greenland to opt for independence, with a view to later joining the US outright, or through an association agreement akin to their present relationship with Denmark. However, this would take years to achieve, likely reaching beyond President Trump's term in office.

In the end, a deal will only come about if it focuses on the actual interests of the sides, and mutually satisfies them, instead of seeking to enforce the overblown positions they may advance during the negotiating process.

Overplaying that card may make the other side reluctant to engage with an erratic partner in negotiations – and one that publicly professes to step out of the accepted legal framework for the conduct of international affairs. After all, any resulting deal will, in the end, itself need to be encapsulated in a formal legal agreement governed by the rules and processes of international law.

In actual fact, a face-saving diplomatic resolution should be fairly easy. The US and Denmark might reach a joint declaration, in which they would confirm the high strategic value of Greenland, also for the US, allowing the US to claim victory. However, they would also confirm that any decision on the change of status of the territory requires the free consent of the people of Greenland, addressing any concerns they may have about being 'sold' to a foreign power in violation of the right to self-determination they have been granted.

There would be a reference to the need to comply with Danish constitutional procedures, balanced with Copenhagen's pledge to full implementation of any decision freely reached by the people of Greenland. This would leave the change of status of the island at some future point open, if this is wished for by the people most affected.

In the meantime, the sides could conclude an enhanced economic and security cooperation agreement, confirming increased US access to the island and surrounding maritime areas in terms of both security and natural resources, and a corresponding undertaking to keep both Russia and China out.

Greenland would need to be a full party to this arrangement and the negotiations leading up to it. In addition to its own status and future being at stake, in a rather unusual step, Denmark has already transferred full authority over Greenland's natural resources, and the benefits flowing from them, to the islanders.



In meeting with ICC, Bangladesh reiterates its refusal to travel to India for T20 World Cup

Continued from front page

World Cup matches in India after its player Mustafizur Rahman was released by his Indian Premier League (IPL) team amid growing tensions between the two countries. Subsequently, Bangladesh "formally requested" the ICC to shift their games to Sri Lanka.

The World Cup begins on February 7, with Bangladesh scheduled to play their four group matches in India.

On Tuesday, during a video conference with the ICC, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said it had "reiterated its request for the ICC to consider relocating Bangladesh's matches outside India".

"The BCB reaffirmed its position regarding the decision not to travel to India, citing security concerns," the board said in a statement.

"While the ICC highlighted that the tournament itinerary has already been announced and requested the BCB to reconsider its stance, the Board's position remains unchanged."

The ICC has not commented.

The BCB said discussions with the ICC continue to "explore possible solutions", it added, but that it "remains committed to safeguarding the well-being of its players, officials and staff".

Bangladesh, led by Litton Das, are placed ninth in the ICC T20 rankings. They have played all nine editions of the tournament, but have never qualified for the semi-finals.

Political ties between India and Bangladesh soured after a mass uprising in Dhaka in 2024 toppled then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina, a close ally of New Delhi.

India's foreign ministry last month condemned what it called "unremitting hostility against minorities" in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's interim leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, has accused India of exaggerating the scale of the violence.

Pakistan signs MoU with Trump-linked World Liberty Finance

Continued from front page

The Pakistan Virtual Asset Regulatory Authority (PVARA) said in a statement that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with SC Financial Technologies, a little-known company it described as an "affiliated entity" of World Liberty, would enable "dialogue and technical understanding around emerging digital payment architectures".

The announcement represents

one of the first publicly announced tie-ups between World Liberty, a crypto-based finance platform launched in September 2024, and a sovereign state. It also comes amid a warming of ties between Pakistan and the United States.

Under the agreement, SC Financial Technologies will work with Pakistan's central bank to integrate its USD1 stablecoin into a regulated digital payments structure, allowing the token to operate alongside Pakistan's own digital currency infrastructure, a source involved in the deal said.

World Liberty CEO visits Pakistan

The announcement of the memorandum came during a visit to Pakistan by Zach Witkoff, son of US special envoy Steve Witkoff and co-founder and chief executive of World Liberty.

Zach Witkoff is also CEO of SC Financial Technologies. The company, registered in Delaware, co-owns with World Liberty the USD1 stablecoin brand, according to documentation on the stablecoin's reserves from July 2025.

Witkoff met with "senior Pakistani stakeholders" to discuss how digital payment infrastructure, cross-border settlement and foreign exchange processes, the statement said.

"Our focus is to stay ahead of the curve by engaging with credible global players, understanding new financial models, and ensuring that innovation, where explored, is aligned with regulation, stability, and national interest," said Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb.

Stablecoins, digital tokens typically pegged to the dollar, have ballooned in value in recent years. Under Trump, the United States has introduced federal rules widely seen as beneficial to the sector, and countries across the world are beginning to examine the potential role of stablecoins in payments and financial systems.

World Liberty fuelled a sharp increase in income for the Trump family business, known as the Trump Organisation, including from foreign entities, in the first half of last year, Reuters reported in October.

Last May, MGX, a state-controlled Abu Dhabi investment company, used the World Liberty stablecoin to buy a \$2 billion equity stake in Binance, the world's largest crypto exchange.

Pakistan has been exploring digital currency projects as it seeks to reduce cash usage and improve cross-border payments such as remittances, a key source of foreign exchange.

Its central bank governor said in July it was preparing to launch a pilot for a digital currency and is finalising legislation to regulate virtual assets.

US says revoked 100,000 visas since Trump return

Continued from front page

American sovereignty," State Department spokesman Tommy

Pigott said.

The figure since Trump's second inauguration on January 20, 2025 is two and a half times the number revoked in 2024, when Joe Biden was president.

The State Department said that "thousands" of the visas were revoked over crimes, which can include assault and also drunk driving.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has proudly highlighted his revocation of visas from students who protested against Israel.

Rubio used a McCarthy-era law that allows the United States to block entry to foreigners seen as going against US foreign policy, although some of his high-profile targets successfully challenged deportation orders in court.

The State Department said 8,000 of the revoked visas were for students.

The Trump administration has also tightened vetting for visas, including moving to screen social media postings of visitors.

The visa revocations are part of a wider campaign of mass deportations, carried out aggressively through a surge of federal agents.

The Department of Homeland Security last month said that the Trump administration has deported more than 605,000 people, and that 2.5 million others left on their own.

Pakistan hopes routine processing of US immigrant visas will resume soon after their internal review: FO

Continued from front page

immigration policies and system, and hope that the routine processing of immigrant visas will resume soon."

The visa processing suspension could delay travel, study, and work plans for thousands of Pakistanis who annually seek US visas. Pakistani consulates in the US are expected to provide guidance to affected applicants in the coming days.

The freeze is linked to the US public-charge rule, which evaluates whether immigrants are likely to rely on government assistance. While suspensions of visa services have occurred in the past, officials have termed the scope of this action unprecedented.

No timeline has been given for resuming visa services, but the State Department assured that countries would be notified once the review is complete.

'Full confidence in Iranian people and their leadership'

On the ongoing unrest in Iran and its heightened tensions with the US, the FO spokesperson said Pakistan was "closely following the developments".

Andrabi stressed: "We attach great importance to Iran, both as a neighbouring country and as an important player of the international community and an important member of the global fraternity.

"Pakistan hopes that peace and stability will prevail, and we reaffirm our support for all efforts aimed at a peaceful resolution of the situation."

He highlighted that the protests in Iran were "triggered by economic difficulties faced by the ordinary citizens, which have been further exacerbated and compounded by international sanctions".

"So, we sincerely hope that the livelihood and financial support measures announced by the Iranian government for traders and the general public will help alleviate the hardship faced by the people, and we offer our best wishes towards that endeavour," Andrabi said.

The FO spokesperson asserted that Pakistan remained "confident that the Iranian nation will overcome these challenges and emerge stronger".

He said, "A stable and peaceful Iran, free from domestic unrest, is in Pakistan's interest.

"We have full confidence in the wisdom of the Iranian people and their leadership — a wisdom rooted in their rich culture, ancient civilisation, history and resilience to address all the challenges confronting them."

Andrabi urged Pakistanis to reconsider their travel plans for Iran, keeping in mind the FO's recent travel advisory and exercising "extreme caution to ensure their safety and security".

He stated that Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassir Tipu and his team were "working diligently to ensure that Pakistanis in Iran are well-looked-after".

Pakistan strongly rejects Indian army chief's 'baseless allegations'

On Tuesday, Indian Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi alleged that there were "at least six terror camps still active across the LoC (Line of Control) and two across the international border" after India's May 2025 strikes under what it called 'Operation Sindoor'.

"Will act, if any [nefarious] attempts are carried out," Times of India quoted Gen Dwivedi as saying.

Asked to comment on those remarks today, the FO spokesperson said, "Pakistan, of course, strongly rejects the baseless allegations by the Indian army chief regarding the presence of so-called terrorist camps."

Andrabi termed the allegations "cliched, habitual and somewhat delusional".

"Our unparalleled sacrifices and blood and [...] for combatting terrorism are internationally acknowledged and recognised," he highlighted.

"We continue to contribute to peace not only in the region, but beyond," he stressed.

Get Out the Vote Rally Energizes Fort Bend County as Sara Khan's Campaign Gains Momentum

Continued from front page

attendees alike emphasized the power of participation in shaping

local governance. The evening brought together community leaders, legal professionals, and elected officials, reflecting the broad-based support behind the campaign.

Addressing supporters, Sara Khan highlighted her years of community service, proven professional experience, and strong educational background, stating that these pillars have prepared her to serve Fort Bend County with integrity and accountability. She expressed gratitude for the continued support and prayers from residents, calling the campaign a collective effort rooted in trust and shared values.

"This is not a movement of followers," the message resonating throughout the rally declared. "We are trendsetters. Trendsetters show up. Trendsetters lead. Trendsetters build momentum." The energized crowd echoed this sentiment, reinforcing the campaign's focus on action and participation rather than rhetoric alone.

The rally also featured prominent guest speakers, including Fort Bend District Attorney Brian Middleton, Fort Bend County Attorney Bridgette Smith Lawson, Judge Argie Brame, Precinct Chair BJ Johnson, and Judge Toni M. Wallace. Each speaker stressed the importance of civic responsibility and encouraged voters to remain engaged beyond election day.

As the evening concluded, the prevailing message was clear: the campaign is gaining momentum, powered by grassroots energy and a shared belief in inclusive leadership. With voter engagement at its core, the "Get Out the Vote" rally served as both a call to action and a testament to the growing enthusiasm surrounding Sara Khan's bid for Fort Bend County Treasurer.

Prominent Pakistani-American Businessman Muhammad Baig's Mother Passes Away

Continued from front page

Masjid Taqwa in Houston, attended by a large number of community members. Among those present were former Federal Minister Babar Ghauri, former President of PAGH Salman Razaqi, and well-known businessman Furqan Khan, along with other community leaders and dignitaries.

Community members expressed their heartfelt condolences to Muhammad Baig and prayed for the forgiveness of the departed soul and patience for the bereaved family.

The deceased is survived by her son Muhammad Baig and three daughters.

Community members requested for prayers, asking Allah Almighty to grant the late Gul Bano Qadir eternal peace and bestow strength and patience upon her family during this difficult time.

Pakistan eyes minerals to drive strategic economic growth

Continued from front page

Saima Afzal, notes that "Pakistan's policy reforms aim to align it with international standards and position itself as a responsible partner in the global minerals market".

Building on PMIF25, which drew 5,000 delegates from over 50 countries and resulted in 14 MOUs, PMIF26 will host a Strategic Conference, Technical Sessions, an International Gemstone Exhibition, and a resource library for investors.

The Second Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum PMIF26 to be held April 8-9 in Islamabad is central to this strategy. Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik said, "PMIF26 will serve as a key platform for promoting mining awareness, stimulating economic activity, and attracting sustainable investment into Pakistan's mineral sector".

Mineral deposits in Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan, including the Reko Diq site with over 5.9 billion tonnes of ore, have long been underexplored. If utilised effectively, it can produce billions of dollars in revenue, provide thousands of job opportunities, and positively change the trade of the area.

The government recently released a national policy framework for gemstones, targeting 1 billion dollars in exports over five years with modernised certification and improved value addition. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has approved "international standard laboratories, certification systems, and centers of excellence for gemstones" to boost credibility and draw private investment.

Reforms aim to empower local miners and entrepreneurs with better market access and fair pricing. They include skill development, modern technology use and collaboration with global industry players to improve product quality and export potential.

Countries like Chile, Australia, and Canada have leveraged their mining sectors through structured policy, transparency, and international collaboration.

Chile accounts for nearly one-third of global copper production, while Australia has developed lithium, cobalt, and rare earth exports. PMIF26 seeks to reduce Pakistan's historical lag, showcasing investment-ready projects and reforms that meet global standards for extraction, transparency, and environmental management.

PMIF26 positions Pakistan as a regional center for critical minerals essential for energy transition, high-tech manufacturing, and industrial development. A recent MOU between US-based Strategic Metals (USSM) and Pakistan's Frontier Works Organisation demonstrates potential for technology transfer, mineral production, and integration into global supply chains.

