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## FROM ABU DHABI TO KARACHI — HOUSTON SHINES IN GLOBAL IFTAR CELEBRATION



Members of the organizing committee with Mayor John Whitmire, Congressman Al Green, and distinguished guests, celebrating unity and harmony at the 27th Annual Houston Iftar.

Houston: As every year, this year Iftar dinner in the United States was Hosted by the Mayor of Houston, as well, the largest annual Houston held, with over 2,000 attendees. *Continued on page 12*

## Sara Khan Surges as Primaries Force Major Runoffs



In a historic night for Fort Bend County, results from the March 3, 2026, primary elections show Sara Khan leading the charge for County Treasurer. Khan, a prominent *Continued on page 12*



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### US Senate rejects bid to limit Trump's Iran war powers

WASHINGTON: The US Senate on Wednesday rejected a resolution aimed at curbing President Donald Trump's authority to continue military strikes on Iran, in a narrow congressional show of support for a conflict launched without explicit approval from lawmakers.

The bipartisan measure, *Continued on page 12*

### UN chief says 'migration is not a crisis,' urges global cooperation

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged countries on Friday to reject fear-driven narratives on migration, stressing that "migration is not *Continued on page 12*

### Pentagon tells Congress no sign that Iran was going to attack US first, sources say

Trump administration officials acknowledged in closed-door *Continued on page 13*

### US Marines fired on protesters storming consulate in Karachi, US officials say

United States Marines opened fire on demonstrators during the storming of the Karachi consulate *Continued on page 12*

### Young Faham Ali Laid to Rest in Houston; Community Mourns a Heartbreaking Loss

HOUSTON: The Houston community gathered in deep sorrow on March 5, 2026, to offer the Janazah prayer for young Faham Ali, beloved son of Friends of Karachi Admin member Ameer Ali, who passed away on March 3 while undergoing heart surgery. *Continued on page 13*




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# Water concerns

RECENT reports that India plans to invest \$60bn in increasing its water storage capacity on the Jhelum and Chenab rivers confirm official concerns that New Delhi is weaponising the shared resource against Pakistan. The increase in storage capacity from roughly 15 days to nearly two months will expand India's holding ability on the rivers allocated to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty, giving it unprecedented leverage over downstream flows. In an agrarian economy like ours, where sowing cycles rely on predictable river discharge, even brief interruptions can cause lasting damage. A 55- to 60-day window to regulate flows could enable India to create artificial scarcity during critical crop cycles, especially during the low-flow winter months. The reverse scenario is as alarming. During monsoon surges, large upstream storage gives India the capacity

to release accumulated water in concentrated volumes, flooding downstream regions.

Although the IWT has survived wars and diplomatic ruptures since it was signed in 1960, India's decision to place it "in abeyance", followed by a series of contentious steps, has unsettled a framework long valued for its predictability and stability. Against this backdrop, the recent directive by the Court of Arbitration instructing India to share specific project-related data for the dams it is building on Pakistani rivers has significance beyond procedural compliance. It is also a reminder that the IWT's dispute resolution mechanisms remain active, even amid strained Pakistan-India ties. It reinforces the principle that transboundary river management cannot be altered through unilateral political decisions. That said, legal or diplomatic

wins on their own will not protect us from hydrological risks. Pakistan must move with urgency on two fronts: it must leverage diplomatic and legal avenues to press India to uphold its IWT obligations; and it should strengthen its own policy preparedness to successfully meet any Indian attempt to weaponise water — whether through engineered flooding or by restricting flows that sustain Pakistan's agriculture. That, however, does not mean allowing some circles to advance controversial agendas, including the construction of contentious new flood reservoirs. Sindh, the lower riparian province, has serious reservations about such proposals and has pointed out that even existing river flows often fail to meet drinking water, irrigation and ecological needs downstream. Building additional storage in an already water-deficient system risks aggravating these issues.

# Human smuggling solution

The recent announcement that Pakistan, Italy, Spain and Greece have reached a consensus to establish legal migration pathways while jointly combating human smuggling marks a new beginning after several years of failed attempts to curb illegal migration operations. These operations take advantage of the desperation of economically-deprived Pakistanis or oppressed minorities who are seeking a better life in affluent countries, especially in Europe.

While there is still much work to be done before formal agreements can be signed, there have already been some breakthroughs on smaller levels, including recent deals with Italy for 10,500 work visas for Pakistani workers in sectors including shipbreaking, hospitality, healthcare and

agriculture. Many of these sectors are already popular among illegal migrants from Pakistan, so the visa deal is essentially a way to formalise workforce participation and bring them out of the dark.

Work visa agreements benefit all parties, since they help host countries address under-the-table employment and the use of grey channels. At the same time, Pakistan's oversupply of less educated youngsters would find many opportunities in physical, labour-intensive professions, which are generally unpopular among local citizens in most wealthy countries. And because work visas would give workers legal status, they would also be more likely to use formal banking channels, especially for remitting money.

Pakistan's recent efforts to reduce illegal migration have already been bearing fruit — the European states reportedly said there has been a 47% reduction in illegal migration cases, and the availability of a legal option will obviously deliver another blow to traffickers. The new understanding between Pakistan and the three European countries is proof that migration issues can have win-win solutions reachable through diplomatic means, as long as the parties approach talks earnestly. Aside from legal migration pathways, additional support to crack down on human traffickers will also help clear up the situation on the ground here and encourage more people to choose safe and legal channels.

# Iran War, Election Season and the Strain on Washington: From the Battlefield to Congress

WASHINGTON — What began as a large scale military operation against Iran has quickly evolved into a confrontation with implications far beyond the initial airstrikes. The effects are visible not only across the Middle East but also inside the American political system, where questions of authority, strategy and electoral consequence are unfolding alongside developments on the battlefield.

President Donald Trump has adopted an uncompromising tone. According to Reuters, he warned that any significant Iranian retaliation would be met with force "not seen before." Additional reporting suggests that the administration's approach may extend beyond a limited exchange of strikes, raising the prospect of a longer campaign. Statements interpreted by analysts as encouraging internal dissent within Iran have fueled speculation that Washington's objectives may include more than deterrence.

Yet in the United States, the most immediate controversy centers less on the scale of the military action than on the constitutional process behind it. Several lawmakers, as reported by The Associated Press, have called for a vote under the War Powers framework, arguing that Congress must assert its role before the conflict deepens. Legal analysts note that once hostilities begin, Congress has limited leverage beyond funding restrictions or formal resolutions. The Washington Post has reported on bipartisan efforts to

introduce measures aimed at constraining further escalation, reflecting a broader institutional tension between the executive and legislative branches.

The debate has exposed familiar fault lines in American governance: the balance between presidential authority in matters of national security and Congress's constitutional power to declare war. NPR has highlighted that the strike was carried out without explicit prior congressional authorization, intensifying partisan divisions and prompting renewed scrutiny of the War Powers Act's practical limits.

Meanwhile, events on the ground have complicated the strategic landscape. Reuters reported that following actions by Hezbollah, the Iranian aligned group in Lebanon, Israel carried out strikes inside Lebanese territory, increasing the risk of regional spillover. Reports of American military casualties have further sharpened the domestic stakes, as the human cost of the conflict becomes more immediate to U.S. voters and lawmakers.

Iran's leadership has signaled defiance and retaliation. Regional exchanges have reinforced the impression that Tehran does not intend to confine the confrontation strictly to its own borders. The strategic question now confronting policymakers is whether the objective is calibrated pressure or a more fundamental reshaping of the regional balance.

This is where the language of



By Raja Zahid  
Akhtar Khanzada

"regime change" demands careful scrutiny. Iran is often described as a system centered on a single supreme authority. In reality, while the Supreme Leader holds sweeping powers, the Islamic Republic is structured around a dense institutional network: the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts, the Expediency Council, the Revolutionary Guards, the judiciary and an extensive security apparatus. Together, these bodies provide continuity that does not depend exclusively on one individual.

Analysts have pointed out that leadership transitions in Iran have historically been managed within this institutional framework. Following earlier assassinations and even the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1989, succession occurred through established mecha-

nisms rather than systemic collapse. More recently, after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in 2024, constitutional procedures were activated without destabilizing the state.

A Reuters analysis noted that prior intelligence assessments raised concerns that targeting the Supreme Leader could empower more hard line elements, particularly factions aligned with the Revolutionary Guards. The implication is that removing a central figure does not necessarily dismantle the governing structure; in some cases, it may consolidate authority within more security oriented institutions.

The debate has been further complicated by questions surrounding the administration's public justification for the strikes. According to Reuters, some claims advanced in the early narrative prompted scrutiny within U.S. intelligence circles, adding to congressional unease. In Washington, contested war rationales often intensify media examination and accelerate polarization in public opinion.

All of this is unfolding during primary election season. Across multiple states, Democratic and Republican voters are selecting their party nominees ahead of November's general elections. Political scientists have long observed that external conflicts can produce a temporary consolidation of public support behind national leadership, the so called "rally around the flag" effect. Some critics argue that the timing of the escalation may influence the elec-

toral environment, strengthening a national security message for Republican candidates.

However, recent polling cited by Reuters and other outlets suggests that the American public remains divided. A significant share of voters expresses skepticism or opposition, particularly if the conflict appears open ended. Analysts caution that prolonged engagement, rising casualties or economic repercussions could erode rather than enhance political standing. Inflation, domestic policy and economic stability remain dominant concerns for many voters.

In that sense, the war operates simultaneously on three fronts: the military theater in the Middle East, the constitutional arena in Washington and the electoral landscape across the United States.

For countries such as Pakistan and others in the region, the lesson is not to assume that political change in Iran would follow a simple or linear path. The Iranian system functions less as a personalist regime than as a layered institutional order. If external actors seek lasting transformation, they confront not only individuals but a structure designed for continuity under pressure. And if the goal is limited coercion, the risk remains that escalation could redraw regional calculations in ways difficult to control.

As November approaches, the intersection of war and politics may prove as consequential in Washington as events unfolding on the battlefield.

# Lessons from the Taliban

*Pakistan must use all means to eliminate terrorist networks operating from Afghan soil.*

Muhammad Amir Rana

A POSITIVE that can be extracted from the ongoing confrontation with Afghanistan is that Pakistan has taken an ideological turn before it could drift further into 'institutionalised radicalism'. The worst aspect, meanwhile, is the loss of lives on both sides, and the shattered dream of a friendly state on Pakistan's western border as a strategic shield against India and geo-economic connectivity beyond Afghanistan and Central Asia up to the borders of Europe.

It may be hard for many to grasp the argument that Pakistan has taken a turn away from institutionalised radicalism — especially those who believe that the country is already suffering on account of religious extremism. There's little doubt that religious radicalism had been a power elite project that was nurtured for multiple purposes — crafting national cohesion, cultivating proxies for geopolitical aims and shaping a strategic outlook in which the West and the Gulf were allies during its formative phase. Faith was also used to give the masses a sense of belonging to the state and to make them obedient to authority, rather than to grant them civil rights.

The power elites had crafted the system for the masses whom they sought to rule, though it held little meaning in their own lives. But they failed to achieve their aims of political and national cohesion through religion. Policies that allowed madrassahs and religious groups — ranging from moderate to violent — to proliferate failed both state and society. Meanwhile, the major question of national cohesion still looms over the power elites: the Baloch insurgency,

rights movements from Gwadar to Azad Kashmir, and a growing sense of ethnic sub-nationalism have weakened the system.

The 1973 Constitution was the best thing that happened to the country. It could have created the needed cohesion among the federating units and among the masses. However, the Constitution, severely distorted over the years, was unable to fulfil that utopian design. The rulers, instead, preferred to exercise power in a manner resembling the Gulf monarchies, with a worldview rooted in an ambition to become specialised security providers to the Gulf and the wider region.

The enthusiasm the power elites showed after the 2021 Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, looking at it as a strategic victory over a superpower, had two inbuilt dangers. First, the ideological influence of the Taliban — had the state here not changed course — would have grown inside the country, particularly among low-income groups, which comprise some 65 per cent of the population, while the rest would have gravitated towards opposing camps, mainly sub-national political, social and violent movements. This would have deepened the dangerous ideological and political divide, and the Taliban-style governance model would have become an attraction for madrassahs that produce thousands of students with a narrow worldview. Second, Pakistan's geopolitical and diplomatic space would have been eroded, a development disastrous for an already weak economy.