Experts predict that developing Pakistan's mineral and gemstone industry could boost GDP by \$5-7 billion annually over the next decade, creating tens of thousands of jobs.

Strategic foreign investment, local reforms, and technological improvements could transform underutilized resources into a major economic driver.

Environmental protection and social safeguards are part of the agenda, with discussions on ESG compliance and worker safety integrated into PMIF26 proceedings.

By aligning policy with international standards and creating a transparent investment platform,

With rising demand for critical minerals, Pakistan aims to turn "untapped potential into measurable economic and social impact" and make its mineral sector a strategic engine of growth. PMIF26 is not merely a forum, it is a strategic milestone turning untapped potential into measurable economic and social impact.

2026 global health outlook: Experts warn of key challenges ahead

Continued from front page

is a "forced remodeling" of international aid following the funding cuts. Global health faced a massive setback when the Trump administration decided to cut billions in foreign aid and dissolved USAID, known for delivering humanitarian aid.

Countries including the UK, Germany, and France followed suit and cut the major aid chunks, leading to financial shortfalls in the health sector.

Anja Langenbacher, Europe office director at the Gates Foundation warned, "Recent funding pauses for global health initiatives are creating headwinds for progress, with effects that could persist into 2026 if uncertainty continues. This comes at a moment when child mortality is edging back up for the first time this century."

Workforce crisis and burnout
Healthcare systems are also strained due to the labor crisis, medical professional shortages, and aging population.

According to the WHO projection, the healthcare sector will face a shortfall of 11 million physicians globally. Consequently, the systems are being coerced to "deliver more with less."

Katherine de Bienassis, health policy analyst at Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said, "We can expect workforce constraints will remain central to health policy debates in 2026."

"Methods for ensuring health system productivity are likely to become increasingly central as systems strive to deliver more with fewer resources, while also maintaining patient outcomes," she added.

Climate change as health crisis
Climate change is no longer an environmental issue. In fact, it is also causing various health issues stemming from vector-borne diseases and biodiversity losses.

"Science shows no sign that this [climate] crisis is slowing, while EU policy attention remains focused elsewhere," Génon K. Jensen, director at the Health and Environment Alliance, told Euronews Health.

"People's health should be central

to this year's climate resilience proposals, with nature-based solutions as a cornerstone of climate adaptation," Jensen explained.

Role of double-edged AI tools
Undoubtedly, AI is uplifting the healthcare sector by automating administrative tasks, offering diagnostic opportunities, and allowing clinicians to focus more on patient care. "Healthcare is entering a new phase, with AI creating new possibilities for how care is delivered and experienced, and helping make sense of an increasingly complex system," a Philips spokesperson said.

In Europe, biotechnology is gaining ground due to the recently presented EU Biotech Act.

According to HIRPA, a Spanish biotech company said, "If we had to sum up, what we expect in 2026 is the year of biotechnology for Europe to contribute to strategic autonomy, to the competitiveness of the continent."

But the increasing use of AI raises concerns over the "environmental footprint" and shortages of water and energy.

Unstable trade environment
Global tariffs and geopolitical tensions have pushed pharmaceutical companies into a competitive tug of war, thereby stifling innovation and disease prevention in 2026.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

Superbugs remain a top-tier threat and will continue to be in 2026. Without urgent action and drug discovery, drug resistance could lead to 10 million deaths annually by 2050, threatening to return medicine to a "pre-penicillin" era.

Ffion Storer-Jones, senior policy and advocacy officer at DSW said, "We really hope that 2026 does not become another year of neglect in the global health 'panic and neglect' cycle."

Nobel Institute rejects Maria Corina Machado's suggestion, says 'Nobel Peace Prize' is non-transferable

Continued from front page

The Institute said the Nobel Peace Prize cannot be transferred, shared, or revoked, following remarks by Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado suggesting she might give her 2025 award to U.S. President Donald Trump.

In a statement, the institute said the decision to award a Nobel Prize is final and permanent, citing the statutes of the Nobel Foundation, which do not allow appeals, reports Fox News.

The organization also noted that committees awarding the prizes do not comment on the actions or statements of laureates after receiving awards.

"Once a Nobel Prize is announced, it cannot be revoked, shared or transferred to others," the Norwegian Nobel Committee and the Norwegian Nobel Institute said on Friday, January 9, 2026. "The decision is final and stands for all time."

The statement came after Maria Machado, speaking to Sean Hannity on Fox News, said on Monday, January 5, 2026, that presenting the

prize to Trump would be an act of gratitude from the Venezuelan people for the removal of Nicolás Maduro, the country's president, who was captured last week by the United States.

Machado secretly escaped Venezuela last month and traveled to Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, which she dedicated to Trump.

"Let me be very clear. As soon as I learned that we had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, I dedicated it to President Trump because I believed at that point that he deserved it," Machado said on "Hannity."

"And a lot of people, most people, said it was impossible to achieve what he has just done on Saturday, January 3rd," Machado added.

"Did you at any point offer to give him the Nobel Peace Prize?" Hannity asked. "Did that actually happen?"

She responded, "Well, it hasn't happened yet."

Trump, who has long expressed interest in winning the prize and has at times linked it to diplomatic achievements, said he would be honored to accept the prize if offered by Machado during a planned meeting in Washington next week.

Machado, a former National Assembly member, was barred from running in Venezuela's 2024 general election by authorities aligned with Maduro.

She backed a stand-in candidate who was widely considered to have won the vote, although Maduro claimed victory.

Indian rocket loses control after lift-off in fresh blow to country's space agency

An Indian rocket carrying 16 loads of equipment and experiments, including an earth surveillance satellite, went off track after lift-off on Monday in a fresh setback to the workhorse launch vehicle of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

It was a second disappointment for the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle in about eight months, denting its reputation for reliability, with a more than 90 per cent success rate over about 60 past missions.

The PSLV-C62 lifted off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on the island of Sriharikota at 10:18am local time, carrying the EOS-N1 observation satellite and 15 other payloads developed by startups and academic institutions in India and abroad.

The ISRO's mission control said the rocket performed normally for most of the flight before an unexpected disturbance and deviation from its path.

"The PSLV-C62 mission encountered an anomaly during the end of the PS3 stage. A detailed analysis has been initiated," ISRO said in a statement, without giving further details on what had gone wrong or where the rocket ended up.

The PSLV has been central to India's space programme, having launched missions such as Chandrayaan-1 and the Aditya-L1 solar observatory. It also underpins India's push to open space manufacturing to private industry.

Trump informed Iran he does not intend to attack, asked Tehran to exercise restraint: envoy

ISLAMABAD: Iran's envoy to Pakistan, Reza Amiri Moghadam, revealed on Thursday that US President Donald Trump informed Tehran that he will not attack the country and asked that Iran also exercise restraint.

Moghadam made the remarks during a visit to the National Rahmatul-lil-Alameen Authority, where he met the authority's chairman, Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem.

Protests have taken place across Iran in a movement sparked by anger over the rising cost of living, leading to authorities imposing internet restrictions. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened to intervene in support of protesters.

On Wednesday, Trump said that he had been informed the killings of protesters in Iran had been halted, and added that he would "watch and see" about threatened military action.

The Iranian envoy also disclosed that he received information at around 1am, which indicated that Trump did not want war and had asked Iran not to attack the US interests in the region.

Speaking of the protests, the envoy maintained that the people had a legitimate right to protest and that the government had engaged in talks with the demonstrators.

However, he said that the coverage of the US and Western media incited violence, further escalating the situation.

Referring to the statements issued by Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on January 7, he said that they amounted to interference in Iran's internal affairs, further stoking the tensions.

The envoy described the events as the worst in Iran's history.

He alleged that armed groups carried out killings, attacked mosques, imambargahs, and committed acts of arson.

The envoy went on to claim that the situation was now "fully under control", adding that there were no protests in Iran at the moment, despite threats from Israel and the US.

He further held that in case of aggression from Israel or the US, Tehran had already conveyed that it remained prepared.

He added that the country remained on high alert and its airspace had been closed temporarily. The diplomat maintained that in the event of an attack, Iran would target US and Israeli installations in the wider region.

During the visit, the envoy added that Tehran was committed to the pursuit of peace. He further noted that Iran's ties with Muslim countries were witnessing a "positive phase".

Moghadam expressed gratitude to Pakistan for its support, which he said had been given "wholeheartedly", stressing that the country needed moral and political support, rather than material assistance.

He added that Iran had faced economic sanctions for the past 44 years, causing damage but also leading to certain internal strengths.

US control of Venezuela's oil may not be the bonanza that Trump expects

Robust long-term oil demand is needed to justify significant investment, but is called into question by the growing popularity of electric vehicles.

Chris Aylett

Research Fellow, Environment
and Society Centre

In a press conference following the US attacks on Venezuela, and the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, US President Donald Trump announced that American oil and gas companies would invest in the Venezuelan oil sector and extract the 'tremendous amount of wealth' in the ground.

On 7 January, Vice President JD Vance stated that the US will 'control the energy resources' in the country, with US Energy Secretary Chris Wright saying that 'We're going to market the crude coming out of Venezuela'.

For the world's leading military power to assert the right to develop the resources of another sovereign nation is extraordinary: a further step away from an international system based on rules and norms, towards one in which might makes right. But the American president sees economic opportunity.

Venezuela is estimated to hold the world's largest proven reserves of crude oil (19.4 per cent in 2024). But it is currently a minor producer, pumping 960,000 barrels of oil per day (b/d) in 2024 – around 1 per cent of global production – down from 3.3 million b/d in 2006. President Trump hopes to get Venezuelan oil flowing again. But this will not come cheap.

Venezuela's oil production infrastructure is in a state of severe disrepair after years of underinvestment, corruption and sanctions. Tripling Venezuelan production by 2040, from 1 million to 3 million barrels of oil a day (b/d), would cost an estimated \$183 billion, according to Rystad Energy.

Falling oil prices

The economics of Venezuelan oil are challenging. Extracting the viscous, sticky crude that constitutes most of the country's reserves requires special processes, such as steam injection. And transporting through pipelines requires the addition of diluents to ease flow. This makes it more expensive to produce than lighter crudes, such as those originating in Saudi Arabia.

Heavy crudes also tend to sell at a discount, due to the complex refining techniques needed to convert them into consumer products such as petroleum and diesel.

Nevertheless, given the scale of Venezuela's oil reserves, this could be justified in a seller's market: after all, the world consumed around 104 million b/d in 2025. The problem is that



Image — View of an oil refining plant of state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) in Puerto La Cruz, Anzoategui state, Venezuela in 2021: Leaks, rusted pipes, pieces of broken equipment and staircases leading nowhere.

AMERICAN OIL AND GAS COMPANIES HAVE PRIORITIZED SHAREHOLDER RETURNS OVER UPSTREAM INVESTMENT. LOW OIL PRICES WILL NOT ENCOURAGE THEM TO CHANGE COURSE

price trajectories increasingly point in the other direction, as supply outpaces demand.

Since the highs of mid-2022, following the post-lockdown surge and the spike brought about by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, the price of Brent has been in gradual decline. Geopolitical shocks have caused violent swings, but there is a clear downward trajectory.

This was acknowledged, coincidentally, in the 5 January bulletin of the US Energy Information Administration, with the headline: 'Crude oil prices fell in 2025 amid oversupply'.

Since the shale gas revolution of the 2010s, American oil and gas companies have prioritized shareholder returns over upstream investment. Low oil prices will not encourage them to change course.

What is driving falling oil prices? Weak global economic

growth is one reason. But this is not the only factor. While the imperative to reduce planet-warming emissions has slipped down the global policy agenda, low-carbon technologies, like solar panels and electric vehicles, have been progressively eating into fossil fuel demand, slowing oil and gas demand growth.

This can be seen in Europe, where wind, solar and batteries are gradually eroding the need for gas to generate electricity. And in China, the ongoing boom in electric vehicles – not just cars, but buses and trucks too – is reducing the need for oil in the world's second largest oil consumer.

The proportion of electric and hybrid vehicles as a share of all new vehicle sales in China reached 50 per cent over Jan–Sept 2025, up from only 6.5 per cent in the same period in 2020. Consequently, oil demand in China's transport sector

has likely already peaked, with a peak in overall Chinese oil demand expected to follow soon.

China is a frontrunner, but electric transport is growing sharply in many countries. One reason is that electric cars are becoming more appealing to drivers, with cheaper models entering the market, and as major improvements in battery capacity, coupled with better availability of charging infrastructure, ease 'range anxiety'.

Electric vehicles are also attractive to policymakers, especially those in oil-importing countries. Switching from oil to electricity can boost energy security, by limiting the leverage of foreign suppliers, protecting against volatile oil prices, and reducing currency risk (oil is priced in dollars).

Electrifying transport – the largest sectoral consumer of oil – dampens oil demand at a time when global supply is increasing, with new production coming online in Argentina, Brazil, Guyana and the US itself.