The Taliban's stubbornness and short-sightedness taught the power elites here a lesson, and they quickly changed course before it was too

late. Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, which the state launched after the Taliban's attacks inside Pakistan, is a clear indication of the growing divide between the two countries. That divide runs deeper than differences in religious interpretation; it reflects the divergence between two states with distinct characters. Their future lies in pragmatic cooperation, not in ideological illusions.

If Pakistan refrains from provoking or using the anti-Taliban resistance front against them, there is a possibility of a broader shift in thinking about the use and exploitation of proxies, as was done in the case of the Taliban. This is a different world: the utility of proxies and tolerance for them at the regional and global levels are rapidly declining, as such actors often become a burden and prolong conflicts. China and the Central Asian states may not support such ventures, and without their consent, any adventurism would be costly and could prolong chaos in the region for decades.

Pakistan will have to focus on eliminating terrorist networks operating from Afghanistan using all means — political and coercive. The direction that has been set is the right one, and it can build pressure on the Taliban regime to review its attitude and policies regarding ties with globally designated terrorist groups operating from its soil.

A major challenge that requires greater attention from state institutions is the eradication of support bases and sources of inspiration for terrorists who align themselves with the Taliban and still operate in the country. This inspiration takes

many forms: direct support; and the idealisation of the Taliban governance model and advocacy for implementing a similar system in Pakistan.

Though state institutions have achieved certain successes, many leading radical religious figures of the past, who once produced jihadist literature, nurtured extremist mindsets and developed nexuses with international extremist groups, have recently changed their tone, presenting themselves as moderates and patriots, while distancing themselves from the Taliban and other terrorist groups. This change is welcome, but their political economy still thrives on the business of hate and state patronage. If the state regulates religious institutions, confines them to their scholarly role, and refrains from using them for political purposes, the inflated number of such institutions would gradually be rationalised, and they would begin functioning according to their mandate.

The state has also taken initiatives to break the power of violent radical groups, such as in the case of the TLP; but much still needs to be done. The misuse of blasphemy laws, especially by organised groups, often with the support of officials, has been one of the worst forms of institutionalised radicalism. The system has been so corrupted and distorted that it has crossed the boundaries of humanity. State institutions must distance themselves from such spoilers.

This will be possible only if state institutions build trust in constitutional and democratic norms rather than remaining hostage to religiously inspired groups, which have mastered the art of shifting their position in keeping with elite interests.

*The writer is a security analyst.*

# Young and restless

*The young feel ignored and excluded even though it is they who will determine Pakistan's future.*

Maleha Lodhi

PAKISTAN'S population is among the youngest in the world. It will also stay a young country for at least the next two decades. But who are the young? What do they think? What are their aspirations about their future and the country? How politically engaged are they? Can they be a transformative force?

First, some statistics to set the context. The 2023 census put Pakistan's population at 241.5 million people (an estimated 256m today). Of this 67 per cent or 160m are below the age of 30. The youth bulge is reflected in the fact that 26pc or 63m people are between ages 15-29. This represents the largest youth population in the country's history. Generation Z number around 71m or 29.5pc of the population. This cohort (ranging from 14 to 29 years old) is roughly those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s.

The socioeconomic profile of youth shows around 27pc are still illiterate. This is the consequence of the fact that about 26m school-age children still have no access to school. It means millions grow up without any education, which constrains their employment chances and leaves them economically disadvantaged. The World Bank estimates 37pc of those aged 15 to 24 are not in employment, education, or training.

Although more research is needed into what young people think and want, studies and surveys undertaken in the past offer insights into their attitude, concerns and aspirations. The most comprehensive was UNDP's Pakistan National Human Development report of 2017, Unleashing the Potential of a Young Pakistan, whose findings

remain relevant. Other studies include the British Council's Next Generation report of 2023, and the prolific writings of Adil Najam, who co-authored the UNDP report with Faisal Bari and contributed a chapter on youth to the book I edited two years ago, Pakistan: the Search for Stability.

If we consider some of the research and survey findings and supplement those with anecdotal evidence, some key themes emerge. It is important to keep in mind that given Pakistan's ethnic, cultural, income, religious and educational diversity, and rural-urban divide, we should avoid painting a picture of homogeneity as youth attitudes vary across these cleavages, especially as young people have different notions of their identity. Nevertheless, some common themes can be identified in their outlook.

A significant expectation recorded in all research is that they should be given attention and listened to, which they find is not the case. The young have high hopes of the future but also apprehensions as they see the environment — and opportunities — around them as unequal and unpredictable. As Adil puts it "to be young in Pakistan is to be highly agitated and very often very angry". The Next Generation report, however, finds they remain optimistic that things will improve and despite pressures, prefer to remain in the country rather than go abroad. They have a strong sense of national affiliation and pride. Their high aspirations are both a motivation and source of frustration when confronted with obstacles. This makes them a restless generation that wants greater space to realise their goals and ambitions.

The country's overall political and eco-

nomically obviously affects their lives and shapes their experiences and outlook. Young people are most concerned about their economic future, especially at a time when economic conditions are challenging, competition is intense, job opportunities limited and economic growth anaemic. A Gallup Pakistan survey in 2023, using data from the Labour Force Survey of 2020-2021, found that of the youth population 21.8m were neither enrolled in school or training institute, nor in any employment. This is unsurprising because with 3.5m being added annually to the labour force, around 3m jobs need to be generated every year. This isn't happening due to stagnant economic growth and investment, creating generational discontent — a potential driver of future volatility and unrest.

Technology has a defining and empowering role in youth lives. They have grown up with the internet and digital technology makes them a more 'connected' and informed generation. Online platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to voice their views as also their frustration. The Next Generation report finds digital opportunities are also being leveraged for self-empowerment and e-commerce. Social media activism is a key characteristic of Gen Z, amplifying their views. Three in five Pakistani youth use the internet according to the Next Generation survey and practically all internet users are on social media. Nearly half of young people regularly post political views on social media.

Turning to their political attitudes and political engagement, there is a high degree of mistrust of the political system and conventional politics. But the young also want a voice in the political process and policymak-

ing. They feel their concerns are ignored by political leaders and are sceptical about the ability of traditional politicians to represent them. Consequently, their low political engagement, confirmed by surveys, reflects disillusionment, not lack of interest. They see traditional political parties to be out of touch with youth. There is no question, however, that Imran Khan and PTI reached out to the youth to inspire and mobilise them. But this process was halted by state policies of repression. How far this discourages what emerged as higher youth participation in politics remains to be seen.

As a voting bloc young people's potential to influence elections is significant as they constitute 46pc of the electorate. But their historically low political engagement is reflected in their low voter turnout. A 2021 Gallup Pakistan report, relying on exit polls conducted in successive elections since 1988, found usually only a quarter of young voters cast the ballot. In recent elections, their participation was a third compared to the average overall turnout of 52pc. But in the 2024 election, more young voters cast the ballot than previously, suggesting the trend moving towards higher youth participation. If mobilised by any party, young voters can be a potential game changer in shaping the electoral outcome.

It is the young who will determine Pakistan's future. Their needs and aspirations are ignored only at great peril to the country's stability. After all, youth discontent has produced social instability and political change across our region.

*The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK and UN.*

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# Budget 2026-27 as a bridge

*The next budget should signal that Pakistan is preparing to graduate from stabilisation to growth.*

**Ishrat Husain**

THE federal budget for 2026-27 won't be just another annual ritual. It will likely be the penultimate budget before Pakistan's Extended Fund Facility with the IMF concludes end-2027.

If the prime minister's stated aim to exit the IMF programme decisively is to be realised, this budget must serve as the bridge between stabilisation and sustainable growth.

The government deserves credit for meeting the performance criteria and structural benchmarks agreed with the IMF. Macroeconomic stability has been restored, inflation moderated, the exchange rate steadied and fiscal discipline improved. The task now is to move from horizontal drift to upward ascent.

Some of the ongoing reforms such as the national tariff policy, separation of tax policy, deregulation of wheat and sugar trade, FBR digitisation, Discos' privatisation and third-party access to oil and gas companies should be carried forward. It won't be easy; the external environment is turning slippery.

For two decades, developing countries benefited from liberal trade regimes, lowered tariffs in advanced economies, concessional financing, generous multilateral flows, buoyant FDI, easier labour mobility and technology transfer. These are narrowing. Protectionism is resurging. Geopolitical fragmentation is reshaping supply chains. Aid and concessional flows are tightening. Labour visas are becoming restrictive.

Meanwhile, competitors aren't standing still. India's recent trade

deals with EU and the US, Bangladesh's preferential access for apparel exports using US cotton and imported inputs and Pakistan's own renegotiation of the EU's GSP-Plus in 2027 must be factored into budget strategy. One can't assume past export advantages will persist. The 2026-27 budget must comply with IMF conditionalities while clearly articulating a post-2027 growth roadmap anchored in inclusive, sustained expansion, job creation and export dynamism.

Pakistan has shown resolve on the external front against a formidable adversary. Yet internal security, particularly terrorism in Balochistan, KP and recently Islamabad, has shaken investor confidence. Mineral development plan, oil and gas exploration, maritime export strategy, expanded trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia and Gwadar's meaningful industrialisation can succeed if security is restored to the level achieved after the APS tragedy in Peshawar. All economic activity rests on the preservation of life and property. Economic policy can't compensate for insecurity, and can only be built on stability.

A second chronic weakness is coordination failure among ministries and between the centre and provinces. Two constitutional forums exist to address this: National Economic Council and the Council of Common Interests (CCI). Yet both remain underutilised. The NEC, with the Planning Commission as its secretariat, should meet regularly, not simply to endorse the Annual Development Plan (ADP) but also to a) approve an integrated budgetary

framework paper within which federal and provincial budgets are formulated; b) review NFC awards when consensus breaks down; c) serve as a clearing house for cross-ministerial policies to ensure consistency, coherence and stakeholder consultation; d) monitor policy implementation, consolidated fiscal operations and guide corrective action where variances are significant. In the past, well-intentioned export policies have been undermined by contradictory tax, tariff and energy pricing measures. Policy coherence must replace policy contradiction.

The CCI, now equipped with a full-time secretariat, should proactively address contentious matters such as water apportionment, telemetry and the weighted average cost of gas. These issues, if unresolved, will breed fiscal and political friction.

Third, line ministries and provincial departments must shift from process-driven administration to performance-driven management. Each ministry should prepare annual business plans aligned with budget allocations and enter into performance agreements with the PM or chief ministers. Clear, measurable key performance indicators should be monitored periodically and form the basis for evaluation. High performers should be rewarded. Similar agreements should cascade down to public sector corporations, autonomous bodies and attached departments. With agreements in place, directives outside their scope should cease.

This will require amending the Rules of Business and rationalising

the size of the PM and CM secretariats. Endless summary re-examinations breed risk aversion and buck-passing. Governance must be defined by accountability for results, not paperwork.

Fourth, Pakistan's real sectors, including industry and agriculture, have been battered. Domestic productive capacity has shrunk. De-industrialisation is visible. Imports of base industrial raw materials and components have risen making downstream industries noncompetitive. Tax and tariff structures, energy pricing, R&D allocations, skilled manpower expansion, industry-academia collaboration, financial sector engagement and integration into global value chains must all align with the single aim of raising productivity and competitiveness.

The PSDP and provincial ADP allocations should prioritise productivity-enhancing investments. Large conglomerates that have shown financial muscle — evident in PIA's privatisation — should be incentivised to undertake long-gestation, capital-intensive projects, leveraging capital markets and global joint ventures. Industrial revival cannot be left to rhetoric and needs coordinated incentives, patient capital and policy consistency. A country with a vast irrigation system should not be importing \$10 billion of foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials. Technological advances and access to finance and knowledge should help small farmers raise the productivity of their farms and switch to remunerative crops, livestock and marine products.

Finally, the long-pending regulatory guillotine must be completed.

Outdated, restrictive and redundant federal, provincial and local regulations should be eliminated. Instead, a unified Pakistan business portal that integrates permits, licences and NOCs — along the lines of the Pakistan Single Window — should simplify business entry and compliance.

Special Economic Zones should be given operational autonomy, with utilities and facilitation services delivered seamlessly. Special Technology Zones should provide land, power and water to domestic and foreign firms for setting up data centres. Provinces should consolidate labour laws into a unified code that ensures dignity, reskilling, fair compensation, housing, medical care and post-retirement security by revising and consolidating various prevalent schemes such as Social Security, Workers Welfare Fund, EOBI, Profit Participation Funds, apprenticeship programmes, etc.