This suggests that prices will continue to fall. And while theoretical future improvements in the global economy could yet boost oil demand, the oil demand lost through combustion engines being swapped for electric vehicles is likely to be permanent.

American oil companies' perceptions

The Venezuelan oil bonanza promised by President Trump has, so far, received a muted public response from the American oil and gas majors. The president indicated on Monday that, if anticipated profits do not materialize, corporate losses could be reimbursed by the

government. That would constitute a massive public subsidy of some of the world's largest and most profitable companies.

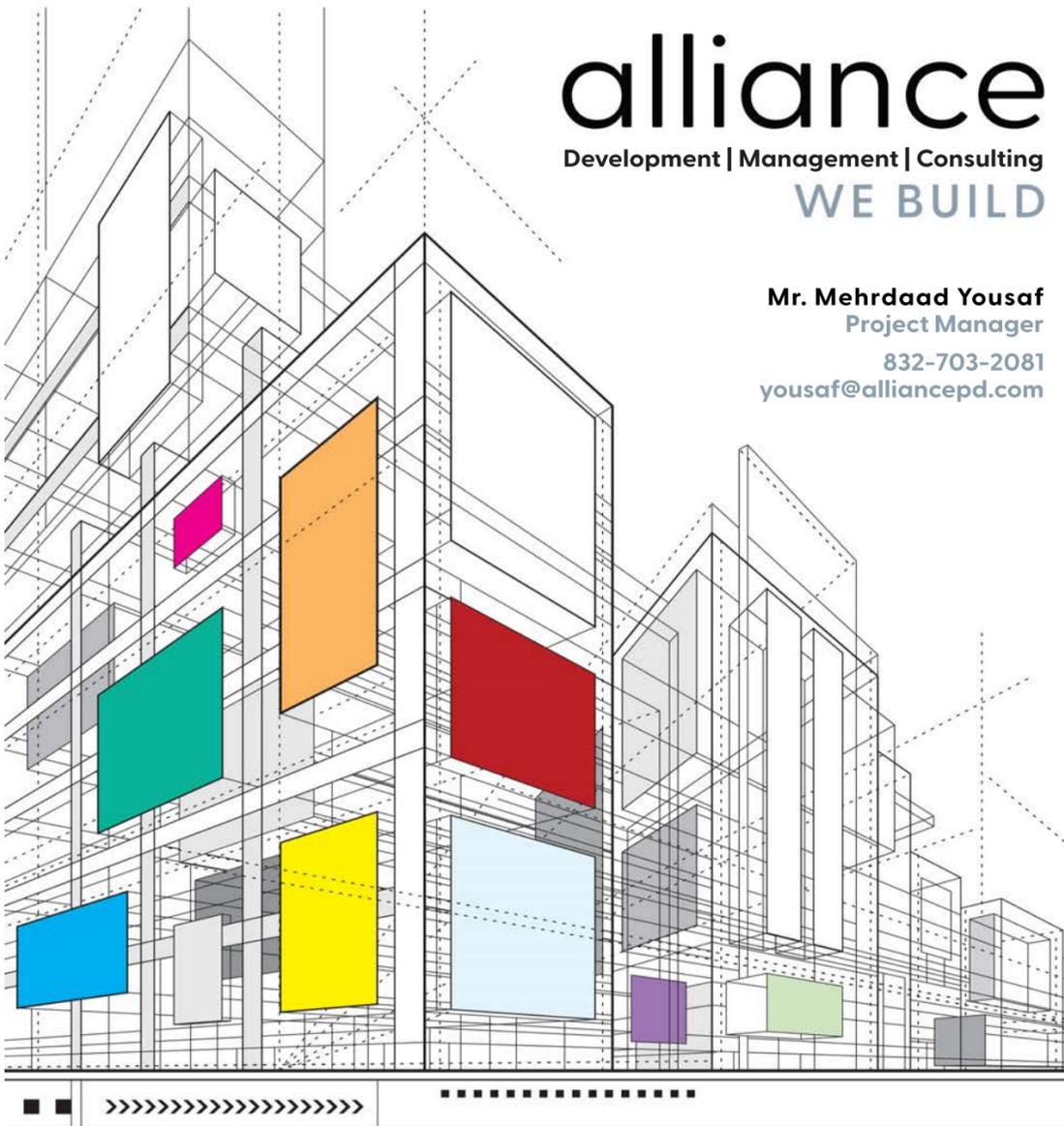
It remains to be seen what this generous offer would look like in contractual terms, and whether it will be sufficiently concrete to incentivize investment today, especially given uncertain political outlooks both in post-US intervention Venezuela, and in the US itself.

There are other possible reasons for the US trying to assert control of Venezuela's oil resources. The US's own energy security could be one motivation: for historical reasons, most US refineries are set up to process heavy, sour crude, like that found in Venezuela. At present they are dependent mainly on supplies from the Canadian tar sands. Maintaining 'optionality' over reserves in the global market, to influence prices – a strategy as old as oil extraction itself – may be another.

The opportunity to exert leverage over geopolitical rivals could be a factor: China is currently the main buyer of Venezuelan oil, and several Chinese companies operate in the country's oil sector.

President Trump, meanwhile, has indicated that he sees US access to Venezuelan oil as 'compensation' for historical actions by the Venezuelan government which have hurt the interests of American companies, such as the 1976 nationalization of the oil industry.

Irrespective of the underlying motive, and of who ultimately foots the bill, moving to exploit Venezuela's oil reserves would be a risky economic gambit – and a bet that the emerging global electric vehicle revolution will stall.



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American Pakistan Chronicle

Grow Your Own Food: Awareness Campaign Launched to Transform Backyards into Organic Gardens

- Senator Babar Ghouri Leads Drive to Promote Organic Backyard Gardening in Pakistani Community
- Sara Khan highlighted the "Organic Farm-to-Table" concept, encouraging families to grow organic vegetables at home for healthier, sustainable living.



Houston — A community awareness meeting was organized to encourage Pakistani families to adopt a healthier lifestyle by growing organic vegetables at home. The event was attended by former Federal Minister and Senator Babar

Continued on page 28

Community Dialogue Takes Center Stage at Nabil Shike Event in Sugar Land



SUGAR LAND, TX: Residents of Fort Bend County gathered Friday evening for "Dinner, Dialogue, and Community," a civic engagement event hosted by Nabil Shike, Democratic candidate for Fort Bend County Precinct 4 Commissioner. The event was held at Mai Colachi Restaurant on Southwest Freeway and drew community members, local

advocates, and civic leaders for an evening of discussion and connection.

A key highlight of the program was the participation of Fort Bend County District Attorney Brian Middleton, who joined as a special guest speaker. Middleton addressed public safety, community-based

Continued on page 28

Makkah Masjid Dairy Ashford to Host Special 'Isra' wal Meraj' Celebration in Houston this Friday

HOUSTON : The Houston Muslim community is invited to a special evening of spiritual reflection and celebration this Friday as Makkah Masjid hosts its annual Isra' wal Meraj program.

The event, scheduled for Friday, January 16, 2026, will begin immediately following the Isha prayers at 7:30 P.M. at the mosque's location on Dairy Ashford Road.

The "Blessed Mehfil," will com-

memorate Isra' wal Meraj—the miraculous Night Journey and Ascension of the Prophet Muhammad. Observed on the 27th night of the Islamic month of Rajab marks the night Muslims believe the Prophet traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem and then ascended to the heavens in a single night.

A Night of "Tilawat, Hamd, and Naat"

Continued on page 28

Pakistan-American surgeon appointed Chief AI Officer at US college of medicine



Pakistani-American surgeon-scientist Dr Adil Haider has been appointed the Inaugural Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer (CAIO) at the Carle Illinois College of Medicine (CI MED), the world's

Continued on page 28

Houston, Meet Your New Favorite Coffee Spot: Dallas's Original Yemeni Coffee Arrives in Aliana



RICHMOND, Texas — The wait is over for fans of authentic global flavors as Dallas's original Yemeni coffee experience has officially arrived in the heart of the Aliana

community. Arwa Yemeni Coffee House celebrated its successful soft opening, drawing a vibrant crowd for an event filled with fun, fare, and

Continued on page 28

USCIS to Hike Premium Processing Fees Starting March 1: Impact on Pakistani Professionals and Students

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced a significant increase in fees for premium processing services, a move set to impact thousands of Pakistani professionals,

students, and families residing in the United States. The new fee schedule will take effect on March 1, 2026.

The agency stated that the adjustment is intended

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Visa Crisis Shakes T20 World Cup as USA Stars Denied Entry to India

The United States national cricket team's T20 World Cup campaign has been thrown into disarray following reports that four of its key players have been denied visas to enter India. Fast bowler Ali Khan and teammates Shayan Jahangir, Mohammad Mohsin, and Ehsan

Adil—all of whom were born in Pakistan—are facing an administrative stalemate just weeks before the tournament's opening match.

The crisis became public on Tuesday when Ali Khan, the veteran "yorker machine"

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Study finds your morning coffee could help with type 2 diabetes

Roasted coffee may do more than just wake you up in the morning.

Scientists from Kunming Institute of Botany, Chinese Academy of Sciences, have discovered several new coffee compounds that inhibit α -glucosidase, a key enzyme linked to type 2 diabetes.

Some of these coffee-derived molecules were even more potent than a common anti-diabetic drug. The study also introduced a faster, greener way to uncover health-boosting compounds in complex foods.

The compounds were found to strongly inhibit α -glucosidase, an enzyme that plays a central role in breaking down carbohydrates during digestion.

Since this enzyme directly affects how quickly sugars enter the bloodstream, the discovery points to possible new functional food ingredients aimed at managing type 2 diabetes.

The discovery was made using more advanced analytical methods: nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry (LC-MS/MS).

After the complex tests, it was analyzed that although the three caffealdehydes differed in their fatty acid components (palmitic, stearic, and arachidic acids), all showed notable α -glucosidase inhibition.

They indicated stronger activity than the comparison drug acarbose.

It was found that while they shared similar fragment patterns, these molecules contained different fatty acids (margaric, octadecenoic, and nonadecanoic acids).

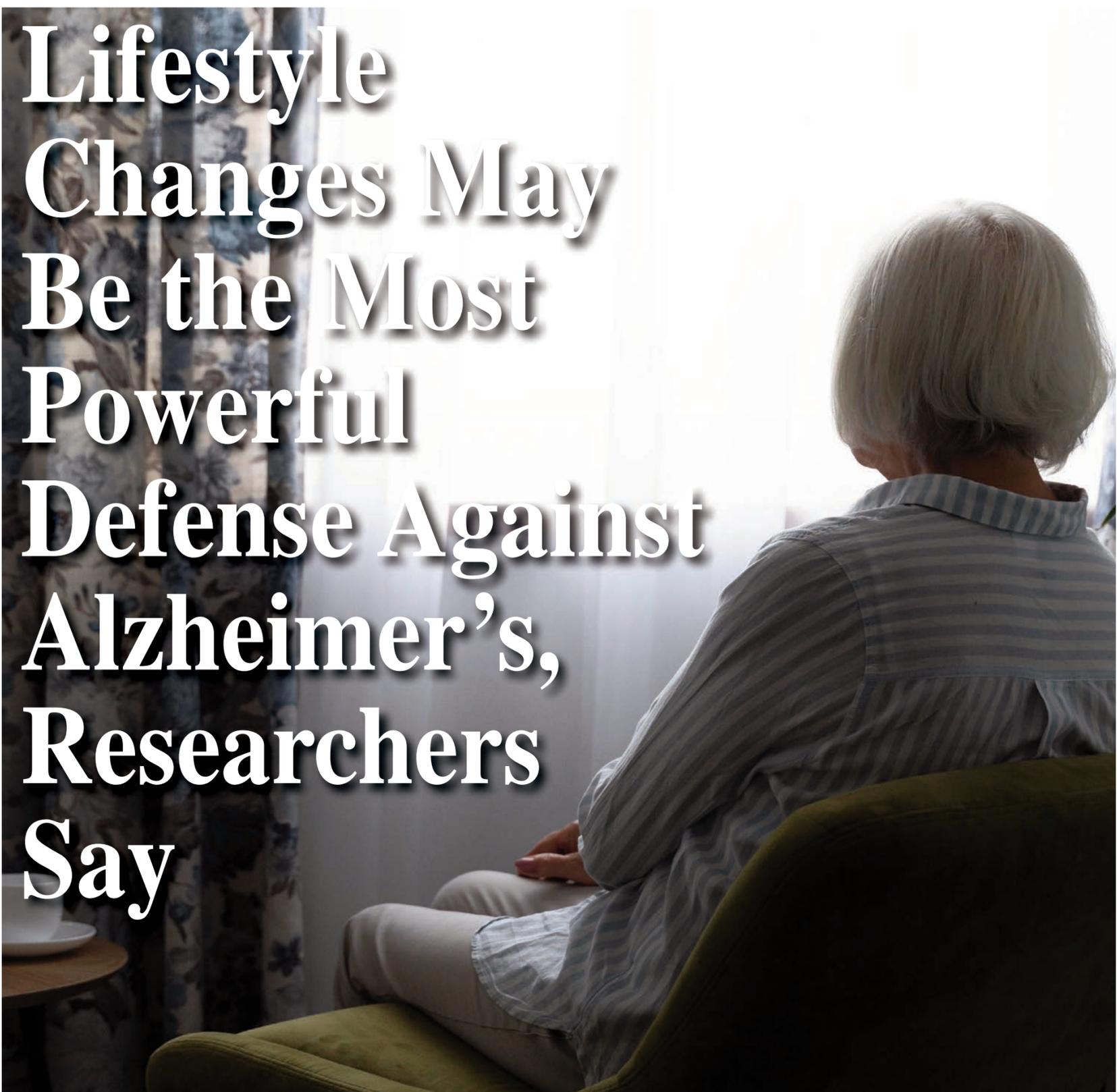
Searches of existing compound databases confirmed that these substances had not been reported before.

This could lead to new opportunities to develop coffee-based functional foods or nutraceuticals that support glucose control and may help manage diabetes.



Researchers have discovered some coffee-driven components that may aid in controlling type 2 diabetes

Lifestyle Changes May Be the Most Powerful Defense Against Alzheimer's, Researchers Say



Preventing Alzheimer's disease might not be as difficult as you think

Alzheimer's disease has emerged as one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. More than 7.2 million Americans are currently living with the disease, and experts project that this number will climb to nearly 13.8 million by 2060. While population aging plays a role, researchers warn that this dramatic rise reflects more than longevity alone—it signals a preventable and accelerating health crisis.

Although advancing age remains the strongest risk factor for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, scientists increasingly emphasize that cognitive decline is not an inevitable part of aging.

Researchers from Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine argue that one of the most effective—and underutilized—tools for preventing Alzheimer's lies in modifiable lifestyle choices. In a recent commentary published in *The American Journal of Medicine*, the team urged physicians, public health officials, and policymakers to prioritize lifestyle-based prevention strategies at both individual and population lev-

els.

Dr. Charles H. Hennekens, a distinguished epidemiologist and senior author of the commentary, highlighted a troubling contrast: since 2000, deaths from heart disease in the United States have steadily declined due to prevention and treatment advances, while Alzheimer's-related deaths have surged by more than 140 percent.

"This divergence strongly suggests missed opportunities for prevention," Hennekens noted.

According to the researchers, up to 45 percent of dementia risk may be attributable to factors that people can change, including behaviors, medical conditions, and environmental exposures. This estimate aligns with findings from the Lancet Commission on Dementia Prevention, which has repeatedly shown that addressing modifiable risks could delay or prevent millions of dementia cases worldwide.

Key lifestyle and health factors linked to cognitive decline include:

- Physical inactivity
- Poor-quality diets high in ultra-

processed foods

- Obesity
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Smoking
- Social isolation and chronic loneliness
- Untreated depression

In addition, medical conditions such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and cardiovascular disease significantly increase the risk of Alzheimer's by damaging blood vessels and reducing blood flow to the brain.

Encouragingly, the researchers emphasize that the same lifestyle habits that protect the heart also protect the brain. Regular physical activity, a nutrient-rich diet (such as the Mediterranean or MIND diet), cognitive stimulation, quality sleep, stress management, and strong social connections all appear to play a protective role.

Compelling evidence comes from large clinical trials, including the POINTER study, the first major U.S.-based randomized trial examining whether intensive lifestyle interventions can slow cognitive decline in older adults at risk for dementia.

Early results from POINTER closely mirror those of the landmark Finnish Geriatric Intervention Study to Prevent Cognitive Impairment and Disability (FINGER), which demonstrated that participants who followed a structured program of exercise, nutrition, cognitive training, and vascular risk management showed measurable improvements in brain function.

Taken together, these findings reinforce a powerful message: Alzheimer's is not solely a disease of fate or genetics. While no single lifestyle change guarantees prevention, combining healthy behaviors across the lifespan can substantially reduce risk and delay the onset of cognitive decline.

The researchers conclude that preventing Alzheimer's will require a shift in how society views brain health—from late-stage treatment to early, sustained prevention—supported by public policy, community programs, and proactive medical care.

As the Alzheimer's epidemic grows, the science is increasingly clear: how we live today profoundly shapes how our brains age tomorrow.

PAKISTAN'S WINDING ROAD TO THE BOMB



Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (left) pictured alongside Munir Ahmad Khan (centre) and Dr Abdus Salam (right) during the inauguration ceremony of the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant (Kanupp) on November 28, 1972 | PAEC

Farhatullah Babar

BHUTTO'S SUMMIT WITH SCIENTISTS

I had not yet joined the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) and was working as an information officer in the Press Information Department (PID), where each information officer is responsible for servicing the media needs of one or more ministries.

On a cold January day in 1972, a colleague in the PID responsible for media projection of scientific organisations talked about a planned meeting of the country's scientists. President [Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto had called the meeting to frankly discuss what role they could play in national defence and security, he said. Where and when it was to be held, he was not sure. It would be at some undisclosed secret venue, he said.

He also said that prominent scientists and engineers had started arriving in Islamabad, waiting to be taken to the conference venue, which was known only to a few. There was confusion about the venue. When the word spread that it would be held in Quetta, some scientists actually travelled there, making their own private arrangements. In the morning, a military aircraft airlifted a precious human cargo of scientists and engineers from Islamabad. But instead of Quetta, it landed at Multan. Those who had already arrived in Quetta were herded to Multan in a special Pakistan Air Force aircraft.

No one was sure of the conference's purpose. Some excited scientists, before leaving their homes, only told their families that they would be out of station for a few days without disclosing where they were going. Having been personally invited by the head of state, everyone felt elated.

Even though the purpose had not been officially declared, there was a sense among the scientists that Bhutto wanted to salvage the country in the wake of the loss of East Pakistan. He wanted to seek the support of the scientific community and raise the morale of the people, they conjectured.

In private conversations, they recalled that Bhutto outlined his views on foreign and security policies in his 1969 book *The Myth of Independence*. As a minister in [Gen] Ayub [Khan]'s cabinet, he had failed in his mission to make Pakistan nuclear. But now he was the president himself, and a great opportunity was knocking at his door.

Pakistan had not only suffered defeat at the hands of the Indian army, but it had also lost half of the country and more than half of the population. China also had not applied pressure on India's border, and Pakistan had suffered a permanent strategic loss by the cessation of East Pakistan.

The Multan Conference was aimed at

inspiring the scientists and engineers to commit themselves to delivering. The Chief Scientific Adviser to the president, Dr Abdus Salam (later Nobel Laureate), was also on board the special flight from Islamabad. A younger colleague later recalled Dr Salam saying, "I think they are going to make us bite the dust."

Excitement grew as they neared Multan. An army bus was waiting to collect the cream of scientists as they disembarked in Multan. Shamiianas covered the spacious lawns of Nawab Sadiq Qureshi's — a PPP [Pakistan Peoples Party] leader and Governor of Punjab — residence in Multan, to host the first-ever face-to-face meeting between scientists and the country's president.

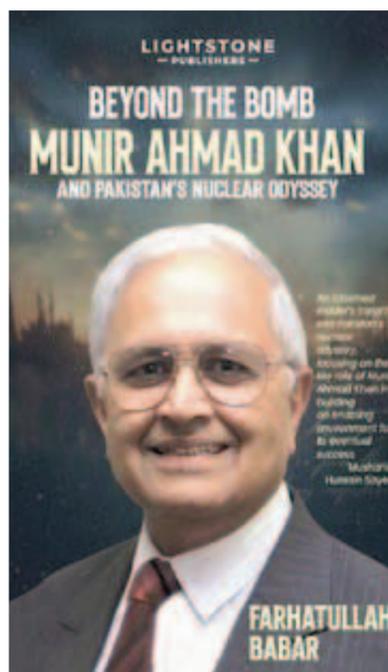
The conference brought together science luminaries from all over the country, including the chairman of the PAEC, the versatile and outspoken Dr I.H. Usmani. Professor Abdus Salam had also flown in from abroad. The attendees also included Munir Ahmad Khan, a nuclear engineer with international credentials. He had flown in from Vienna, where he was in charge of the nuclear power and reactor division of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

It was a historic moment in Pakistan's journey toward nuclear development. Scientists and engineers took turns addressing pressing issues in science and technology, with particular focus on how quickly Pakistan could achieve atomic capability. Criticism voiced at the conference ranged from lamenting the misallocation of funds for building physical infrastructure to issues with trained manpower and a lack of planning and motivation. Some voiced concerns about bureaucratic red tape, while others passionately demanded respect and recognition.

After several scientists had spoken, Bhutto rose to speak. The chatter in the pandal stopped. There was a pin-drop silence as eager eyes turned towards him.

Bhutto began his address by recalling with anguish the surrender and national humiliation in December 1971 and vowed to restore the lost national honour. He then told the audience that he had invited them to seek their help. He addressed them directly, face-to-face, and excited them. Only a month earlier, Pakistan had witnessed its darkest hour: the secession of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, following a humiliating defeat in the Indo-Pakistani war. The nation's wounds were fresh, its pride shattered. Amidst the ruin, Bhutto's speech kindled in the gathering the spark of resolve that would forever alter the trajectory of Pakistan's history.

Bhutto's words resonated with the scientists. In Multan, he was not merely outlining a policy; he was igniting a movement. Masterfully blending pragmatism with patriotism, he quoted from history. He spoke about the



transformative power of nuclear technology, instilling enthusiasm in the audience. He cited India's steady march toward atomic capability as both a challenge and a provocation. Pakistan's survival in the regional power matrix required a matching response.

When the crowd of scientists was sufficiently charged, Bhutto directly asked how they could help meet the threat to the nation's security. India possessed not only superiority in conventional weapons, it was also building nuclear weapons.

"Can you meet India's nuclear challenge?" He asked them, promising "all the resources you may need." He had challenged the scientific community at a time of the lowest national morale, and the scientists were ecstatic.

Curiosity was replaced by enthusiasm. The enthusiastic ones believed they could do it even if some of their colleagues disagreed. The atmosphere was electric, tinged with the weight of what lay ahead.

As the discussions unfolded, the pandal crackled with ideas, projections, and debates about feasibility, resources and time frames. The scientists understood that achieving nuclear capability was no small feat — it was a herculean task and a willingness to defy all odds — but they were ready. There were a few who were sceptics, also mindful of the technical roadblocks, but a shared sense of purpose united all.

MORE THAN A CONFERENCE

Scientists fell over one another to convince the president they could deliver on the promise. The president was amused as he watched them engage in a shouting match. "Yes, yes, sure, we can deliver," the scientists shouted back in unison, almost like children on a playground, a scientist later recalled.

When a scientist claimed that Pakistan had already reached a "take-off stage" in the nuclear field, Bhutto said, "There is no such thing as the take-off stage. Either we take off or we are left behind."

President Bhutto deplored that we had been left behind in almost every aspect of national life, especially in science, technology and education.

How long will you take to deliver, he asked them. The scientists did not expect such a pointed question from the head of state. Already charged with enthusiasm, the meeting turned into near pandemonium. Scientists made claims and counterclaims about how soon it would be done.

Some said it would take five years; others thought it would take longer. The overenthusiastic claimed to do it in less than a year, while the realistic ones said at least five years were needed. Everyone was eager to catch Bhutto's

attention.

When a young engineer jumped and almost shouted, "Five years, Your Excellency, five years!" Bhutto asked him to sit down.

On the dais, the chairman of PAEC, Dr I.H. Usmani and Dr Salam looked at each other. As a young scientist claimed that they could make the bomb in three years, Usmani nudged Professor Salam, sitting next to him, with his elbow.

Usmani, the pioneer of nuclear energy in the country, believed that Pakistan was a long way away from acquiring nuclear capability. "We will never be able to make it, we do not have the infrastructure," he whispered in his ear, Salam later recalled to me.

When Salam asked him whether he disapproved of the quest to go nuclear, Usmani told him, "How can I refuse the president anything? I am only trying to be realistic."

Usmani then said, "Listen, morally I can disagree with a nuclear weapon, but I will not. I know what Bhutto wants and I want to help him."

Usmani then rose on his seat.

"With all respect, Mr President," he said, "but I think that we should look into the eye of truth."

At present, Pakistan does not possess a thing that justifies the optimism in this pandal, he said. "We do not have any metallurgists or a steel industry." Usmani had the courage to speak his mind in front of the president and a charged crowd of enthusiastic scientists.

Perhaps Dr Usmani was not wrong. As head of the organisation for a decade, he knew better. There was no infrastructure in place needed to go nuclear. It took more than a decade after the Multan Conference for Pakistan to conduct its first cold nuclear tests, in March 1983, and complete its nuclear fuel cycle projects.

A young engineer was keen to speak but was ignored each time he raised his hand to ask for the floor. Just as the next speaker was about to take the floor, Bhutto, pointing towards the young engineer, said, "No, no, that man over there."