Ease of doing business is a system, not a slogan. Many of these reforms extend beyond a single fiscal year. But a clear direction must be set now. Abrupt policy reversals, discretionary interventions and unpredictable regulatory actions must be avoided. The next budget should signal that Pakistan is preparing to graduate from stabilisation under IMF supervision to self-sustaining growth anchored in institutional coherence, security, competitiveness and private sector dynamism. If this budget lays that foundation, exiting the IMF programme in 2027 will be more than procedural; it will be meaningful.

*The writer is a former governor of the State Bank of Pakistan.*

# Outrage abroad

*UK MPs urge fair trial for Imran Khan as Islamabad court fixes sentence suspension pleas*

It was a happening day for former Prime Minister Imran Khan as his plight resonated in the British Parliament. Legislators called for due medical treatment as well as a fair trial for the jailed leader. The House of Commons also called upon the British government to "scrutinise" the issue and to "intensify diplomatic engagement with Islamabad and consider linking aid and trade to human rights benchmarks".

While acknowledging that Pakistan's judicial processes are an internal issue, the peers across the party lines pressed for "respecting fundamental freedoms, including the right to a fair trial for all including Imran Khan..." They urged the British foreign minister to "step up" to what has caused "an international outrage". This move coincides with the concern expressed by 14 former cricket captains, in an open letter,

demanding better treatment for the former skipper, in accordance with his stature as "a national leader and global sporting icon".

As a mark of consolation, however, the Islamabad High Court has, after a long hiatus, fixed for hearing this month petitions by Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi seeking suspension of sentences in the Al-Qadir Trust and Toshakhana cases. This has surely come as a relief after hectic per-

suasion from the lawyers of the incarcerated couple, as a divisive and clueless PTI is seen engaged in internal bickering and blame-game.

Khan's sisters, the other day, charge-sheeted the who's who of the party, including its chairman, Barrister Ali Gohar, for inaction and being "oblivious" to PTI founder's deteriorating eye infection. A lacklustre attitude from PTI lawmakers is proving to be one of

the main predicaments in charting a way out of the mess.

The bad press that the government is getting abroad, coupled with unrest at home, necessitates a lawful solution. The way forward is to let the courts dispense justice in real time. A huddle of all political forces for soliciting a grand consensus in the larger national interest is indispensable. Let the soaring political mercury come down to usher in political stability.

# Feeding isn't enough

*Can families afford and access enough good food?*

**Mohamed Yahya**

A SILENT crisis is unfolding on our plates: diets built on grains and sugar leave many undernourished while diabetes continues to rise. Pakistan does not lack food, but many still struggle to access a balanced diet. A policy shift from a 'food security' approach to a 'food systems transformation' one could be a gamechanger.

Walk through any Pakistani bazaar or sit for a cup of tea and one thing is hard to miss: sugar. It is cheap, plentiful and woven into daily life. The human cost is less visible. Pakistan's children are among the most malnourished in the region. Thirty-four per cent of under-fives are stunted, and diet-related diseases are rising. According to the International Diabetes Federation, Pakistan has the highest prevalence of adult diabetes in the world, with approximately 34.5 million people living with the condition — a prevalence rate of between 26.7pc and 30.8pc.

What looks like a dietary habit

is really a macroeconomic outcome: a system that prioritises calories above nutrition. For decades, Pakistan's food policy has been shaped by an understandable preoccupation: ensuring sufficient staples for a fast-growing population size. The central questions were logistical and political — wheat procurement, strategic reserves, administered prices. Those instruments mattered in a world where famine was a real fear. But the national challenge has evolved. Today, the test is not simply whether Pakistan can feed its people, but whether families can afford and access sufficiently diverse foodstuffs to nourish themselves.

The latest global food security report estimates that 60.3pc of Pakistanis cannot afford a healthy diet. Some 16.5pc are undernourished, even as obesity has risen to 23pc.

New evidence from a Food Systems Transformation initiative led by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United

Nations — clarifies the access problem: while Pakistan's overall dietary energy availability is adequate, the national food supply falls short of what is needed to support healthy diets in line with national guidelines. Significant gaps persist in the availability of key food groups, including fruits and vegetables, pulses and legumes. These shortages directly weaken the population's access to — and therefore ability to choose — a healthy diet.

Pakistan needs a policy shift. Staple-focused food security is not food systems transformation. The first manages commodities; the second manages the entire system — how resources are allocated, what is grown and processed, and how those choices shape diets, health and sustainability.

Three things currently hamper this transformation. First, policy remains narrowly focussed on the availability of staple foods, technically limiting the definition of food security. Second, the institu-

tional architecture treats food security almost exclusively as an agricultural problem, designing and implementing policies through that lens. And third, there is a complete absence of modern food systems governance capable of integrating the diverse actors, factors and processes that ultimately shape food security outcomes.

Immediate action on four tracks could transform Pakistan's approach. First, create incentives for dietary diversity. Rather than privileging a narrow set of staple crops, policy should support the production and affordability of nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, pulses and, where appropriate, animal-source foods, without undermining price stability. Second, reduce food loss and waste. Cutting post-harvest losses in the agri-food sector, estimated at 20 to 40pc, may be the fastest way to expand the effective supply of nutritious foods without requiring more land or water. Third, build awareness and

a strong political and social constituency for healthy diets. Until citizens demand better nutrition and leaders see electoral value in delivering it, progress will be slow. Fourth, use fiscal policy to make healthy choices easier. A nutrition-first agenda cannot rely on messaging alone; it requires coherent taxation, subsidies and public procurement that shift relative prices and incentives, including reviewing commodity support, assessing the health impact of food taxes, and using targeted social protection to improve access to diverse diets.

Pakistan has spent decades asking: do we have enough wheat? The more urgent question today is: can families afford and access enough good food? A food system that reliably delivers healthy diets is not a luxury agenda. It is economic policy, resilience policy and ultimately, nation-building.

*The writer is UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan.*

## The invisible hand at 250

*Pakistan's policymakers need to channel the invisible hand to bring about social order and economic opportunities.*

**Aqdas Afzal**

AS THE US gears up to celebrate 250 years of independence this coming July, another anniversary is quietly being celebrated in economic circles around the world. This year marks 250 years since the publication of Adam Smith's monumental *The Wealth of Nations*. Like Newton and Darwin, this book truly established Smith's ideas as foundational for the coming generations.

Smith is considered the father of modern economics. 'The invisible hand' is one of Smith's most famous ideas; when individuals pursue their own self-interest in a free market, they unintentionally benefit society as a whole. Smith's invisible hand is often employed during protracted debates on the efficacy of market capitalism. Some people believe that this idea establishes the indubitable superiority of free or unregulated markets over government planning and state regulation — the notion that unregulated markets always provide superior economic outcomes.

Libertarian scholars have interpreted Smith's work to reject any regulatory or redistributive (taxes) role for the state, arguing that endless gains accrued through unregulated markets are vastly superior, while the state is nothing more than a source of

inefficiency. Like Victorian-era children, libertarians argue, the state may be seen, but not heard. According to libertarians, Adam Smith's message may be best summarised by the catchphrase 'greed is good'.

Such interpretations of the invisible hand, however, are largely misconceptions. Smith's ideas need to be understood in the context of immense social upheaval in Britain, beginning in the 17th century with the Civil War. Social turmoil continued into the 18th century and by the end of the century, Britain faced full-scale rebellion and secession in its North American colonies leading to the US Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

Given such turbulent times, social contract scholars turned their attention to the question of how social order and peace could be achieved and maintained. Thomas Hobbes argued for a powerful state to guarantee peace, while John Locke proposed a limited government and minimal state to preserve the people's 'natural rights' to life, liberty and property.

Smith came of age at a time when social contract thinking was resonant. For this reason, Smith's core ideas were actually an extension of social contract thinking, that is, how to achieve social order, peace and harmony. Smith

was not a one-dimensional promoter of unregulated markets. Rather, the invisible hand was Smith's attempt to proffer a means for achieving and maintaining social order during turbulent times.

Interestingly, Smith was not anti-government or anti-state as he enshrined the invisible hand firmly within the political institutions of the state, that is within a governance and enforcement framework. The invisible hand or unregulated markets only come into action once a functioning government precedes them. Moreover, Smith believed that the government also had to provide certain essential services that would not be otherwise provided by unregulated markets. These public goods included rule of law and defence against foreign aggression, among others.

In reality, when Smith made a case for the invisible hand, he was actually making a case for the freedom of individuals not from state regulation, but for freedom from the elite, like the wealthy merchants of his time. In the passage of *The Wealth of Nations* where he used the invisible hand idea, he was not talking about state intervention, in general. He was specifically referring to intervention pushed by the elite, who were advancing their own interest

at the public's expense. Thus, the invisible hand was originally invoked not to draw attention to the problem of state regulation, but of state capture.

Though a long time has passed, Smith's attempts at addressing the problem of social order are still relevant. The issue of social order is especially important for Pakistan as it, too, has had its fair share of turmoil in the last few years. In particular, the economic situation is not optimal for Pakistan's exploding young population that requires three million jobs per year over the next decade, as stated by Ajay Banga, the World Bank's president, on a recent visit to the country.

Pakistan's policymakers need to take a leaf out of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and channel the invisible hand in order to bring about social order, and economic opportunities. Pakistan's state-owned enterprises are generally not efficient due to rent-seeking by elites and workers and due to protection from competition. Just as Smith argued for freeing markets from the distorting influence of the elites, Pakistan must free its SOEs from state capture.

To be sure, where the successful privatisation of the national airlines is a great beginning, a tough balancing act is required in the future. Where economic poli-

cymakers must keep liberating SOEs from state capture, the state would need to keep playing the role of an effective regulator, ensuring that SOEs' privatisation does not fall victim to elite capture; something that happened in Russia in the 1990s.

Pakistan's attempts at using the invisible hand for achieving social order and economic opportunities would remain incomplete if its young people are spending hours navigating the labyrinthine world of paperwork; attested photo-copies, thumb impressions, affidavits and NOCs. There is an urgent need to do away with these needless requirements to unfurl the economic potential of Pakistan's young people.

Digitalisation definitely offers a ray of hope in cutting down the endless paperwork, but policymakers better prepare for fierce resistance by those who want to keep Pakistan mired in endless turbulence.

Two hundred and fifty years later, Smith's wisdom endures. True economic freedom requires both vibrant markets and a competent state. Pakistan's path to social order lies in privatising inefficient SOEs, while building capacity to regulate and prevent new forms of elite capture.

*The writer completed his doctorate in economics on a Fulbright scholarship.*

# U.S. CONGRESS DISTRICT 22 CANDIDATE PEARL VUORINEN

**EMBRACES CULTURAL CELEBRATION, CONDEMNS IRAN STRIKES:  
'THIS IS NOT WHO WE ARE'**

As lion dancers wound through crowds at the Sugar Land Town Square's Chinese New Year festival Saturday, congressional candidate Pearl Vuorinen stood among families celebrating generations of tradition. For the Democrat seeking to represent District 22, the moment was personal.

"To experience the lion dance, to see the pride in this community, this is what America should look like," Vuorinen said. "We are stronger because of our diversity, not in spite of it." But the festive atmosphere stood in sharp contrast to the news breaking hours earlier: U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran. Vuorinen did not hesitate to address it.

"This is an attack against Iran from the United States, and it is not what our country stands for," she said. "We should be leading with diplomacy, not escalation. The Iranian people will bear the cost of decisions made far from their homes. Innocent families will suffer, and for what? This is wrong, morally wrong, strategically wrong, and it moves us further from peace, not closer to it. We cannot claim to champion freedom abroad while fueling violence that destroys lives."

With March 3 being the last day of primary election, Vuorinen urged voters to consider the kind of country they want.



*Win or lose Tuesday, Vuorinen pledged to keep fighting. "This work doesn't end at the ballot box. I will keep standing with this community, and with everyone who believes we can do better."*

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# STRONG POLITICS FIRST; Why Pakistan's Economic Recovery Demands Institutional and Political Maturity

Syed Feroz Ahmed

Pakistan's economy stands at a critical crossroads. Rising inflation, mounting public debt, declining foreign exchange reserves, persistent energy shortages, and growing unemployment have deepened uncertainty across the country. While these challenges appear primarily economic, their roots are fundamentally political and institutional.

Sustainable economic recovery cannot occur without political stability, policy continuity, and strong institutions.