"Mr President, all I want to say is that we have a research institute in PINSTECH [Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science and Technology] at Nilore. Local people call the nearby bus stop 'Nilore Bum Factory.' They believe that the atom bomb is the saviour. They also hope that the bomb will be produced in this building. But what are we doing here? We can make it if tasked," he said.

Bhutto listened intently.

The young man was Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood, later the first project director of the uranium enrichment project at Kahuta and much more.

As the scientists differed over how soon the bomb could be made, Bhutto raised his hand and stretched out three fingers. Everyone was silent. He wanted the bomb made in three years. All eyes had turned to him.

"Can I have this from you in three years?" he then asked. "Yes, yes," the scientists responded in chorus, vowing not to disappoint him.

The Multan conclave of scientists marked the starting point of Pakistan's strategic nuclear programme. The dye was cast that day.

The Multan Conference marked the genesis of a long and arduous journey. Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear capability was as much a battle against external pressures as it was a test of internal resolve. In the years that followed, the country faced a barrage of international sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and economic challenges. Yet, the vision set in motion that January day in Multan endured.

The Multan Conference remains a

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PAKISTAN'S WINDING ROAD TO THE BOMB



(Left to right) Professor Ishfaq Ahmad, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Gen K.M. Arif and Munir Ahmad Khan at the cold test site | Beyond the Bomb



Dr Mujaddid Ahmed Ijaz (extreme left), Munir Ahmad Khan (centre) and Dr Abdus Salam (extreme right) at the International Nathiagali Summer College on Physics and Contemporary Needs (INSC) in 1976 | Ijaz Family Archives

Continued from Page 20

pivotal chapter in Pakistan's history, its significance extending beyond the realm of nuclear technology. It set Pakistan on a path that continues to shape its identity and policies.

More than a chatter of enthusiastic scientists, it was a solemn promise to deliver. More than a conference, it was a defining moment.

BHUTTO SELECTS MUNIR AHMAD KHAN

Amidst fervent exchanges at the Multan Conference, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once again raised his hand to signal that he had an announcement to make. The chatter in the pandal fell silent, all eyes fixed on him.

Turning towards Munir Ahmad Khan, seated on the podium, Bhutto declared, "From today, Munir Ahmad Khan will be the new chairman of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission." Munir Ahmad Khan was thus entrusted with the responsibility of advancing the nuclear programme, aligning it with Bhutto's bold vision.

Bhutto's faith in Munir Ahmad Khan seems to have been rooted in their past association, which began when Munir Ahmad Khan worked at the IAEA in Vienna. He had established himself as a distinguished nuclear engineer and shared a common vision with Bhutto about the role of nuclear technology for the country's development and survival.

In December 1965, Bhutto, then Pakistan's foreign minister, accompanied President Ayub Khan during an official visit to London. Bhutto orchestrated a meeting of Munir Ahmad Khan with President Ayub, aiming to persuade the latter to invest in nuclear reprocessing technology. Despite Munir Ahmad Khan's compelling arguments, Ayub remained unconvinced, placing reliance on China's "nuclear umbrella" in case Pakistan needed it. After the meeting, a disappointed Munir Ahmad Khan was reassured by Bhutto: "Do not worry—our turn will come."

That turn came in 1972. Bhutto, now the president of Pakistan, positioned Munir Ahmad Khan as chairman of PAEC, signalling a new chapter in the pursuit of his ambition of making Pakistan a nuclear power.

Following Munir Ahmad Khan's appointment, Dr I.H. Usmani, who had served PAEC with great distinction for over a decade, resigned from his position. While Dr Usmani laid the groundwork for scientific development, Munir Ahmad Khan was tasked with a transformative mission: to translate Bhutto's vision of a nuclear Pakistan into reality.

In his address, Bhutto noted what he called a "process of erosion" which he said had set in the country as a result of the events

of December 1971. He wanted it addressed urgently. In the realm of science and technology, he wanted to launch a "crash programme" to nurture indigenous talent. He wanted to create a pool of at least a hundred scientists, bringing home expatriate Pakistani talent, and instituting prestigious awards for the talented. He wanted to ensure that Pakistan's nuclear ambitions were powered by its own people.

THE UNSUNG HERO

Munir Ahmad Khan's emphasis on secrecy and a low profile was one of the reasons for his remaining unsung. But this was not the only reason. He remained unsung also because his criticism of the tendency to seek personal projection at the expense of the nuclear programme displeased a powerful lobby that cherished personal publicity.

He was uncomfortable when some contemporaries liked to advertise their achievements and flaunted nuclear capabilities, terming it irresponsible. He said that scientists, bureaucrats and generals in other countries do not publicly make tall claims about their capabilities. No scientist in India, Israel or any other country had publicly made such claims.

A former army chief publicly made some claims in the mid-nineties that appeared to him unwise. With carefully chosen words, he strongly criticised him in a newspaper article. He said that what the ex-army chief had said amounted to Pakistan making a fool of the US president for continuing to certify, on the advice of the US Embassy in Islamabad for three years from 1987 to 1990, that Pakistan did not have nuclear capability or a device. He predicted that such irresponsible rhetoric would cost Pakistan dearly.

Naturally, those in high places seeking personal publicity did not like it and turned against him.

When, in May 1988, Pakistan demonstrated nuclear capability, individual scientists in another organisation scrambled to claim credit for bomb-making, cherishing the spotlight. In doing so, some scientists excelled over others. The PAEC scientists were trained in his [Munir Ahmad Khan's] nursery with a rigid code of restraint for two decades. They remained tight-lipped even at that time of national celebrations.

While there was no one to speak for him, his detractors had a field day. When he retired, he launched a vigorous campaign advocating to curb nuclear rhetoric. He and his associates in the PAEC paid a heavy price for this restraint. He endured all this with grace.

Despite his remarkable achievements in bringing Pakistan to the world nuclear map, he was not lauded. His achievements were not recognised during his lifetime. For 20 years, the cold nuclear tests that were carried out under his watch had remained a guarded

secret.

He denied himself and the team limelight through self-projection, adhering to the strict secrecy codes. He did not advertise his achievements to safeguard the safety and security of the nuclear programme. He believed that advertising personal achievements would damage the programme by attracting adverse international response.

In his memoirs, Professor Riazuddin, the quiet theoretician behind the bomb, has said: "All the strategic nuclear infrastructure was completed during the tenure of Munir Ahmad Khan as chairman of the PAEC. Thus, all the key elements, except uranium enrichment, were already in place, including conducting cold tests and building tunnels in the Chagai mountain for carrying out underground nuclear tests when needed. In spite of all this, he didn't get the credit he deserved and remains an 'unsung hero.'"

He had raised the bar of secrecy so high that it deprived his team of due recognition. When in office, he never mentioned in public the word "cold nuclear tests", let alone reveal that it had indeed been successfully carried out way back in the early 1980s.

His detractors ensured that Munir was not honoured in his lifetime. While others were decorated with the highest civil award twice, Munir Ahmad Khan was denied it. [Asif] Zardari had long been aware of Munir Ahmad Khan's work, since his wife, Benazir Bhutto, was prime minister. During his first term as president, he posthumously awarded the unsung hero in 2012 with the highest civil award, the Nishan-i-Pakistan. His family received the award.

In a world often seduced by the allure of spectacle, the power of restraint is the most profound virtue, but it does not come without a cost. Munir Ahmad Khan's life and the price he paid demonstrated this truth. He exemplified it throughout his career in his disdain for self-promotion and his advocacy for nuclear discretion. His steadfast belief that nuclear capabilities must never be flaunted distinguished him as a leader of extraordinary foresight. He was willing to pay a price for it.

His ethical philosophy was that nuclear capability is not a status symbol but a grave responsibility. It needed strategic silence and avoiding rhetoric that could provoke adversaries or attract unnecessary global attention. He clearly understood that self-promotion in this sensitive domain was counterproductive and dangerous. The success of Pakistan's nuclear programme lay in the collective effort of a well-knit team in complete secrecy, not in individual accolades.

He never sought cheap popularity, denied himself newspaper headlines, and declined to advertise the Commission's achievements. He kept a low profile and disliked anyone making provocative, inflammatory state-

ments to grab headlines.

The brandishing of nuclear capability was anathema to him. He believed that bravado, brandishing nuclear capability or advertising achievements did not serve the national interest. A natural consequence of this worldview was that he and his team were not acknowledged for their work.

His commitment to restraint placed him at odds with those in positions of power. But he was not deterred and continued to be vocal in condemning nuclear rhetoric. Later, when talking about the former army chief's public statement, he said, "Farhatullah, it was more than a lapse in judgment; it was a breach of trust."

He viewed such declarations as reckless and an invitation to international sanctions. He foresaw adverse diplomatic fallout and the damage it could inflict. His frustration stemmed not only from the immediate consequences but also from the long-term implications of eroding the trust of global powers.

Unfortunately, he did not live long enough to see the day when his warnings against the dangers of irresponsible nuclear behaviour proved true.

The world was shocked when, in 2006, Gen Pervez Musharraf disclosed in his memoirs, *In the Line of Fire*, how a clandestine proliferation network had been in existence in Pakistan for a long time, and blamed one lone individual for it. The network had actually been busted by the CIA in 2003, and Musharraf was forced to acknowledge it in his 2006 memoirs. Ignoring Munir's warnings cost the nation dearly.

The legacy of restraint was both his formidable strength and a great burden. While it was meant to shield Pakistan's nuclear programme from external threats, it also allowed his detractors to dominate the narrative. His posthumous recognition, with the highest civil award, was a bittersweet moment for his family and colleagues. It was a long-overdue acknowledgement of his role in placing Pakistan on the global nuclear map while also underscoring the quiet pain of a life spent in service without recognition.

His life is a powerful reminder of humility and restraint in leadership. When egos clash and ambitions run high, quiet dedication to the collective good is his enduring legacy. Prioritising responsibility over recognition and wisdom over bravado while remaining personally self-effacing shall resonate as his legacy.

Excerpted with permission from *Beyond the Bomb: Munir Ahmad Khan and Pakistan's Nuclear Odyssey* by Farhatullah Babar, published by Lightstone Publishers

The writer is a former senator and served as the director of information at the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) under Chairman Munir Ahmad Khan



Building Bridges Over Break: Nabil Shike Sets a Vision for Precinct 4 at Local Civic Event

Highlights from "Dinner, Dialogue, and Community," where Fort Bend County Precinct 4 Commissioner candidate Nabil Shike shared his people-centered priorities and heard firsthand from Fort Bend advocates regarding the future of their diverse communities.



GRAND NIKKAH CEREMONY: Mr. and Mrs. Syed Arshad Iqbal's Daughter Syeda Abeeha Weds Syed Shahmeer Navaid, Son of Mr. and Mrs. Syed Navaid Raja

A graceful and well-attended Nikkah ceremony marked the union of Syeda Abeeha Arshad, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Syed Arshad Iqbal, and Syed Shahmeer Navaid, son of Mr. and Mrs. Syed Navaid Raja, on Sunday, January 11, 2026, at the picturesque White Oaks on the Bayou in Simonton, Texas. The event drew a large gathering of family members, friends, and respected community figures. Senator Babar Ghouri also honored the occasion with his presence, extending warm congratulations and prayers to the newlywed couple and their families. The Nikkah ceremony was solemnized in the evening, followed by an elegant dinner reception. A soulful Qawwali night later in the evening added spiritual depth and festive charm, leaving guests with cherished memories of the celebration. Hosted by the family of the bride, the ceremony reflected tradition, hospitality, and joy, as attendees prayed for the couple's enduring happiness, harmony, and success in their married life.



The CINEMA of falsehoods and fantasies

Behind Bollywood's choreographed dreams lies a less glamorous truth

Safia Siddiqui

"Writing on Indian movies?" exclaimed Amna, my lifelong best friend. "But you never watch them, let alone follow the industry!"

I smiled. "Well, now is the time to put pen to paper." My goal is to strip away the cinematic polish and expose the reality behind the glitz. While Bollywood markets itself on dreams and grandeur, there is a stark contrast between its scripted perfection and the underlying fakeness of the industry. Behind the coordinated dancing and grand romances lies a manufactured world that often obscures the truth. I want to challenge the polished facade of Bollywood and compel readers to see the reality hidden beneath the inaccuracy and fraudulent practices.

"Why the shock?" I asked Amna. Bollywood's "originality" has always been a mirage and I for once was one of the few who could sense it!

My elder sister, Saira, has always been a powerful influence in my life, shaping many of my choices since childhood. Despite her deep-seated devotion as a die-hard Shah Rukh Khan fan, even her enthusiasm couldn't bridge the gap for me. I simply couldn't develop a taste for what I perceive as the repetitive or lacklustre quality of mainstream Hindi cinema. Despite our close bond, my cinematic preferences have diverged sharply from the influence of her favourite superstar.