## Political Stability

The Bedrock of Growth:

Economic growth thrives on predictability. Investors both domestic and foreign make long-term decisions based on confidence in policy consistency, legal protection, and macroeconomic stability. When governments change frequently, policies are abruptly reversed, or political conflict overshadows governance, uncertainty rises. The result is reduced investment, slower industrial expansion, and weakened job creation.

Major reforms, whether in energy restructuring, tax administration, or privatization, require sustained commitment over years. When successive administrations abandon or significantly alter their predecessors' policies, economic planning becomes fragmented and ineffective. Sustainable development demands cross party agreement on core economic priorities that extend beyond electoral cycles.

## Institutions Over Individuals.

Institutions Leadership is important, but institutions are decisive. Independent courts, a professional civil service, credible regulatory authorities, and transparent accountability systems create an environment where economic policy can function effectively.

When institutions are politicized or weakened, corruption expands and enforcement declines. Investor confidence erodes in envi-

ronments where contracts are insecure or laws are applied inconsistently. Mature politics strengthens institutions rather than using them for short-term political advantage. Economic resilience depends on the rule of law not merely on individual leaders.

## Long Term Vision Over Short Term Politics.

One persistent weakness in Pakistan's political culture is the preference for short-term political gains over long-term national strategy. Subsidies, populist spending, and politically motivated economic decisions may generate temporary public approval but often worsen fiscal deficits and fuel inflation. Structural reforms broadening the tax base, enhancing export competitiveness, reforming state owned enterprises, and investing in human capital, require patience and political courage. These measures rarely deliver immediate political rewards, yet they are essential for sustainable prosperity. Political maturity means prioritizing national interest over electoral advantage and resisting the lure of short term populism.

Policy Continuity and National Consensus:

Economic reform is inherently a long term process. Countries that have successfully stabilized their economies have built bipartisan consensus around core economic frameworks. In Pakistan, however, abrupt policy shifts following political transitions have repeatedly undermined reform efforts.

A stable macroeconomic framework covering fiscal discipline, monetary independence, industrial policy, and energy reform should be insulated from political volatility. A nationally agreed "Charter of Economy" among major political stakeholders could provide the continuity needed to reassure investors that fundamental policies will remain intact regardless of changes in government.

Such consensus would not eliminate political competition; rather, it would ensure that

competition operates within agreed national economic boundaries. Stability in direction allows markets, businesses, and citizens to plan with confidence.

## Leadership, Democracy, and Accountability:

Competent leadership is essential, but competence must be cultivated through democratic processes rather than restrictive barriers. Education, integrity, administrative experience, and policy expertise should be promoted within political parties through internal democracy, transparent candidate selection, and merit based advancement.

Citizens, too, bear responsibility. Public demand for accountability, performance, and transparency elevates political standards. A mature political culture / structure emerges not only from leaders but also from informed and engaged voters who prioritize governance and policy outcomes over rhetoric.

When democratic accountability functions effectively, it strengthens both leadership quality and institutional performance creating a virtuous cycle in which better governance produces stronger economic outcomes.

## Managing External Pressures:

Political reform alone cannot resolve every economic challenge. Global commodity prices, climate shocks, geopolitical tensions, and international financial obligations significantly shape Pakistan's economic environment. However, resilient political institutions enable countries to manage these external pressures more effectively.

Sound governance enhances policy coordination, reduces vulnerability, and strengthens a country's negotiating position in international economic relations. Political fragmentation, by contrast, weakens credibility and limits strategic flexibility.

External shocks are inevitable; institutional weakness is not.

## Rebuilding Public Trust:

Trust is a critical yet often overlooked economic asset. When citizens trust their leaders and institutions, they are more willing to pay taxes, comply with regulations, and invest in long-term ventures. Conversely, distrust encourages tax evasion, capital flight, and expansion of the informal economy.

Transparent governance, consistent policy implementation, and visible accountability can gradually restore public confidence. Trust reduces transaction costs, improves compliance, and strengthens social cohesion. Economic revival requires not only financial capital but also social and political capital.

Rebuilding trust is neither quick nor easy. It demands sustained integrity in public office, impartial enforcement of laws, and consistent policy signals. Without trust, even technically sound economic reforms may falter.

Pakistan's economic crisis is not merely fiscal or monetary; it is deeply intertwined with political instability and institutional weakness. Inflation, unemployment, rising debt, and sluggish growth are symptoms of deeper governance challenges. Sustainable recovery requires political stability, institutional independence, long term vision, and cross party consensus.

Strong politics does not mean authoritarian control or rigid uniformity. It means responsible leadership, respect for institutions, and commitment to national development beyond partisan interests. Political competition should center on performance and policy innovation not on reversing foundational economic direction.

Ultimately, economic strength flows from political maturity. By strengthening institutions, ensuring policy continuity, and fostering democratic accountability, Pakistan can build a stable economy and secure a more prosperous future.

# The burdens of war

Khurram Husain

FOR many decades now, Pakistan has been investing in a large and expensive military apparatus to fend off external threats to the country. Today, that apparatus faces its supreme test.

With the near simultaneous start of conflict in Afghanistan and Iran, the country's entire western border is now a war zone. Moreover, neither war looks like it will be over soon. With the prospect of protracted conflict on the entire western flank, Pakistan must now take sober stock of its resource position to be able to sustain the burdens that conflict will inevitably bring.

These burdens will come in different forms. First and foremost will be the requirements of the war itself, especially mobilisation if more ground forces become necessary, and the rate at which armaments need to be replenished. Second will be the aftershocks from the fighting: rising oil prices in international markets, distracted allies on whom Pakistan relies to get the rollovers it needs for its external obligations, disruption of foreign trade due to rising shipping costs (already insurance cost on foreign shipments has risen massively) as well as port closures in the Gulf

countries through which all Pakistan's west-bound exports transit. Add to this the impact on remittances since the Gulf countries under fire are sources of a significant share of Pakistan's remittance flows.

This is only the beginning. The list of second-order impacts will grow more and more complicated as the war in Iran drags on, which all indications suggest it will. The fate of the UAE rollover, for example, remains uncertain. The last we heard from the finance minister on the issue was this sunny statement: "We are in communication with the UAE authorities and there is absolutely no issue in the rollover of the \$2 billion debt." That's reassuring. The only issue with the rollover, however, is that it has not yet happened. And one wonders whether the UAE authorities are in any mood to discuss our rollover at this time, when their emirates are absorbing the brunt of Iran's missile and drone fire in the Gulf.

Our finance minister assured us all is well, that external financing requirements are sorted for the remaining fiscal year, while an IMF review is underway. Presumably, he means the financing requirements are sorted even without the UAE rollover. But even then, Pakistan

rolls over around \$6bn of bilateral debt every year, which is subject to geopolitical risk in various forms. Last year, a slight delay in one such rollover from China nearly sent key external sector ratios into crisis territory for a brief period. Fortunately, the blip was too short to have any real impact but it exposed an important vulnerability. Now we have the UAE rollover stuck and wait to see how this situation resolves itself.

Qatar has called force majeure on its LNG supply contracts with all countries, including Pakistan. Both LNG supply contracts have an exit ramp in 2026, and perhaps this is a good time to exercise that option. Last reported figures suggested that up to 40 LNG cargoes in 2026, equal in value to \$1.5bn approximately, are surplus. So far it seems the petroleum ministry has been trying to renegotiate the price rather than seeking to terminate the contracts altogether. Given the mounting surpluses of LNG in the country, perhaps the moment presents a good opportunity to exit these deals altogether considering they have served the purpose for which they were signed.

The upside here is that Pakistan's stock and importance for many countries around the world has just shot

up. The foreign minister explained that Pakistan has mediated between Saudi Arabia and Iran, reminding the latter of the security pact that his country has with the kingdom. He claims this is one reason why the kingdom has been spared (mostly) by Iran's retaliatory strikes, though Tehran maintained that if it is struck by assets from the kingdom's territory, retaliating against those assets remains its right.

A large, growing and ruinous war is gathering pace, and the situation in the weeks and months ahead threatens to become more and more fluid. America has started a war at Israel's behest and cannot clearly articulate its own reasons for why this attack was necessary, and what objective they are pursuing. As a result, they have no concept of the endgame, and the assumptions under which they went in seem to be collapsing. Just like they invaded Iraq in 2003 thinking the local population would welcome the invaders with flowers, they have gone into this war believing that the local population will rise up and finish the job by overthrowing the regime.

That is not happening and now they seem to be falling back on Plan B, which is to arm Kurdish and

Baloch populations on the periphery of Iran, in the hopes that they will provide the ground component to the aerial bombardment. This idea risks the spread of the war since neighbouring countries such as Turkiye and Pakistan will both view this attempt with great concern.

Having launched a ruinous war with no clear endgame in sight, America is now stuck in an untenable situation. The regime in Iran is taking a very serious battering, but the bombing cannot bring about its end without the commitment of ground forces, and even then, the question of who will manage the aftermath has obviously not been given any attention. If the bombing drags on, the war devolves down to the arithmetic of Iranian projectiles minus interceptor stocks in Israel and the Gulf countries. And in this arithmetic it is far from clear who has the upper hand.

Meanwhile, the burdens of war will increase, for the aggressors as well as the victims, the neighbours as well as the wider world. For Pakistan, the supreme test of its armed forces has arrived, as the war and its burdens land with increasing ferocity on our borders.

*The writer is a business and economy journalist.*

## FROM ABU DHABI TO KARACHI — HOUSTON SHINES IN GLOBAL IFTAR CELEBRATION

*Continued from front page*

John Whitmire, the event took place with the support of Muslim sister cities and numerous Islamic organizations, including Abu Dhabi, Baku, Basra, Istanbul, and Karachi. The evening began with a recitation from the Quran. Mayor John Whitmire, in his message, said that this Iftar dinner is a powerful symbol that unites our community, promoting cultural diversity and interfaith harmony.

Congressman Al Green also spoke and said that this Iftar dinner is a wonderful example of unity in our community. He noted that this event gives us a message of tolerance and peace and is a moment where we all come together to embody America's true values.

Iftar dinner coordinator, Syed Sheikh, welcomed all the guests and highlighted the significance of this 27-year tradition, emphasizing how it showcases interfaith harmony, cultural diversity, tolerance, peace, and unity. He expressed special gratitude to all the sponsors and volunteers and thanked Mayor John Whitmire for preserving this tradition.

The president of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston, Imran Ghazi, also spoke, stressing the importance of this platform and said that every year, it gives us an opportunity to celebrate cultural unity. Arab community leader, Ahmed Yaseen, also shared his thoughts, stating that this Iftar dinner is a symbol of the unity of American Muslims.

Pakistani Qari, Syed Sadaqat Ali, also participated, and with his beautiful recitation, he inspired all the attendees. This Iftar dinner was a testament to how the American Muslim community in Houston plays a key role in fostering unity and peace.

This Iftar dinner was a testament to how the American Muslim community in Houston plays a key role in fostering unity, peace, and shared cultural respect. The event concluded with a sense of hope and gratitude, as everyone left inspired to continue building a more inclusive and harmonious future.

## UN chief says 'migration is not a crisis,' urges global cooperation

*Continued from front page*

a crisis" and calling for stronger international cooperation to manage human mobility.

"Human mobility is profoundly shaping our world," Guterres said during an address to the General Assembly on his report on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

"Yet instead of responding with cooperation, the global reaction has too often been driven by fear, division, and rank opportunism," he said, warning that "across continents, migrants are being instrumentalised to score political points — with devastating human consequences".

Guterres stressed that "migrants

are not criminals. They are victims," adding that "the real criminals are ruthless smuggling and trafficking networks".

"They profit from despair, exploit the absence of safe alternatives, and thrive when cooperation fails," he said, emphasizing that the networks "must be pursued, prosecuted and brought to justice".

Highlighting the growing restrictions on legal migration channels, he said, "Safe and regular pathways are becoming ever more restrictive, especially for families and low-wage workers who face the steepest barriers".

"When pathways are blocked, migrants do not disappear," he added.

Guterres said that "the crisis is the failure to manage it together," and outlined two priorities. "First, expanding and simplifying clear pathways of regular migration.

Second, ensuring development cooperation that meaningfully invests in education, skills, and decent job creation in countries of origin".

"Let us choose cooperation over chaos, and dignity over discrimination," he added.

## US Senate rejects bid to limit Trump's Iran war powers

*Continued from front page*

introduced by Democrat Tim Kaine and Republican Rand Paul, would have required the withdrawal of US forces from hostilities against Iran unless Congress authorises the campaign.

But with Republicans holding a 53-47 majority in the upper chamber of Congress and largely backing the president's decision to attack Iran alongside Israel, the resolution fell short by exactly that margin.

The vote came five days into a rapidly expanding conflict that has already killed Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several senior figures in Tehran, while US troops have died in an Iranian attack on a US base in Kuwait.

Democrats argue Trump constitutionally bypassed Congress when he ordered the air campaign and say the administration has offered shifting justifications for the war.

"Let me say it this way, there was no presentation of any evidence in that room... that suggested that the US faced any imminent threat from Iran," Kaine told AFP after a classified briefing from administration officials.

Republicans have largely rallied behind their leader, though some have signalled their support could wane if the war expands or drags on.

"Roadside bombs coming out of Iran have maimed and killed hundreds, if not thousands, of Americans," Lindsey Graham, one of Trump's top loyalists in the Senate and a longtime advocate of confronting Iran, posted on X.

"They mean it when they say 'death to America.' I'm glad we didn't let it go further. I'm glad we didn't let them build more missiles."

**'Knocked out'**

For the resolution to pass, Democrats would have needed at least four Republicans to join Paul. One Democrat, Pennsylvania centrist John Fetterman, opposed the resolu-

tion.

Even if the measure had cleared the Senate and the House — where a vote on a similar resolution is expected Thursday — Trump would have been able to veto it. Congress would have needed an almost certainly unattainable two-thirds majority in both chambers to override the president.

Governments around the world have scrambled to evacuate citizens stranded by the war in the Middle East, triggered by the US-Israeli strikes that killed Khamenei and prompted retaliatory missile and drone attacks across the Gulf.

Cities such as Dubai and Riyadh — long seen as insulated from the region's turmoil — have been drawn into the crisis as the conflict spreads across the region.

The debate in Congress over Trump's authority to wage war reflects broader unease on Capitol Hill about the scope and duration of the military campaign.

Administration officials told lawmakers in classified briefings this week that the operation could last weeks and may require additional funding from Congress. Lawmakers from both parties say the Pentagon could soon seek emergency funds to replenish weapons stockpiles and sustain the operation.

The war powers resolution invoked the 1973 War Powers Act, passed after the Vietnam War, which allows Congress to force votes on military engagements and limits unauthorized conflicts to 60 days.

Democrats had acknowledged the measure faced steep odds but said forcing lawmakers to take a public position on the war was essential.

## Sara Khan Surges as Primaries Force Major Runoffs

*Continued from front page*

community leader, is making waves as the first Pakistani American female to seek and lead a major county-wide executive office in the region's history.

**Sara Khan Secures Dominant Lead for Runoff**

In a crowded five-person Democratic primary field, Sara Khan emerged as the clear frontrunner. Because no candidate crossed the 50% threshold, Khan is officially headed to a May 26 runoff election.

She will face Jeffrey Boney to determine who will take on Republican incumbent Bill Rickert in November. Khan's campaign, which centers on financial transparency, digital modernization, and language access, has resonated deeply with the diverse electorate of Fort Bend.

*"Together, we're listening, learning, and acting on the issues that matter most to families across Fort Bend County," Khan stated on her campaign platform, emphasizing her commitment to "service with dignity."*

**Full Election Results: Multiple Races Heading to Runoffs**

The Community Impact report highlights that Khan is part of a broader shift in Fort Bend's political landscape, where several key races remain undecided:

**Democratic Primary Runoffs**

**County Judge:** Commissioner Dexter McCoy (42%) and Rachele Carter (18%)

are headed for a runoff.

**County Clerk:** Maria T. Jackson and Sonya Jones will face off in May.

**District Clerk:** Incumbent Beverley McGrew Walker will face challenger Iris Lewis.

**Republican Primary Results & Upsets**

**Major Upset at County Judge:** Former Sugar Land City Council member Daniel Wong unseated incumbent KP George outright with approximately 56% of the vote.

**County Clerk:** J.J. Clemence and Tamara McFarlane are headed to a Republican runoff.

**District Clerk:** Audrey Lee and John Minchew will move to a runoff.

**Key Dates for Voters**

With multiple positions hanging in the balance, voters are encouraged to stay engaged for the final primary phase:

May 18, 2026: Early voting for the runoff begins.

May 26, 2026: Runoff Election Day.

## US Marines fired on protesters storming consulate in Karachi, US officials say

*Continued from front page*

over the weekend, two US officials said on Monday — a rare use of force at a diplomatic post that could sharply escalate tensions in the country amid widespread protests over the assassination of Iran's leader.

On Sunday, 11 people were killed when protesters breached the compound's outer wall after Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was assassinated in strikes on Iran.

Citing initial information, the two US officials said it was unclear whether rounds fired by Marines struck or killed anyone. They also did not know whether shots were also fired by others protecting the mission, including private security guards and local police.

This would mark the first confirmation by US officials that Marines were involved in firing at the protesters.

A Sindh government spokesman, Sukhdev Assardas Hemmani, said "security" personnel had opened fire, without specifying their affiliation.

Daily security operations at US diplomatic missions are often carried out by private contractors and local forces, and the involvement of Marines in the incident underscores how seriously the consulate viewed the threat.

Protesters on Sunday chanted "Death to America! Death to Israel!" outside the consulate, where Reuters reporters heard gunfire and saw tear gas fired in surrounding streets.

A video on social media appeared to show at least one protester firing a weapon toward the consulate and bloodied demonstrators fleeing as shots rang out.

A Karachi police official told Reuters that the shots were fired from inside the consulate premises.

The US Marines referred questions to the US military, which in turn referred questions to the State Department. The State Department did not respond to a request for comment.

Fact-finding report incident 'expected in 15 days'

Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Memon has said that a high-powered joint investigation team (JIT) has been constituted to investigate the incident at the US Consulate in Karachi in which 10 people were killed.

In comments to Geo News, he said that a fact-finding report was "expected in 15 days" and that once it's done, one would be able to tell "exactly how this happened and whose bullets hit whom".

Memon noted that different CCTV footage showed that some of the people at the site had also been carrying weapons, but added that he was "not a technical expert" and that the technical experts were the investigation teams and police who were present at the scene.

Separately, according to a notification issued by the Sindh inspector general, a committee headed by Counter Terrorism Department Additional Inspector General Zulfiqar Ali Larik was formed to investigate the incident.

It added that the committee would ascertain the facts and circumstances surrounding the incident, identify lapses in security and compliance, examine the role of the police and external elements involved, and recommend immediate remedial measures.

**'We will be known for strength'**

Vic Mellor, a Republican candidate for Rhode Island, said on X that "armed rioters tried to storm our US Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan".

"They breached the perimeter. They set fires. They thought this was 1979. It's not," Mellor, a US Marine veteran, added.

"United States Marines met them at the door — and sent a message the entire world just heard: The days of America not defending itself are OVER," he wrote.

Mellor further said, "We will be known for strength. And anyone who wishes to harm Americans will learn the cost. As a Marine, I'll tell you what every Marine already knows: you don't touch American soil. Not in Karachi. Not anywhere on earth."

On Monday, large gatherings were banned across Punjab, Islamabad and Karachi after protests over the strikes on Iran spread, with 26 people reported dead across the country.

Police have registered a case against "unidentified 150-200 protesters" for vandalising the US Consulate building and resorting to firing and arson.

A second first information report (FIR) has been lodged against unknown persons for setting a police post on fire and arson near the consulate.

The third FIR, which pertained to violence on the Native Jetty Bridge, was also lodged against "unknown armed men" who resorted to firing, causing bullet injuries to two women and injuries to others.

Religious community leaders have called for more protests in Lahore and Karachi despite the nationwide ban on public gatherings.

The US embassy in Pakistan is in Islamabad, and there are two additional consulates in Peshawar and Lahore.

Roads leading to the US Consulate in Karachi have been blocked off since Sunday, with a heavy police presence in the area. Similar measures were in place around US missions in Lahore and Islamabad.

## Young Faham Ali Laid to Rest in Houston; Community Mourns a Heartbreaking Loss

*Continued from front page*

Faham, who had been suffering from a heart condition, was admitted to the hospital for a procedure involving stent placement. Family sources shared that he walked into the hospital on his own prior to the surgery. Tragically, complications arose during the procedure, the stent placement was unsuccessful, and he passed away, leaving his family and community in shock and grief.

The funeral prayer was held at Masjid Hamza after Zuhr prayer, where a large number of family members, friends, and Pakistani-American community members gathered to pay their final respects. The atmosphere was heavy with emotion as mourners stood shoulder to shoulder, offering prayers for the young soul and strength for the grieving family.

Following the Janazah, Faham Ali was laid to rest at Forest Park Westheimer Cemetery. Heart-wrenching scenes were witnessed as loved ones bid their final farewell.

Faham leaves behind his parents and two elder brothers, who are enduring an immeasurable loss. Community members described him as a gentle and brave young boy whose courage until his final moments will always be remembered.

Messages of condolence and prayers continue to pour in for Ameer Ali and his family, with many offering support during this profoundly difficult time.

"Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'oon — Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we shall return" (Qur'an 2:156).

May Allah (SWT) grant him the highest ranks in Jannat-ul-Firdous and grant patience and strength to his parents and brothers. Ameen.

## Pentagon tells Congress no sign that Iran was going to attack US first, sources say

*Continued from front page*

briefings with congressional staff on Sunday that there was no intelligence suggesting Iran planned to attack US forces first, two people familiar with the matter said.

The United States and Israel launched their most ambitious attacks on Iran in decades on Saturday, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sinking Iranian warships and hitting more than 1,000 targets so far, officials say.

But Sunday's remarks to Congress appeared to undercut one of the key arguments for the war made by senior administration officials.

They told reporters the day before that President Donald Trump decided to launch the attacks in part because of indicators that Iranians might strike US forces in the Middle East "perhaps preemptively."

Trump, one of the officials said, was not going to "sit back and allow

American forces in the region to absorb attacks."

**Pentagon briefings lasted more than 90 minutes**

Pentagon officials briefed Democratic and Republican staff of several national security committees in both the Senate and the House of Representatives for more than 90 minutes on the unfolding US attack in Iran, White House spokesperson Dylan Johnson said earlier.

In the briefings, administration officials emphasized that Iran's ballistic missiles and proxy forces in the region posed an imminent threat to US interests, but there was no intelligence about Tehran attacking US forces first, the two sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters.

Trump said the attack, which is expected to run for weeks, aimed to ensure Iran could not have a nuclear weapon, contain its missile program, and eliminate threats to the United States and its allies.

He has urged Iranians to rise up and topple the government.

**Democrats criticise 'War of Choice'**

Still, Democrats have accused Trump of waging a war of choice and have taken aim at his arguments for abandoning peace talks that mediator Oman said still held promise.

Trump has argued, without presenting evidence, that Iran was on track to soon secure the ability to strike the United States with a ballistic missile.

His missile claim was not backed by US intelligence reports, and appeared to be exaggerated, sources familiar with the reports have told Reuters.

Questions about the justification for the war came as the US military revealed on Sunday the first American casualties of the conflict.

**Three US troops killed, five wounded**

Three US troops were killed, and five seriously wounded, US Central Command said on Sunday, adding that several other US troops suffered minor shrapnel injuries and concussions.

US aircraft and warships have struck more than 1,000 Iranian targets since Trump ordered the start of major combat operations, the military said.

The strikes include B-2 stealth bombers dropping 2,000-lb (900-kg) bombs on hardened, underground Iranian missile facilities.

A Reuters poll on Sunday showed 27% of Americans approved of the strikes, while 43% disapproved and 29% were not sure.

## PTA urges citizens to avoid sharing 'unverified, inflammatory' information amid heightened geopolitical tensions

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) on Saturday issued an advisory cautioning citizens against sharing "unverified, inflammatory or misleading information" in light of the recent geopolitical situation.

"In view of the prevailing sensitive national situation, PTA urges all

citizens to be responsible while using social media and digital platforms," the body said, advising citizens not to "share, disseminate, forward or upload information/content which is authentic and based upon official sources and to refrain from spreading rumours and fake news".

PTA cautioned against sharing fake news or information "liable to legal action in accordance with applicable laws".

"PTA calls upon all citizens to act with caution, maturity, and a strong sense of national responsibility to help, maintain stability and public confidence," the statement added.

The statement comes against the backdrop of escalating geopolitical tension in the Middle East, as Israel and the United States launched an attack on Iran on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's armed forces continue to counter the Afghan Taliban regime's aggression on its western border as part of Operation Ghazab lil-Haq, which was launched against the Afghan Taliban after "unprovoked firing" from across the border.