My tastes were forged in a Convent School environment where the soundtrack of our youth was dominated by Western icons like Wham! Modern Talking, Tina Turner, Madonna and Michael Jackson. While Saira swooned over Hindi leads, my classmates and I were busy idolising Whitney Houston and crowning Tom Cruise as the ultimate heartthrob. This deep-rooted immersion in global pop culture created a disconnect that mainstream Hindi cinema simply couldn't bridge, leaving me indifferent to its charms.

After years of maintaining a deliberate distance from Bollywood, one might wonder why I've finally chosen to break my silence. The answer is simple: I have reached a breaking point with the nonsense being produced. It is no longer just about a difference in taste; it is about the blatant propagation of copied plots, unoriginal influences, and, most alarmingly, historically distorted narratives.

Seeing history weaponised to fit a specific political agenda is deeply unsettling. The industry seems to have pivoted from entertainment to a vehicle for the Indian government's messaging, trading creative integrity for propaganda. They are rewriting our past to suit a modern narrative, and it begs the question: who are they actually trying to fool? My long-standing disconnect has shifted from mere cultural indifference to a principled stand against the intellectual dishonesty currently dominating the Hindi film industry.

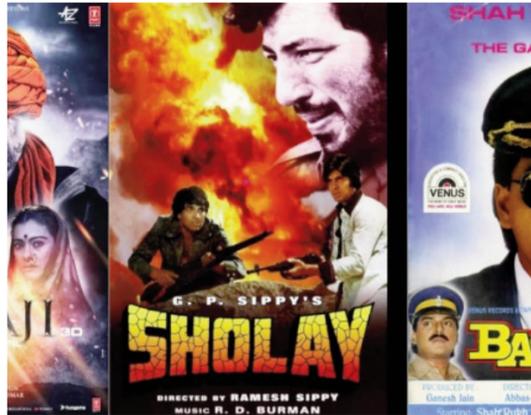
Professional dishonesty of Bollywood probably started with its music. The trend of lifting tunes isn't new; it began decades ago with legends like R.D. Burman, whose iconic Mehbooba Mehbooba was a direct lift from Demis Roussos's Say You Love Me.

My further digging into this subject just confirmed my hunch that things were not as they were commonly seen by the general public in India and across the border. For example R.D. Burman borrowed from ABBA for Mil Gaya Hum Ko, while Bappi Lahiri famously lifted Jimmy Jimmy from Ottawan's T'es OK.

The trend intensified with Anand-Milind copying Poovoma Oorgolam for Dhak Dhak Karne Laga, and Jatin-Lalit reimagining The 500 Miles as Jab Koi Baat Bigarr Jaye. Even Rajesh Roshan used Boney M's rhythms for Kya Kehna. From Anu Malik's blatant lifts to Pritam's modern "adaptations," the industry's "reality" is a persistent pattern of uncredited creative recycling.

I am not trying to undermine the creativity of these music giants but only R D Burman copied some 25 songs in his illustrious career each ending up as a one of the biggest hits of its time, is my point.

Bollywood's history of "inspiration" is extensive, with many of its biggest hits being direct adaptations of Western cinema. Iconic blockbusters like Sholay drew heavily from The



Magnificent Seven, while Sarkar and Kaante served as Indian iterations of The Godfather and Reservoir Dogs. The trend spans genres: thrillers like Ghajini, Sangharsh, and Baazigar mirrored Memento, The Silence of the Lambs, and A Kiss Before Dying. Even beloved romances and comedies—including Hum Tum, Partner, Chachi 420, and Dil Hai Ke Manta Nahin—are reproductions of classics like When Harry Met Sally, Hitch, Mrs Doubtfire, and It Happened One Night. From Black (The Miracle Worker) to Dhoom 3 (The Prestige), the industry has consistently built its success on established Hollywood frameworks.

Believe me Bollywood copied even the dialogues and situations from some 10 of Nadeem Baig's movies for 1980s, yes they copied Pakistani hit movies.

The industry's creative bankruptcy extends beyond Hollywood; in academia, we consider "self-plagiarism" a grave offense, yet Bollywood has institutionalised it by systematically cannibalising South Indian cinema. Rather than innovating, filmmakers frequently rely on carbon-copy remakes of established hits from the Tamil, Telugu, and Malayalam industries to guarantee box-office returns. This relentless recycling of domestic plots reveals a profound lack of originality. By treating the South as a mere content farm for Northern audiences, Bollywood perpetuates a cycle of intellectual dishonesty that stifles genuine artistic growth.

The term "Dishonesty" serves as the vital link between Bollywood's creative bankruptcy and the current media landscape. This culture of intellectual theft has paved the way for Indian media to stoop to new lows, transitioning from unoriginal entertainment to blatant propaganda. Over the last few years, the influence of the Modi government and its youth wing RSS has become unmistakable, as they desperately attempt to rewrite history through the lens of cinema. By weaponising the industry's reach, they are replacing factual heritage with distorted, nationalist narratives designed to manipulate the masses. This systemic dishonesty doesn't just fool the audience—it erodes the very foundation of historical truth, proving that when an industry is built on "borrowed" ideas, it is easily bought by political agendas.

Recent Bollywood portrayals of Mughal history have shifted from the nuanced storytelling of classics like Mughal-e-Azam to a modern trend of maliciousness. In films like Padmaavat and Panipat, Mughal and Sultanate rulers are often depicted as barbaric, unrefined caricatures, stripped of their documented administrative and cultural contributions. This cinematic distortion frequently aligns with the RSS and BJYM agenda to frame Indian history as a perpetual religious struggle.

By exaggerating atrocities and ignoring the complex alliances of the era, movies like g use the "invader" trope to stoke contemporary nationalism. This systematic rewriting ignores historical records in favour of a binary narrative, transforming the screen into a site for political revisionism and communal polarisation.

The demolition of the Babri Masjid remains a visceral memory—a shocking spectacle of communal rage broadcast to a global audience. For a young person like myself, witnessing

such fanaticism through international media was deeply unsettling. However, the true weight of the tragedy hit home when my father, a historian and a proud Lucknow University graduate, spoke on the matter. I vividly remember him exclaiming, "Now is the time the Hindus should bring down the Taj Mahal."

His words weren't a call to action, but a heavy expression of heartbreak; I could sense the profound sadness and disgust in his tone. As a scholar of history, he saw the destruction of the mosque not as a victory, but as the beginning of a dark era where India's rich, pluralistic heritage would be systematically dismantled by hate.

I never expected to see my father's prophecy take shape within my lifetime. While Hindu fanatics aren't physically tearing down the Taj Mahal yet, the Indian media and government have launched a diabolic strategy and sorry to say in collaboration with Bollywood, who is a master architect of shaping public opinion. Their influence is subtly ingrained through popular culture, most recently in the film The Taj Story (released October 31, 2025).

This strategic shift in narrative suggests that physical destruction isn't the primary goal; rather, it is the systematic erasure of historical identity from the collective consciousness. By reframing the monument's origin through cinema, the state successfully bypasses logic and targets emotion. Watching this transformation unfold is a chilling testament to my father's foresight. It reveals how easily a nation's heritage can be recontextualised until the original truth becomes unrecognisable to the very people who once cherished it.

The movie centres on the long-debunked theory by P.N. Oak that the Taj Mahal was originally a Shiva temple. Despite having no archaeological evidence and being repeatedly dismissed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Supreme Court, the film presents this "alternative history" as a hidden truth being suppressed by a "Muslim rulers."

Tushar Amrish Goel, who happens to be the writer, director, and dialogue writer for the film need to do better homework. P.N. Oak the self-proclaimed historians claim that Taj Mahal was originally a Shiva temple (often called "Tejo Mahalaya") have been systematically examined and rejected by India's highest legal and archaeological authorities on multiple occasions from 2017 to 2022.

Movies like The Kashmir Files (2022), The Kerala Story (2023), Pathaan (2023), Sarfarosh (1999), Fanaa (2006), The Surgical Strike (2019), follows a pattern of stereotyping Muslims, often linking them to terrorism or anti-Pakistan narratives.

Films like Mission Majnu and Dhurandhar—set in Pakistan—are prime examples of this decline. Rather than offering nuanced storytelling, they rely on caricatured portrayals and factual stretches that are more laughable than gripping. This trend reveals a film industry drenched in creative stagnation, opting for cheap, sensationalist friction over substance. By prioritising agendas over authenticity, these productions fail to impress anyone with a basic grasp of history or sophisticated taste.

My sincere advice to the government-backed Indian film industry is to finally move past these exhausted caricatures and portray Muslims, especially Pakistanis, with a shred of realism. The stereotypes Bollywood peddles are blatantly misguided: Pakistani men do not constantly wear kajal, greet every person with an exaggerated adab, or walk around permanently draped in shoulder cloths and prayer caps.

This lazy visual shorthand reveals a profound lack of research and a commitment to disinformation. By clinging to these outdated tropes, filmmakers ignore the modern, diverse reality of the people they claim to depict. It is time for Bollywood to stop relying on "othering" and start investing in authentic cultural representation. For an industry with such a global reach, this creative ignorance is simply inexcusable.

All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

The writer is a professor and a wild life enthusiast.

Eggs and Cholesterol: Long-Held Beliefs Reconsidered by New Research



For decades, eggs have been at the center of a nutritional controversy, often blamed for raising cholesterol levels and increasing the risk of heart disease. Many people were advised to limit egg consumption—especially daily intake—due to their cholesterol content. However, growing scientific evidence is now challenging this long-standing belief, suggesting that eggs may have been misunderstood.

A recent study published in the July 2025 issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* adds to a mounting body of research indicating that dietary cholesterol from eggs plays a far smaller role in raising blood cholesterol than previously believed. Instead, researchers point to saturated fat as the primary dietary driver of elevated low-density lipoprotein (LDL), commonly referred to as “bad” cholesterol.

What the Study Found

The study involved 48 adults with elevated LDL cholesterol, who were placed on three different controlled diets over a 15-week period. Each participant rotated through the following five-week dietary plans:

- Diet A: High dietary cholesterol but low saturated fat (included two eggs per day)
- Diet B: Low dietary cholesterol but high saturated fat (no eggs)
- Diet C: High dietary cholesterol and high saturated fat (included one egg per day)

The results were striking. Across all groups, LDL cholesterol levels rose significantly only when saturated fat intake was high, regardless of whether eggs were consumed. In contrast, participants who ate two eggs daily as part of a low-saturated-fat diet actually experienced a reduction in LDL cholesterol.

These findings directly challenge the idea that eggs themselves are a major contributor to high cholesterol.

Why Saturated Fat Matters More

According to experts at Harvard Health, the body tightly regulates cholesterol production, and for most people, dietary cholesterol has only a modest effect on blood cholesterol levels. Saturated fats, however, interfere with how the liver removes LDL cholesterol from the bloodstream, leading to higher circulating levels.

LDL-raising saturated fats are most commonly found in:

- Red meats such as beef, lamb, and pork
- Processed meats
- Full-fat dairy products like butter, cheese, and ice cream
- Certain tropical oils, including palm oil

Eggs, by comparison, are relatively low in saturated fat and contain high-quality protein, essential vitamins (such as B12 and D), choline for brain health, and antioxidants like lutein and zeaxanthin, which support eye health.

Implications for Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of death worldwide, making dietary guidance a critical public health issue. While eggs were once a focal point of cholesterol-related dietary restrictions, newer evidence suggests that overall dietary patterns matter far more than individual foods.

As the study authors noted, “Although dietary cholesterol from eggs has been emphasized in past guidelines, current evidence indicates that saturated fat has a greater impact on LDL cholesterol and cardiovascular risk.”

The Bigger Picture

This research aligns with updated nutritional guidelines in several countries, which no longer place strict limits on egg consumption for the general population. For most healthy individuals, moderate egg intake—even daily—can be part of a heart-healthy diet, especially when paired with vegetables, whole grains, and unsaturated fats.

The takeaway is clear: eggs are not the cholesterol villain they were once thought to be. Instead of avoiding eggs, individuals concerned about heart health may benefit more from reducing saturated fat intake and focusing on balanced, nutrient-dense diets.



Pakistan-American surgeon appointed Chief AI Officer at US college of medicine

Continued from page 17

first engineering-based medical school, according to a press statement issued on Wednesday.

The newly created role marks a major milestone in Dr Haider's global career spanning Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States. As CAIO, he will lead the strategic and responsible integration of artificial intelligence across medical education, research, and clinical innovation at CI MED.

Dr Haider joins Carle Illinois after completing a transformative 6.5-year tenure as Dean of the Aga Khan University Medical College in Pakistan. During his leadership, the institution quadrupled its research funding, achieved top-100 global ranking status, and secured multiple international accreditations. Widely respected for his mentorship and accessibility, he remained a popular figure among students.

Speaking on his appointment, Dr Haider said artificial intelligence has the potential to strengthen healthcare systems at scale if implemented responsibly and grounded in real clinical needs.

CI MED Dean Mark Cohen said the appointment reflects the institution's commitment to making artificial intelligence foundational to the future of medicine, adding that Dr Haider's leadership would ensure innovation remains ethical and patient-centered.