## 'Pakistan doing terrifically well,' Trump says on 'Op Ghazab Lil Haq' against Afghan Taliban

United States President Donald Trump hailed Pakistan's strikes against the Afghan Taliban regime under 'Operation Ghazab Lil Haq' on Friday, saying the country was "doing terrifically well".

Earlier on Friday, Pakistani forces targeted key military installations of the Afghan Taliban regime in Kabul, Kandahar, and Paktia through effective airstrikes. The military spokesperson said the ongoing operation was producing the desired results, with insurgents effectively repulsed at 53 locations along the border, inflicting heavy losses while exercising restraint to avoid civilian harm.

The government later updated that a total of 297 enemies were killed, more than 450 were reported injured, 89 Afghan Taliban posts were destroyed and 18 captured, 135 Afghan Taliban regime tanks and armed personnel carriers were destroyed while 29 locations across Afghanistan were subjected to aerial strikes.

Speaking to reporters today before heading to Texas, Trump was asked about Pakistan's response to what it described as unprovoked aggression by the Afghan Taliban.

Asked whether anyone had requested him to intervene, Trump said, "Well, I would, but I get along with Pakistan, as you know, very well. Very, very well."

"[They] have a great prime minister, a great general there, a great leader ... two of the people I really respect a lot," he said, referring to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, both of whom he has praised and expressed admiration for multiple times in the past.

"And I think that Pakistan is doing terrifically well," he added about his thoughts on the situation.

Meanwhile, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for an immediate ceasefire between Pakistan and Afghanistan after fierce fighting broke out between the neighbouring countries.

Guterres "is deeply concerned by the escalation of violence we're seeing between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the impact that violence is having on civilian populations", his spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

"He calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities, and he reiterates his call on the parties to resolve any differences through diplomacy," the spokesman added.

Separately, The president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) also called for de-escalation between Afghanistan and Pakistan, insisting that civilians must be protected and healthcare access guaranteed.

"We are witnessing a profound escalation of hostilities between Afghanistan and Pakistan," ICRC President Mirjana Spoljaric said in a statement, calling for "restraint and de-escalation".

She highlighted that the upsurge in violence was harming people in a region that had "already endured decades of conflict, displacement and loss".

"They have seen and felt the impact of war on their loved ones in their communities," she said.

## Pakistan working to dissuade Iran from striking Saudi Arabia: Sanaullah

Pakistan is working to persuade Iran to stop its attacks on Saudi Arabia, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs Rana Sanaullah said on Wednesday, as a war escalates in the Middle East following joint attacks by the United States and Israel across Iran.

Speaking on Geo News show, 'Geo Pakistan', he said that the military leadership, during today's in-camera briefing, informed that they were in constant contact with Iran, with efforts underway to resolve misunderstandings and ensure Gulf countries are not targeted.

The in-camera meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, was convened to brief parliamentary parties' leaders and representatives of political parties on the Pakistan-Afghanistan situation, the conflict in the Middle East and Pakistan's diplomatic efforts.

During the meeting, Sanaullah said, the participants supported Iran's right to retaliate against Israel.

However, they believed Tehran's response should not be directed at Gulf countries, he added.

Sanaullah said that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar also informed the meeting about his discussions with various countries, specifically Gulf states, to ease the tensions in the region.

According to Sanaullah, Dar conveyed that Iran had stated it would not carry out attacks against Saudi Arabia if Riyadh guaranteed that its territory would not be used against Tehran.

Citing Dar, he said that Pakistan's exchanges with Iran and other countries were "quite positive", emphasising

that Pakistan was facilitating communication between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

He noted that Pakistan's military and political leadership had previously played a key role in the previous negotiations concerning Iran.

Describing the situation in the Middle East, Sanaullah said a war had been imposed on Iran and Pakistan's diplomatic efforts were aimed at reaching an agreement to bring the conflict to an end.

The US may have assumed Iran would retreat after an initial major strike and accept all conditions unilaterally, he said, warning that the war in the region could be prolonged.

Since the beginning of the US-Israel assault on Iran on February 28, more than 1,000 people have been killed across the country, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"During the military aggression... 1,045 of our dear military personnel and civilians" were killed, IRNA said, citing a statement from Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs.

## IAEA endorses Chashma Unit-5 safeguards, underscores Pakistan's nuclear safety record

ISLAMABAD: The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) board of governors on Wednesday unanimously gave a go-ahead to an agreement with Pakistan for the application of safeguards at Unit 5 of the Chashma nuclear power plant, the Foreign Office said.

"This important development reflects the international community's continued confidence in Pakistan's commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear energy and its adherence to global non-proliferation and safeguards obligations," the FO said in a statement, shared on X by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar.

It added that the plant, with a gross capacity of 1,200 MW, is expected to become operational by 2030.

"Upon completion, the unit will provide a substantial source of low-carbon electricity to Pakistan's national grid, contributing to energy security, climate goals and sustainable economic growth," it said.

Pakistan currently operates six nuclear power plants with a combined installed capacity of 3,530 MW, achieving an average capacity factor exceeding 90%.

"Over the past year, nuclear power accounted for 18.3% of the national electricity mix and 34% of total low-carbon electricity generation," the statement said.

With more than 100 reactor-years of operational experience, Pakistan maintains a strong record of safe, secure and fully safeguarded nuclear power operations in line with international standards, according to the handout.

"The development marks a key milestone for Pakistan's energy future — underscoring global trust in our nuclear safety, security, non-proliferation, and peaceful nuclear programme," Dar said in his X post.

# Houston Emerges as a Hub for Pakistani and Indian Cuisine

HOUSTON, TX — With one of the largest South Asian communities in the United States, Houston has steadily grown into a major destination for Pakistani, Indian, and Indo-Pak cuisine. From Hillcroft Avenue to Sugar Land and Katy, dozens of restaurants now offer everything from traditional home-style meals to fine dining, street food, and vegetarian buffets.

## A Strong Pakistani Culinary Presence

Pakistani restaurants in Houston are especially known for their rich curries, slow-cooked dishes, and barbecue. Aga's Restaurant & Catering on Wilcrest Drive continues to be one of the city's most popular desi dining spots, widely recognized for its biryani, nihari, karahi, and grilled meats. Nearby, Savoy Restaurant, Himalaya, and Javed Nihari have long served authentic Pakistani flavors, attracting

diners from across the metropolitan area.

In Sugar Land and surrounding suburbs, restaurants such as Lasbela Restaurant, Mai Colachi, Karahi Boys, and Bar-B-Q Tonight have further expanded the reach of Pakistani cuisine, offering halal BBQ, karahi, and traditional curries in family-friendly settings. Casual eateries like Maza Pakistani Grill, Bismillah Restaurant & Cafe, and Khan BBQ & Grill cater to both dine-in and takeout customers.

Food trucks and cafés, including Pak-Man, Chai Shai, and Meerut BBQ House, have also gained popularity for bringing Pakistani street food, tea culture, and late-night barbecue to Houston's food scene.

**Indian Restaurants Offer Regional Diversity**  
Indian cuisine in Houston reflects a wide range

of regional traditions. North Indian and Punjabi-style restaurants such as Kiran's, India's Restaurant – A Taste of Paradise, and Nirvana Indian Restaurant offer classic curries, tandoori dishes, and lunch buffets popular with office workers and families.

South Indian and vegetarian dining is well represented along Hillcroft Street, where restaurants like Udipi Café, Shiv Sagar, Govinda's Vegetarian Cuisine, and Maharaja Bhog specialize in dosas, thalis, and Gujarati or Jain meals. These establishments attract both vegetarian diners and those seeking lighter, traditional fare.

## Fine Dining and Modern Fusion

Houston's South Asian dining scene has also moved into the fine-dining space. Restaurants such as Musaafer, Verandah, Da Gama, and Pondicheri present modern interpretations of Indian and Indo-

Pak cuisine, blending traditional spices with contemporary presentation. These venues have helped bring South Asian food into Houston's upscale dining conversation.

## A Reflection of Community Growth

Most Pakistani and Indian restaurants in Houston offer halal options, and many serve as cultural gathering spaces for families, students, and professionals. The concentration of eateries along Hillcroft, Southwest Freeway, Sugar Land, and West Houston reflects the growth and influence of the Pakistani and Indian communities in the region.

As Houston continues to diversify, its Pakistani and Indian restaurants not only provide authentic food but also contribute to the city's multicultural identity — making South Asian cuisine an essential part of Houston's dining landscape.

## Here is the list:

**Aga's Restaurant & Catering** – 11842 Wilcrest Dr, Houston, TX 77031

. Phone: (832) 786-8000

. Dine-in and takeout; Halal Indo-Pak cuisine. Known for its halal goat chops, beef kebabs and chicken lollipops

, plus classics like biryani and mango lassi.

**Lasbela Restaurant & Catering** (Sugar Land) – 13849 SW Fwy, Sugar Land, TX 77478

. Phone: (832) 999-4490

. Dine-in/takeout; Pakistani fare. Specialties include rich curries and BBQ – e.g. malai handi chicken, fried fish and kebabs, all Halal.

**Khan BBQ & Grill** – 17001 W Little York Rd, Houston, TX 77084

. Phone: (832) 593-0110

Pakistani/Indian BBQ and grill (dine-in/takeout). Famous for its tandoori meats and curries – chicken tikka, butter chicken, biryanis, kababs like chapli and nihari, all Halal.

**Pak-Man** (Food Truck) – Mobile (Houston-area)

. Phone: (832) 915-0898

. Halal Pakistani street food truck. Specializes in fusion “burgers” and South Asian snacks – e.g. biryani bowls, samosa wraps, Pakistani-style sliders

**Karahi Boys** – 16535 Lexington Blvd Ste 100, Sugar Land, TX 77479

. Phone: (281) 800-5880

Indo-Pak (dine-in/takeout). Offers flavorful Pakistani grills – rich karahi and karahi fries, mixed grills and biryanis

– plus giant naan and spice-forward curries, all Halal.

**Bundu Khan Kabab House** – 10941 FM 1960 W, Houston, TX 77070

. Phone: (281) 477-7897

. Dine-in/takeout; Pakistani BBQ & Halal. Known for its breakfast specials (halwa puri) and kababs, plus biryanis and curries in a casual setting

**Bar BQ Tonight** – 14838 Park Row Blvd Ste A, Houston, TX 77084

. Phone: (346) 594-2097

. Dine-in/takeout; Pakistani BBQ/Grill. Serves classic karahi (meat wok), malai boti, beef bihari kababs and other BBQ meats, all Halal.

**Mai Colachi** – 15425 SW Fwy, Sugar Land, TX 77478

. Phone: (281) 240-0786

. Dine-in; Halal Pakistani/Indian. Upscale BBQ and grill – steaks, tandoori meats and kebabs – and rich curries (mutton karahi, etc.)

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**Javed Nihari** – 14631 Beechnut St, Houston, TX 77083

. Phone: (346) 330-4240

. Dine-in/takeout; Pakistani. Famous for authentic Nihari (slow-cooked beef stew) and biryanis, plus spicy curries. All halal meats.

**Bismillah Restaurant & Cafe** – 5696 Hillcroft St, Houston, TX 77036

. Phone: (713) 587-9300

. Pakistani/Indian halal burgers and sandwiches. Known for its “patty melt” burgers and traditional Pakistani bun kebabs on paratha (all Halal).

**Chai Shai** – 6632 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (832) 939-8112

. Dine-in; Pakistani cafe/bakery (tea room). Specialty: Karak tea (“chai shai”), breakfast sandwiches and buns (e.g. “Bun Ka Baap” pork/salwa roll) and South Asian snacks

. Halal meats and sweets.

**Maza Pakistani Grill** – 15655 JFK Blvd Ste L, Houston, TX 77032

. Phone: (281) 741-2571

. Dine-in/takeout; Pakistani. Offers tandoori grill and curries – chicken tikka, seekh kabab, Butter Chicken, biryani and goat curry. All Halal.

**Himalaya Restaurant** – 6652 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 532-2837

. Dine-in; Indian/Pakistani/Himalayan. Family-style dining with classic curries (palak gosht, goat karahi), biryanis and grilled meats (biryani pictured). Halal.

**Mezban** – 6655 Harwin Dr Ste A108, Houston, TX 77036

. Phone: (713) 952-0606

. Dine-in; Indian/Pakistani Buffet. All-you-can-eat buffet (Halal) featuring biryanis, kebabs, curries and sides.

**Meerut BBQ House** (Food Truck) – 11910 S Texas 6, Sugar Land, TX 77498

(Fri–Sat nights). Phone: (346) 667-6308

. Mobile Halal Pakistani BBQ. Grill specialties: chicken tikka, wings, bihari boti, tikka rolls and parathas

**DDK Kabab & Grill** – 11797 S Hwy 6, Sugar Land, TX 77498

. Phone: (832) 500-4618

. Dine-in; Indian/Pakistani BBQ. Tandoori and grilled specialties (mixed grill, seekh kababs, chicken tikka, goat chops) plus biryanis and curries. All Halal.

**Tolo Kabab House** – 7555 Bellaire Blvd Ste B, Houston, TX 77036

. Phone: (281) 888-7398

. Dine-in; Afghan/Pakistani. Features Afghan specialties (mantoo dumplings, kabuli pulao, chapli kebabs) and Kabab/Pilaf dishes. Halal.

**Shalamar Restaurant** – 15142 Highway 3, Webster, TX 77598

. Phone: (281) 488-4151

. Dine-in; Pakistani/Indian. Neighborhood halal eatery serving karahis, biryanis, tikka masala and more

. Friendly ambiance with both lunch buffet and a la carte.

**Nirvana Indian Restaurant** – 14545 Memorial Dr, Houston, TX 77079

. Phone: (281) 496-3232

. Dine-in buffet (Halal) – specializes in all-you-can-eat vegetarian-friendly Indian buffet and seafood specials

. Known for its elaborate buffet thali (notably chicken biryani, palak paneer, aloo gobi, etc.) and casual setting.

**Maharaja Bhog** – 8338 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 771-2464

. Dine-in buffet; Gujarati veg Thali (Indian Vegetarian). All-vegetarian Gujarati/Marwari feast served in unlimited thalis – dals, vegetables, chutneys, sweets. Family-style dinner with Jain options available.

**Shiv Sagar** – 6662 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 977-0150

. Dine-in buffet; Indian Vegetarian. Offers Gujarati-style thali buffet and à la carte (e.g. dosas, curries, breads) in a casual family setting.

**Govinda's Vegetarian Cuisine** – 1320 W 34th St, Houston, TX 77018

. Phone: (346) 266-1626

. Dine-in buffet (ISKCON temple café); all-vegetarian (vegan-friendly) Indian. Specializes in Jain/South-Indian-

inspired thali buffet and a variety of healthy veggie dishes.

**Da Gama** – 600 N Shepherd Dr Ste 520, Houston, TX 77007

. Phone: (281) 888-7806

. Dine-in; Indo-Portuguese. “Indian canteen” for modern fusion – small plates of Goan and Anglo-Indian style (pork vindaloo, sausage rolls, tandoori masalas), plus craft cocktails. Creative brunch and lunch offerings.

**Surya India** – 700 Durham Dr Ste 200, Houston, TX 77007

. Phone: (713) 864-6667

. (Note: This contemporary Indian fine-dining by Chef Sheel Joshi operated near Rice Military.) It was an upscale dining room with modern Indian plates (award-winning chef, halal)

**Kiran's Restaurant** – 2925 Richmond Ave Ste 160, Houston, TX 77098

. Phone: (713) 960-8472

. Dine-in; Upscale Indian. Fine dining Punjabi cuisine – tandoori grills (chicken tikka, lamb kababs), rich curries (butter chicken, lamb vindaloo) and innovative fusion dishes (Seafood tandoori platter)

**India's Restaurant** – A Taste of Paradise – 5704 Richmond Ave, Houston, TX 77057

. Phone: (713) 266-0131 (also 266-0805)

. Dine-in/buffet; North Indian (vegetarian & non-veg). Long-standing Uptown eatery serving generous lunch buffet and à la carte curries (vegetarian, chicken, mutton), tandoori breads, and Chinese-Indian “desi Chinese” classics.

**Mirch Masala** – 10758 Cypress Creek Pkwy, Houston, TX 77070

. Phone: (281) 955-9878

. Dine-in/buffet; Indian vegetarian-friendly. All-you-can-eat North Indian buffet (Halal) featuring Gujarati and Rajasthani specialties – biryanis, curries, dal, sambhar, desserts (e.g. ras malai) in a colorful family-style setting

**Pondicheri** – 2800 Kirby Dr Ste B132, Houston, TX 77098

. Phone: (713) 522-2022

. Dine-in/cafe; Modern Indian fusion. Casual cafe known for creative South-Indian-inspired breakfast/brunch (e.g. masala egg wraps, Belgian waffles with Indian flavors) and lunch plates (Indian-style burgers, thali bowls)

. Uses local ingredients and has bakery items.

**Musaafer** – 5115 Westheimer Rd Ste C-3500, Houston, TX 77056

. Phone: (713) 242-8087

. Fine-dining Indian (Michelin-rated); Halal. Upscale contemporary Indian cuisine – tasting menus featuring tandoori grills, biryanis and modern “street food” plates. Known for gourmet renditions like lamb chops, butter chicken, and creative desserts.

**Verandah** – 3300 Kirby Dr Ste 7A, Houston, TX 77098

. Phone: (832) 886-4291

. Dine-in; Indian (Malabar/Coastal). Upscale Indian restaurant (Kirby Collection) offering regional specialties – Kerala shrimp curry, Goan fish curry, biryanis, tandoori grills (Awadhi biryani pictured)

. Creative cocktails and vegetarian options also featured.

**Udipi Café** – Hillcroft – 5959 Hillcroft St Ste A, Houston, TX 77036

. Phone: (713) 334-5555

. Dine-in buffet; South Indian vegetarian. Casual cafeteria known for all-you-can-eat thali and dosas – specialties include ghee roast dosa, Mysore masala dosa and South Indian banana-leaf thali

. Vegetarian fare (many vegan options) in a lively setting.

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## Under Allah's Mercy, PAGH Brings Houston's Pakistani Community Together in Grand Sehri



**By Jameel Siddiqui**  
HOUSTON: In the quiet hours before dawn, the halls of the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston came alive with energy, tradition and a powerful sense of belonging as it hosted annual Grand Sehri at the Pakistan Center.

*Continued on page 28*

## Dr. Mubashir Choudhery Brings Houston Together in a Heartwarming Ramadan Iftar



HOUSTON, TX – Dr. Mubashir Choudhery hosted an elegant Iftar dinner at a local restaurant, bringing together members of the Pakistani-American community alongside prominent political and civic figures. The gathering saw the presence of Congressman Al Green, former Mayor Annise Parker, and Pearl Vuorinen, who is running for U.S. Congress, among other distinguished

*Continued on page 28*

## Celebrate Eid in True Texas Style at Marquee Texas Ranch — A Grand Gala of Flavor, Family & Festivities Awaits!

TEXAS: Get ready for one of the most spectacular Eid celebrations of the year as the much-anticipated Grand Eid Buffet – Eid Gala Dinner is set to dazzle families on March 20, 2026, at Marquee Texas Ranch. Promising an unforgettable evening of festive flavors, thrilling attractions, and vibrant community spirit, the event is expected to draw large crowds eager to celebrate Eid in grand style.

*Continued on page 28*

## Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA Hosts Annual Iftar Dinner at Karachi Restaurant

*Exclusive members-only event, in collaboration with Worldfood Express, celebrates the spirit of Ramadan and fosters business networking.*



HOUSTON — In a celebration of community, faith, and business synergy, the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA (PCC-USA) recently hosted its Annual Iftar Dinner. The prestigious, members-only gathering took place at the renowned Karachi Restaurant, offering an evening of spiritual reflection and professional networking during the holy month of Ramadan.

Organized in collaboration with Worldfood Express, the exclusive event brought together prominent Pakistani-American business leaders, entrepreneurs, and esteemed chamber members under one roof. The strategic partner-

ship with Worldfood Express ensured a seamless and memorable experience, highlighting both organizations' shared commitment to community engagement and cultural celebration.

As the sun set, attendees broke their fast together to the traditional call to prayer, followed by a curated menu of authentic cuisine hosted at Karachi Restaurant. Known for its rich traditional flavors and warm ambiance, the venue provided the perfect backdrop for the evening's festivities.

Beyond the spiritual observance, the event was marked by a strong sense of camaraderie.

*Continued on page 28*

## PAGH and PULSE Launch Pakistan Coaching Center in Landmark Ceremony to Empower Houston's Next Generation



HOUSTON, TX — In a high-energy ceremony attended by community leaders and educators, Promoting Unity and Leadership for Social Empowerment (PULSE) and the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston

*Continued on page 28*

## Harris County and Fort Bend County Primary Election Results

HOUSTON – Voter turnout surged across the region in Texas's March 3 primaries. Harris County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth announced late Tuesday that more than 500,000 Harris County voters had cast ballots by the end of Election Day – a record for a midterm primary.

“By the end of the night, we project that this will be the first midterm primary election in which we surpass a combined half-million voters” (early + Election Day). Community Impact reported that Harris County's early voting alone totaled 346,797 ballots (a 64% jump from

2024. Long lines persisted past the 7 p.m. closing time, though officials said no major problems were reported and all in-line voters were permitted to vote. In Fort Bend County, early voting turnout also broke recent records: 99,093 residents voted early (94,333 in person,

4,760 by mail), roughly 17.5% of registered voters.

Harris County – Runoffs in the County Judge Race

Atop the ballot in Harris County was the

*Continued on page 28*

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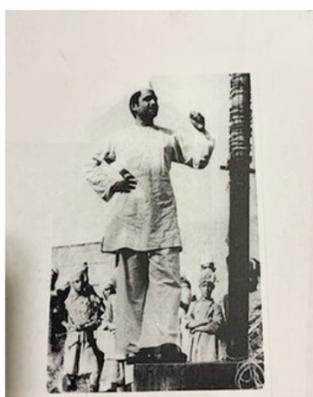


# HISTORY: THE FREEDOM FIGHTER WHO BECAME STATELESS

A scholar, a communist and an anti-colonial activist, Dr K.M. Ashraf spent his life arguing that India's Muslims and Hindus shared a future — and paid for it with exile, imprisonment and marginalisation from history



Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar (sitting, centre), Shahpurji Saklatvala (standing, centre) and Dr K.M. Ashraf (standing, second from left) along with others in London in 1930 | ZMO Library & Archives



Dr K.M. Ashraf giving a speech for the Indian National Congress in Lahore in 1937 | ZMO Library & Archives



Dr K.M. Ashraf | ZMO Library & Archives



Dr K.M. Ashraf (in glasses) with Jawaharlal Nehru (second from right) and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (first from right) | Social Media

Kamran Asdar Ali  
During the hardening positions in the 1940s of the Indian National Congress (INC) and the Muslim League (ML) on the creation of a new state for the Muslims of India, there were other groups and parties that envisioned different resolutions to the "Muslim Question."

Among these voices was that of the Communist Party of India (CPI), which was aligned with the INC in the late 1930s, yet slowly diverged from it in the 1940s. A major figure who articulated the CPI's perspective on Muslim politics was Dr Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf — whose contribution has remained somewhat marginal in the received history of this period.

## THE PALS OF MEWAT

Dr Ashraf was of Rajput stock from the Mewat region and hailed from a lower middle-class family that had settled in United Provinces (UP) in the 19th century. The Mewat region extends across Haryana and Rajasthan, where the majority population were Muslims (called Meo) and Chattriya (Rajput). A distinctive feature of the Meo community was

that those Hindus who abided by the rules of the pals (the tribal groupings) were incorporated into the group, with loyalty to the pal overshadowing religious belonging.

Studies of the Mewat area from the early 20th century have shown how — in matters of birth, death and marriages — the pals would follow rituals and ceremonies of both religious communities.

Dr Ashraf's grandfather, originally from Alwar in Rajasthan, had settled in the town of Daryapur near Hathras (Aligarh district) after 1857. The family had followed the tradition of intermarrying with Hindus and keeping Hindu names — Dr Ashraf's father was born Murlidhar Singh, only changing his name to Murad Ali Khan when he passed the entrance examination for railway service as a guard.

Dr Ashraf was born in 1903 in Daryapur, where he spent his early childhood before moving to Moradabad for schooling. At school, he was influenced by teachers who inculcated the spirit of anti-colonialism in their pupils. In due time, Dr Ashraf joined political activist

Ubaidullah Sindhi's group, Hazb Allah, and took an oath to fight the colonisers.