Dr Haider will also serve as Medical Director for Research Informatics at Carle Foundation Hospital and as a Visiting Professor at the University of Illinois' Grainger College of Engineering.

Dr Haider has authored over 450 publications, secured more than \$200 million in research funding, and founded Boston Health AI in 2024, with a mission to improve care for one billion patients worldwide.

Houston, Meet Your New Favorite Coffee Spot: Dallas's Original Yemeni Coffee Arrives in Aliana

Continued from page 17

festive vibes.

Located at 16733 West Airport Blvd., the new establishment offers a perfect blend of cozy ambiance and cultural heritage. Guests who attended the opening were treated to a first look at the beautiful space and a taste of the rich, authentic Yemeni coffee and exquisite desserts that have made the brand a standout in North Texas.

From the moment the doors opened, it was clear that this location checks all the boxes for a premier gathering spot. Whether it was the intricate spiced aromas or the warm, welcoming environment, visitors found a space designed for connection and relaxation.

"Houstonians have a new reason to celebrate," noted one guest during the festivities. "Having this level of authentic Yemeni coffee right here in

Aliana is a game-changer for the neighborhood."

The team behind Arwa Yemeni Coffee House expressed their excitement about joining the Richmond community, marking the start of a journey to become a favorite local hub. With the soft opening phase now in full swing, the community is encouraged to visit and experience this unique addition to the Houston area.

Location: Arwa Yemeni Coffee House, 16733 West Airport Blvd. Richmond, Texas 77407

Makkah Masjid Dairy Ashford to Host Special 'Isra' wal Meraj' Celebration in Houston this Friday

Continued from page 17

The evening's itinerary features a lineup of distinguished guests to honor the occasion.

Guest Speaker: The keynote address will be delivered by Mowlana Abdul Ghani Awaisi, who is expected to speak on the historical and spiritual significance of the Night Journey.

The event will feature Naat (poetry in praise of the Prophet) recitations by renowned Houston's Best reciters. Naat Khuwan Feroz Ali Jivani, will recite alongside Naat Khuwan Altaf Bukhari.

Event Details

Organizers have confirmed that the event is open to the public and have extended a special invitation to families and friends to attend.

Date: Friday, January 16, 2026

Time: After Isha Prayers (7:30 P.M.)

Location: Makkah Masjid, 3505 Dairy Ashford Rd., Suite #199, Houston, TX 77082

Hospitality: Dinner will be served to all attendees following the program.

For more information, community members are encouraged to visit the mosque at the Dairy Ashford address.

Community Dialogue Takes Center Stage at Nabil Shike Event in Sugar Land

Continued from page 17

initiatives, and the role of the District Attorney's Office in responding to the concerns of Fort Bend residents. His remarks emphasized collaboration, accountability, and building public trust across county institutions.

During the evening, Shike shared his vision and priorities for Precinct 4, focusing on responsive local governance, infrastructure improvement, public safety, youth empowerment, and transparent leadership. He spoke about the importance of engaging residents directly and ensuring that county policies reflect the real needs of Fort Bend's diverse communities.

Attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions, share personal experiences, and offer feedback during an interactive discussion segment. The event was conducted in a respectful and structured manner, encouraging open dialogue and thoughtful

exchange of ideas.

Community members also had the opportunity to network over a plated dinner in a welcoming and inclusive environment. Organizers noted that the event was designed to strengthen civic participation and foster meaningful connections between residents and local leadership.

The gathering reflected a broader commitment to people-centered leadership and constructive community engagement, reinforcing the importance of dialogue and collaboration in shaping the future of Fort Bend County.

Visa Crisis Shakes T20 World Cup as USA Stars Denied Entry to India

Continued from page 17

and a recognizable face in global T20 leagues, posted a photo on Instagram from a restaurant in Colombo with the caption: "India visa denied but KFC for the win." While Indian diplomatic sources later clarified that the applications are officially "under review" rather than flatly rejected, the delay has sparked concerns over a repeat of past geopolitical tensions bleeding into the sporting arena. The four players are currently in Sri Lanka for a final pre-tournament camp, awaiting clearance from India's Ministry of External Affairs.

Under India's strict security regulations, foreign nationals of Pakistani origin are subject to a "100 percent prior reference process." Unlike other international athletes who can use the streamlined e-Visa system, these players must undergo a background check that can take up to 90 days. Indian rules mandate that anyone born in Pakistan must apply using their country-of-birth passport or provide extensive documentation of renunciation, regardless of their current citizenship.

"At the appointment, the players were informed that the visas could not be processed at this stage," an ICC source stated. "Additional inputs are still awaited from the Foreign Ministry. Once that process is complete, they will be contacted."

The USA is not alone in this predicament. Several other Associate nations, including Canada, the UAE, and the Netherlands, are reportedly facing similar hurdles for players of Pakistani descent. Canada's captain Saad bin Zafar and the UAE's Mohammad Waseem are among those whose travel status remains uncertain. Cricket boards from these nations have formally approached the International Cricket Council (ICC) for intervention, but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has yet to issue a guarantee of entry, citing government-mandated security protocols.

The potential loss of these four players would be a devastating blow to a USA squad that famously stunned Pakistan in the 2024 World Cup. Ali Khan, with 49 wickets in 33 internationals, is the team's primary death bowler. Shayan Jahangir provides vital stability in the middle order with two international centuries, while Ehsan Adil—a former Pakistan Test player—brings rare high-level experience to the American attack.

This standoff follows a long his-

tory of visa-related friction between India and Pakistan. It mirrors the 2024 controversy involving England's Shoaib Bashir and Australia's Usman Khawaja, both of whom faced significant delays due to their heritage. However, the scale of the current issue, affecting dozens of players from multiple nations simultaneously, is unprecedented for a major ICC event.

If the visas are not granted by the end of January, the USA may be forced to field a severely depleted squad for their high-profile opener against hosts India on February 7 at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium. For the ICC, which assumed temporary administrative control of USA Cricket late last year, the failure to secure travel for all qualified players raises serious questions about the fairness and integrity of the tournament's hosting agreement.

USCIS to Hike Premium Processing Fees Starting March 1: Impact on Pakistani Professionals and Students

Continued from page 17

to account for inflation between June 2023 and June 2025. For many in the Pakistani American community—particularly those in the tech, medical, and engineering sectors—the hike adds a new financial hurdle to an already costly immigration journey.

Key Fee Changes at a Glance

The price for "peace of mind" and faster adjudication is going up across the board. If you are filing on or after March 1, ensure your Form I-907 reflects the following:

- H-1B, L-1, O-1, TN (Form I-129): Increases from \$2,805 to \$2,965

- Employment-Based Green Cards (Form I-140): Increases from \$2,805 to \$2,965

- F-1/J-1 Change of Status (Form I-539): Increases from \$1,965 to \$2,075

- OPT & STEM-OPT EADs (Form I-765): Increases from \$1,685 to \$1,780

- H-2B or R-1 (Religious Workers): Increases from \$1,685 to \$1,780

Why This Matters for Our Community

Premium processing is often a necessity rather than a luxury for Pakistani nationals. With lengthy backlogs and the uncertainty of visa slots, many Pakistani professionals rely on the 15-day expedited service to secure job changes, travel for family emergencies back home, or renew their status without the risk of falling "out of status."

- For Tech Professionals: Those on H-1B visas—the backbone of many Pakistani-led startups and IT firms—will now see the premium cost approach the \$3,000 mark.

- For Students: Young Pakistanis graduating from U.S. universities often use premium processing for their OPT (Optional Practical Training) to ensure they can begin working immediately upon graduation. The hike to \$1,780 represents a significant bite out of a recent gradu-

ate's budget.

- For Religious Workers: The R-1 visa, frequently used by Imams and religious scholars serving Pakistani community centers and mosques across the U.S., will also see a fee increase to \$1,780.

USCIS Justification

USCIS emphasized that the additional revenue is vital for the agency's survival and efficiency. The funds are earmarked to:

- Reduce massive adjudication backlogs.

- Improve the technology used for processing.

- Fund naturalization services for those seeking U.S. citizenship.

Important Deadline

Applicants must ensure that any premium processing request post-marked on or after March 1, 2026, includes the new fee. USCIS has warned that it will reject any Form I-907 submitted with the incorrect, older fee amount.

Community members are encouraged to consult with their immigration attorneys to file pending applications before the March 1 deadline to take advantage of the current, lower rates.

Awareness Campaign Launched to Transform Backyards into Organic Gardens

Continued from page 17

Ghouri, community leader Shakeel Khan, Faheem Akhund and Sara Khan, Candidate for Fort Bend County Treasurer.

The meeting focused on transforming residential backyards into productive organic vegetable gardens, enabling families to enjoy fresh, chemical-free produce directly from their own homes. Speakers highlighted that backyard gardening not only refreshes home landscapes but also provides a healthy and educational activity for children and adults alike.

Addressing the gathering, Senator Babar Ghouri emphasized that organic backyard gardening plays an important role in improving community health and strengthening family values. He stressed that teaching children the importance of growing their own food helps build a healthier and more self-reliant future.

Speaking on the occasion, Sara Khan candidate for Fort Bend County Treasurer explained the "Organic Farm-to-Table" concept and announced the launch of an awareness campaign aimed at educating community members on simple and practical ways to convert their backyards into organic vegetable gardens. She said the initiative would help families eat healthy food today and develop sustainable habits for generations to come.

Community leader Shakeel Khan highlighted the economic and environmental benefits of home gardening, noting that growing vegetables at home reduces household expenses while promoting environmentally responsible living.

The participants welcomed the initiative and expressed enthusiasm for adopting organic gardening practices, reaffirming their commitment to creating greener homes and healthier families within the Pakistani community.

Study finds money worries increase speed of heart aging

Financial strain and food insecurity are the strongest drivers of accelerated heart aging, Mayo Clinic researchers reported in a new study.

Fretting over making ends meet ages your heart just as much as classic risk factors for heart disease, a new Mayo Clinic study says.

Financial strain and food insecurity are the strongest drivers of accelerated heart aging, researchers reported in the journal Mayo Clinic Proceedings.

The heart aging associated with money and food worries is similar to that caused by conventional risk factors like diabetes, high blood pressure and prior heart attack, researchers concluded.

This aging increases people's risk for heart disease and heart-related death, researchers said.

"Our study highlights the critical role of social determinants of health in cardiac aging and mortality," senior researcher Dr. Amir Lerman said in a news release. He's director of the Cardiovascular Research Center at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

For the study, researchers estimated the heart aging of more than 280,000 people treated by the Mayo Clinic between 2018 and 2023, using an AI-enabled electrocardiogram to track the wear-and-tear age of each person's heart compared to their birth age.

The team compared that data against a questionnaire that assessed the patients' social determinants of health -- factors like stress, exercise, social connection, housing, financial strain, food insecurity, transportation needs, nutrition and education.

These non-medical factors can have a significant impact on a person's health and risk of death, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says.

"Our current research was motivated by the observation that traditional risk factors do not explain and contribute equally to cardiovascular disease," Lerman said. "There are social factors that we do not identify or inquire about from our patients that may potentially reverse biological aging."

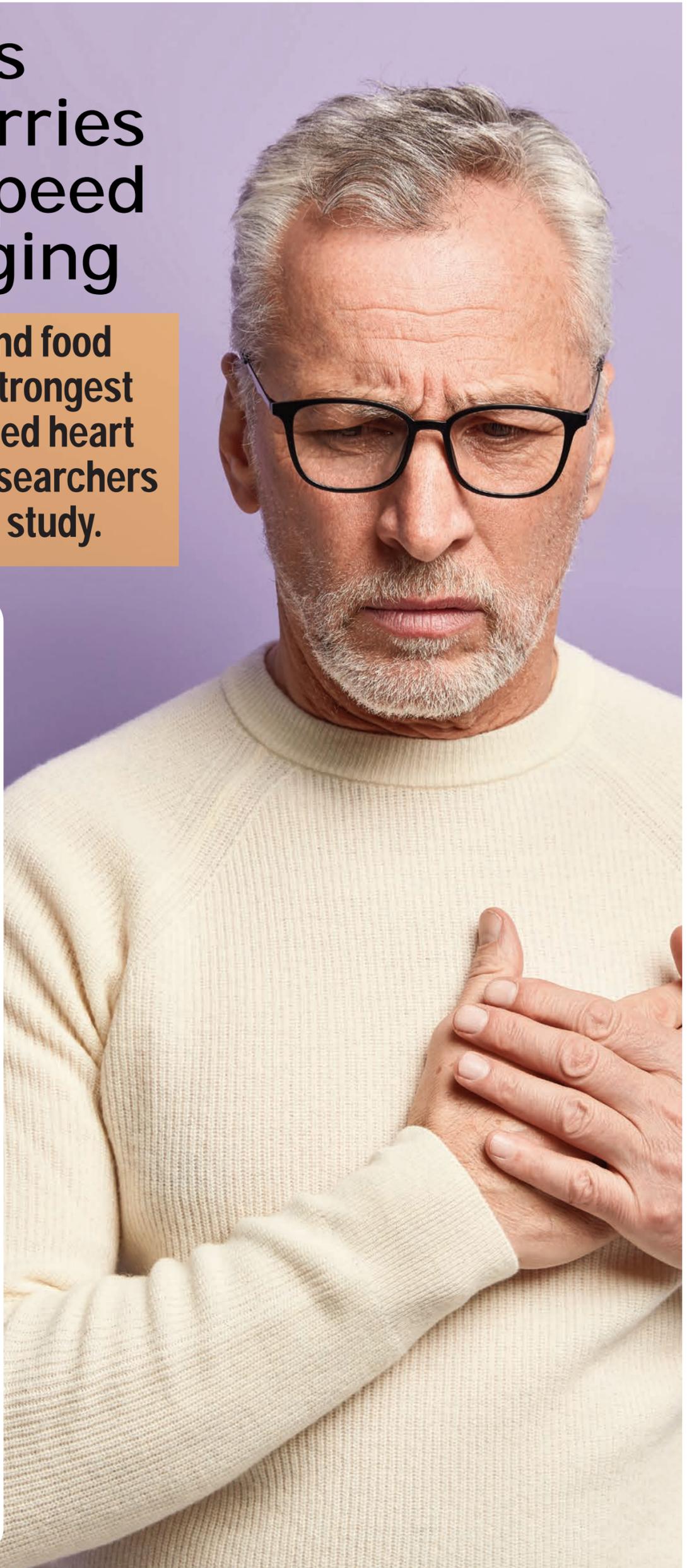
Overall, social determinants of health most influenced a person's cardiac aging, compared to traditional risk factors, results showed.

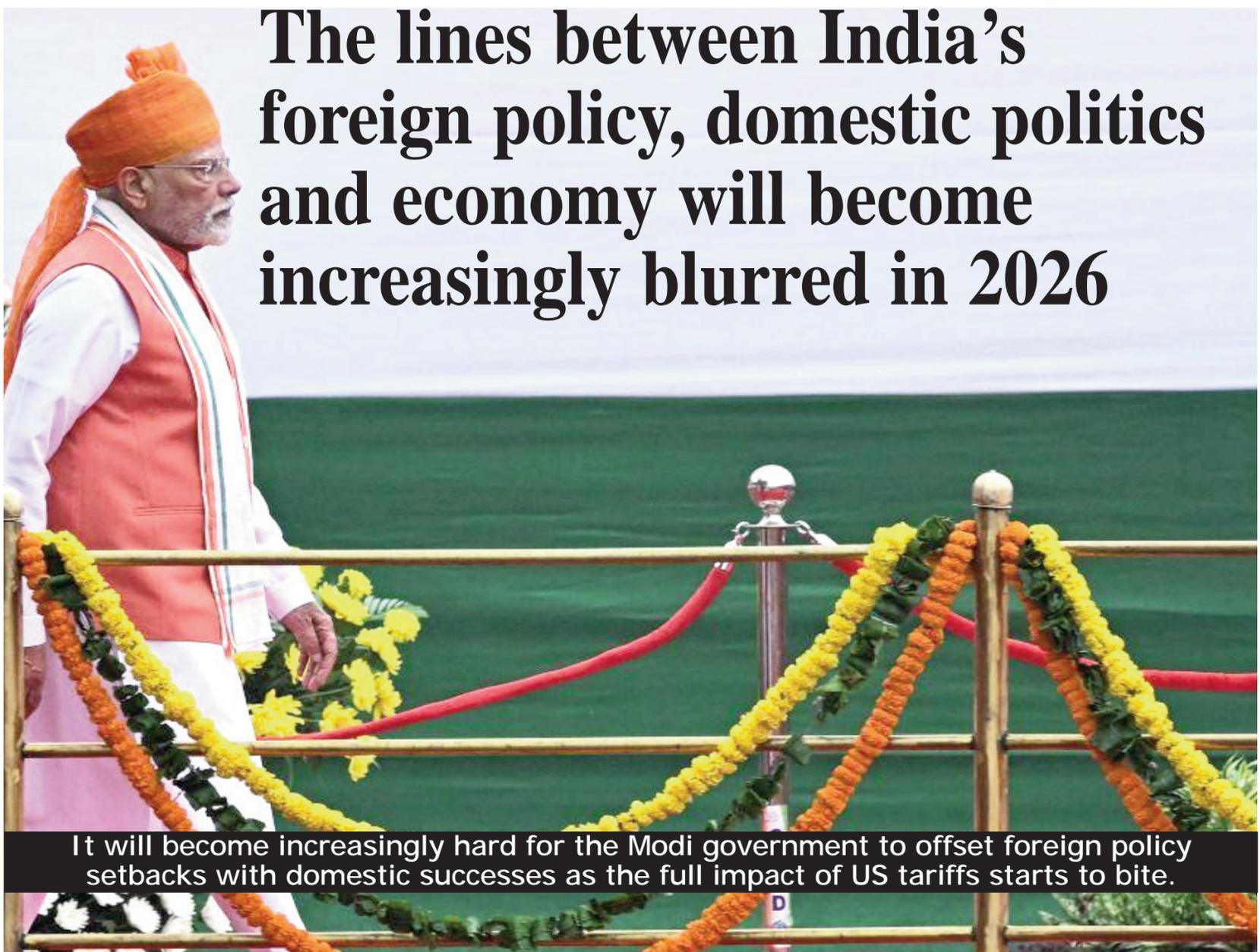
And among those social determinants of health, financial strain and food insecurity were the most impactful when it came to accelerated aging of a person's heart.

Researchers concluded that social factors like financial strain, housing and lack of exercise can be used to predict a person's risk of heart-related death, matching or surpassing conventional risk factors.

For example, financial strain increased risk of premature death by 60% and housing instability by 18%, compared to 10% for a previous history of heart attack and 27% for smoking, the study said.

"Identifying the most important risk factors for cardiac aging allows for targeted preventive intervention in the community and empowers physicians to engage in patient-centered care, addressing the social context that contributes to heart disease," Lerman said.





The lines between India's foreign policy, domestic politics and economy will become increasingly blurred in 2026

It will become increasingly hard for the Modi government to offset foreign policy setbacks with domestic successes as the full impact of US tariffs starts to bite.

Dr Chietigj Bajpaee

Senior Research Fellow for South Asia, Asia-Pacific Programme

2025 was arguably India's most challenging foreign policy year. The four-day conflict with Pakistan in May was followed by a downturn in India-US relations. The Trump administration imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India over its purchase of Russian crude and the failure to secure a trade deal by the agreed deadline. Adding insult to injury, Washington increased its outreach to Islamabad. There was also instability in India's neighbourhood, including the so-called Gen Z protests in Nepal and a downturn in relations with Bangladesh after Sheikh Hasina was removed from power and fled to India in 2024.

The Modi government sought to downplay these setbacks by pointing to successes on the domestic front, including electoral successes for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party in state elections, economic reforms – including reforms to its goods and services tax and new labour codes – and free trade deals with the UK, Oman and New Zealand. Despite the challenges of US tariffs, India remained the world's fastest growing major economy, recording 8.2 per cent growth between July and September thanks in part to its large domestic market.

However, in 2026 the lines between foreign policy, domestic politics and the economy are likely to become increasingly blurred. The latest GDP growth data was before the full force of Trump's tariffs came into effect, so they will begin to have a more sustained impact on the economy the longer they remain in place. Washington is also considering additional sanctions on countries doing business with Russia. This economic impact could have a knock-on effect on the country's politics as India will hold elections in four states and one Union Territory in 2026.

The Modi government will be hoping that trade diversion efforts help alleviate some of these pressures. A key watch-point will be the conclusion of a trade deal with the European Union, India's leading trade partner. However, the negotiations have been on and off since 2007 and a deadline to conclude a trade deal by the end of last year was missed. Both sides will be seeking to conclude the deal ahead of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's visit to India later this month.

Summit year

India will host a string of summits in 2026, including the

AI Impact Summit in February, the BRICS summit and possibly the Quad summit, which was scheduled to take place last year but postponed amid the downturn in India-US relations. India will also be hosting several key world leaders. Following Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India in December, Ursula Von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa will be chief guests at India's Republic Day parade later this month. Chinese President Xi Jinping may visit India for the BRICS summit, and US President Donald Trump could visit India if the Quad summit goes ahead – and New Delhi and Washington are able to resolve their differences and secure a trade deal.

While New Delhi will argue these developments vindicate its multi-aligned foreign policy, the cracks in India's longstanding commitment to strategic autonomy are becoming increasingly difficult to ignore. India's exclusion from the inaugural summit of the Trump administration's Pax Silica initiative in December was telling. India has long been touted as a beneficiary of the push to de-risk or diversify supply chains away from China but its exclusion from a key initiative on critical and emerging technologies signalled a weakening of this narrative.

India's absence from the Pax Silica summit partially reflects the bad blood in the India-US relationship and Washington's aversion to the vagaries of India's strategic autonomy as it prefers to do business with more reliable partners. But it also shows that India is increasingly viewed as a secondary player in the development of critical and emerging technologies. Although US tech companies like Google, Amazon and Microsoft have announced investment commitments in India, much of this is in data centres.

This points to several structural challenges facing India in its ambition to become a global manufacturing hub. An example of this can be seen in the semiconductor space. India is an important player in terms of chip design and last year Modi announced that India would deliver its first domestically produced chips. However, this will largely focus on less advanced (trailing-edge) chips. Chip production also requires water and electricity – areas where India faces acute shortages.

Strategic autonomy under increasing scrutiny

India's careful international balancing act was clear in its response to the US attack on Venezuela. Among BRICS members, India was the least vocal in its response to the attack and the capture of President Nicolás Maduro. Its

Ministry of External Affairs issued a brief statement that expressed 'deep concern' about recent developments, while the government's main focus has been to support and safeguard Indian nationals in Venezuela.

India's muted response partially reflects its limited interests in Venezuela; India has reduced its import of Venezuelan crude in response to Western sanctions on the country. It also reflects a desire to stay on good terms with Washington and secure a trade deal. This echoes New Delhi's muted response to other global flashpoints, including the conflicts in Gaza (to stay on good terms with Israel) and Ukraine (to stay on good terms with Russia).

As a result, Indian foreign policy can often come across as aloof. It professes a commitment to the rules-based international order, including principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the equality of states, but it is often quiet when it comes to upholding these principles. India claims to be a 'voice' of the Global South, but when Venezuela is attacked, its response is slow and silent.

In 2026, India will seek to renew its Global South credentials through its BRICS chairmanship by presenting a non-Western worldview – but not explicitly anti-Western. This will likely entail downplaying some of the more contentious areas of the BRICS agenda, such as de-dollarization – which has incurred the wrath of the Trump administration – reframing this as a push to settle trade in national currencies. India will also seek some alignment with the US G20 presidency. However, it remains to be seen if New Delhi can pull off this balancing act as other BRICS members (including China, Russia and Iran) have historically been more willing to ruffle the feathers of the United States.

Closer to home, New Delhi will seek to reset relations with Nepal and Bangladesh after both countries hold elections in early 2026. Relations with Pakistan, however, will remain precarious. The silver lining is that both sides have exercised a degree of strategic restraint fuelled by external pressure and the threat of nuclear weapons. Terror attacks in New Delhi and Islamabad in November did not trigger military action. While growth and development remain the government's priorities, Modi's tough-on-security credentials will compel the government to respond in the event of another high-profile attack. Hyper-nationalist rhetoric in both countries and the unpredictability of non-state armed groups mean the risk of accidental escalation will remain high in 2026.



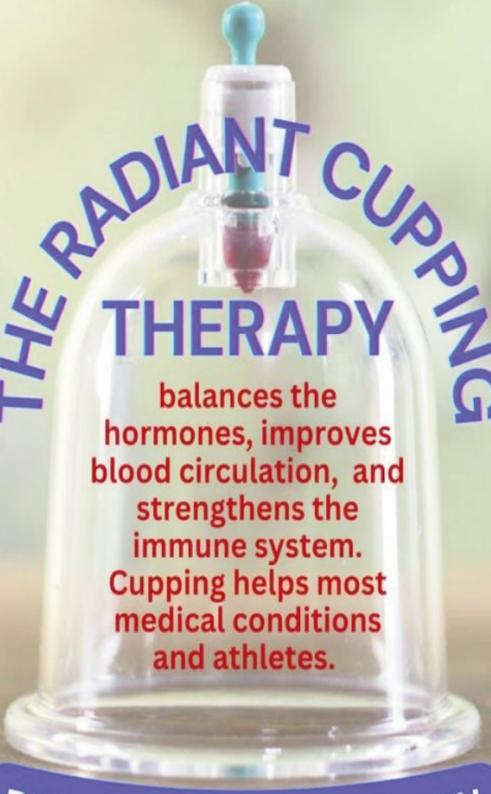
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In his current role as Chief Deputy for Fort Bend County District Clerk, held for the past four years, he manages key administrative functions and works closely with local departments and residents.

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