In 1918, Dr Ashraf passed his intermediate exams from MAO College in Aligarh and re-entered for his BA degree in 1920. These were the days of the Khilafat Movement, led by Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar, which was joined by Mohandas Gandhi, with his call for boycotting English goods and Satyagraha (non-cooperation) that would lead to Swaraj (independence).

Dr Ashraf joined the non-cooperation movement and, along with his friends, agitated for the MAO College to not take aid from the British sarkar [government]. In retaliation, the college administration expelled the students. This expulsion led to the founding of Jamia Millia Islamia (October 1920) as a nationalist alternative to MAO College, which Dr Ashraf and his friends joined.

However, Gandhi's withdrawal from Satyagraha due to the Chauri Chaura incident — in which riled demonstrators killed 22 policemen — and the abolishing of the Ottoman caliphate by Turkish revolutionary Mustafa Kemal — both in 1922 — ended the non-cooperation/ Khilafat movement.

This curtailment brought a period of disillusionment for many of the movement's cadres and Dr Ashraf returned to MAO College in 1923. He completed his BA honours and MA, and topped his class in the LLB course by 1927.

## LONDON AND THE MAKING OF A MARXIST

During the college's jubilee celebrations in 1927, Dr Ashraf was introduced to one of the guests, the Maharaja Jain Singh of Alwar state.

In his address as vice president of the student union, he reminded everyone of Aligarh's secular tradition and spoke of his own ancestral ties to Alwar.

The impressed Maharaja arranged a scholarship for his studies; Dr Ashraf joined Lincoln's Inn for his Bar-at-Law and enrolled as a PhD candidate in mediaeval history at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, UK.

During this first trip to Britain, Dr Ashraf lived with Maulana Mohammad Ali, also supported by the Maharaja for medical treatment in the UK. Through the Maulana, he was introduced to Shahpurji Saklatvala (1874-1936), the Communist Party of Great Britain's (CPGB) member elected to the British parliament.

In 1928, the Maharaja of Alwar invited Dr Ashraf and Maulana Mohammad Ali back to Alwar for his jubilee celebrations. Dr Ashraf was made in-charge of the preparations and oversaw the entire event. After the celebrations, Dr Ashraf was offered the position of personal adviser to the Maharaja, but declined — having witnessed firsthand the wealth, wastage and oppression of a major princely state. In 1929, Dr Ashraf received a scholarship from a foundation in Hyderabad and, with some support from his father, he returned to the UK to complete his PhD.

This time he had a more economically difficult life but he was connected to a range of young radicals studying in Britain, who were also his friends and comrades. They included Dr Z.A. Ahmad, Shaukat Omar, Sajjad Zaheer, Mahmuduzzafar, Hajra Begum (the only female in the group) and Imtiaz Ali Khan. Under Shahpurji

Saklatvala's initial guidance, this group started to work closely with CPGB in organising Indian students on nationalist grounds.

While involved in these activities, Dr Ashraf defended his PhD thesis (University of London) in the early 1930s. The thesis, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindostan (1200-1550 CE)*, was a pioneering work of social history regarding the Sultanate and early Mughal period in India.

## THE MUSLIM QUESTION AND THE COMMUNIST ANSWER

Due to his affiliation with CPGB, Dr Ashraf returned as a committed Marxist to India in 1932-33 and soon joined the CPI under the leadership of P.C. Joshi. In 1935, he joined Aligarh University as a history lecturer.

From the mid-1930s, the CPI had aligned itself with some progressive section within Congress — figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose and Jayprakash Narayan — who were trying to lead Congress in a potentially revolutionary direction. Therefore, when Jawaharlal Nehru was elected president of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) in 1936, Dr Ashraf accepted a position at Nehru's office in Allahabad, becoming secretary of the political bureau and also responsible for the Muslim Contact Cell of the INC.

In his writings, Dr Ashraf argued that the ML could exploit the resentment among Muslim masses stemming from the halted non-cooperation movement of 1922, compounded by the Nehru Report's (1927) rejection of separate Muslim electorates and rising communal tensions. Yet he emphasised that his invitation was for Muslims to join the progressive groups within Congress. As a communist, he maintained that politics was organised essentially around class interests, which drove the exploitation of the poor and the marginalised.

In a 1938 letter to a friend, Dr Ashraf forcefully defended his work for INC, despite understanding the major reservations that a large portion of the Muslim population held against Congress politics.

In a nuanced position on Muslim politics, he suggested that his friend need not join INC and continue to work with the ML (despite

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# HISTORY: THE FREEDOM FIGHTER WHO BECAME STATELESS

*Continued From Page 19*

Dr Ashraf's reservations), provided he could steer the League toward holding democratic elections within the primary bodies of the party, increase its membership and organise it at the local level. For Dr Ashraf, this would lead to the Muslim community to stand up against British imperialism and not be subordinate to its dictates.

The Congress ministries resigned in October-November of 1939, as they opposed the British government's action of declaring India as a party in the Second World War without consulting the Indian elected representatives.

The start of the War tested the alliance between the Congress and the CPI. Both parties initially labelled the war as anti-imperialist, yet the CPI went further, calling for a national revolution and mass insurrection to achieve independence. By 1941, this somewhat radical line led to the British detaining scores of CPI members, including Dr Ashraf, in the notorious Deoli Concentration Camp.

By early to mid-1940s, the CPI had also started to rethink the issue of Muslim separatism (exemplified by the 1940 Lahore Resolution), being put forward by the newly invigorated ML. In response to this shift in Muslim politics, Dr Ashraf (representing CPI) had started to hint at the nationalities question and the idea of self-determination, which would be developed later as a major policy agenda by the CPI.

According to the CPI, the linguistic and religious diversity of India had brought forward two major issues in Indian politics: the Hindu-Muslim divide and the linguistic-states problem. Was India one nation or were Hindu and Muslims separate nations and, similarly, did Bengalis or Tamils deserve different or

autonomous states?

CPI's more overt support of the 'Muslim Question' followed its policy of openly opposing Congress' Quit India Movement. Although all communist members of the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) at the Bombay session in August of 1942 voted against the resolution, it was passed by an overwhelming majority.

The CPI vote was reflective of how, by 1942, the party had reversed its earlier line, moving from calling the War an 'Imperialist War' to a 'People's War.' It now linked itself to the international drive against Germany's fascist regime. This led to the unbanning of the party and the release of the leaders. Dr Ashraf was also released in 1943, though his health had suffered due to prison hardships and a prolonged hunger strike.

After their leadership's release, the CPI condemned the British imprisonment of nationalist leaders while simultaneously urging Congress to collaborate with the ML and accept it as the representative voice of India's Muslims.

In September of 1942, the CPI, echoing Dr Ashraf's earlier formulation on self-determination, presented a resolution that sought to take the question of India not as a cultural whole, but as constituting various cultures, language groups and national sentiments. In this larger context, for the CPI, the slogan for Pakistan was understood as a call for self-determination and democracy for all nationalities.

Clearly, the right of self-determination came with the right of sovereignty, equality and the right to secession. Following this argument, the CPI's manifesto for the 1945-1946 elections demanded immediate independence and transfer of power not only to two governments (India

and Pakistan), but to 17 interim 'sovereign' national assemblies.

However, by late 1946, the CPI had started to change its position on the partition of British India. The party was critical of both the Congress and the ML for accepting the Partition plan. Eventually, although the CPI finally accepted the creation of Pakistan by arguing for the division of the party itself (in 1948), a deep suspicion of ML politics and the agony over British India's division was the overwhelming sentiment that was shared by most party workers.

## STATELESS

The violence during the partition of British India did not spare the Mewat area. The harmony and coexistence that was the hallmark of the Meo palbandi system was breached during the months of August and September of 1947, when unexpected communal riots broke out. Within this atmosphere, rumours circulated that Dr Ashraf was mobilising a large group of Meos to create a "mini-Pakistan" in the Mewat area.

Based on the policy of self-determination related to linguistic and ethnic identities, Dr Ashraf and Syed Mutalabi (an activist and friend) in 1942 had put forward the idea of a province that included Mewat and adjoining areas (not dissimilar to the creation of new provinces in post-independence India). Closer to independence, this idea included the abolition of princely states (especially of Alwar and Bharatpur).

The Maharajas of these two states and their right-wing allies used the idea of the "Pal Province" to instigate communal riots and broke the Hindu-Muslim unity that had been guaranteed through ages by the palbandi process; a community of historically mixed religious heritage was being forced to leave. In

return, Dr Ashraf was accused by the police of instigating communal violence and a case was made to arrest Syed Mutalabi and him. It was decided that both travel to Pakistan for some time.

As Dr Ashraf travelled to Pakistan, his name was sent to the Pakistan intelligence services as someone wanted as a member of the CPI, along with the additional charge of spreading communal violence. Soon after his arrival, he was detained at Karachi Central Jail, even as he battled ill health.

In prison, his health condition further deteriorated. The government of Pakistan only agreed to release Dr Ashraf on the condition that he leave the country. At this juncture, the government of India did not give him permission to return. The only option was that he left for the UK as a British subject.

While in the UK, his health remained unwell, but he put himself through a gruelling routine of research in the British Library on archives related to mediaeval India, his area of expertise. After spending five years in the UK (1949-1954), he returned to India as a British subject, with a six-month visa. On arrival, he requested Maulana Azad, his mentor and friend, to assist him in staying in India. At the expiry of his visa, no action was taken.

Dr Ashraf spent two years in Kashmir working on a state history of the region and was later appointed as visiting professor of mediaeval history at Kirori Mal College at the University of Delhi. In 1960, with his college contract not renewed, he travelled to Humboldt University in East Berlin (GDR) to conduct research and take a position as visiting professor of mediaeval Indian history.

In his later writings, Dr Ashraf reflected on the 1940s and was criti-

cal of the division of British India due to the communalist politics propagated by the British. However, he did maintain that, to fight colonial imperialism, CPI's policy (and his own) of bringing Jinnah and Gandhi together, and to give due respect to ML's emerging popularity among Muslims, some concessions had to be offered to their demand for a separate region.

Dr Ashraf's close relatives were practising Hindus, including his paternal aunt, instilling in him a lived sense of coexistence and mutual respect that he carried directly into his politics. His youth and early middle age were dedicated to the struggle for the freedom of his country, and for equal rights and social justice for the masses. He bore all kinds of sufferings, deprivations and imprisonment. However, once colonial rule ended, Dr Ashraf found himself stateless and exiled in London, without income and with very little social support. Yet he persevered and continued to write and teach in Delhi and then in Berlin.

A mesmerising public speaker, a scholar of Arabic, Persian and Urdu, who wrote poetry, short stories and plays, Dr Ashraf passed away due to a heart attack at the age of 59 in East Berlin on June 7, 1962.

He is buried at the Cemetery of the Socialists in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde, where he lies with the likes of Rosa Luxemburg and others who fought for democratic rights, against fascism and for socialism.

*The writer wishes to thank Alisher Karabeav (ZMO Library, Berlin), Dr Razak Khan (Freie University, Berlin) and Ananya Iyengar (St Stephens College, Delhi) for their input.*

*The writer teaches anthropology at the University of Texas, Austin, in the USA.*

## Greenland ice sheet acts like 'churning molten rock,' scientists find

*'It's like an exciting freak of nature,' says glaciologist Robert Law*

The scientists in a recent discovery have found the real nature of massive, upward-warping plumes deep within the Greenland ice sheet.

For over a decade, the mysterious nature and origin of plumes have puzzled the researchers.

New research study suggests that these are not just random distortions. In fact, they are caused by thermal convection, mirroring the same process that moves molten rock within Earth's mantle.

This heat warms the bottom of the ice, making it soft enough to rise in columns (convection), even though the ice remains solid.



According to glaciologist Robert Law of the University of Bergen in Norway, "Finding that thermal convection can happen within an ice sheet goes

slightly against our intuition and expectations. Ice is at least a million times softer than the Earth's mantle, though, so the physics just works out."

"It's like an exciting freak of nature," Law added.

As per findings published in *The Cryosphere*, the energy driving this movement comes from Earth's natural geothermal heat caused by the radioactive decay and residual heat from the planet's formation.

In 2014, the scientists found these puzzling structures buried deep in the northern Greenland ice

sheet. Since then, they have been trying to solve the puzzle.

"We typically think of ice as a solid material, so the discovery that parts of the Greenland ice sheet actually undergo thermal convection, resembling a boiling pot of pasta, is as wild as it is fascinating," climatologist Andreas Born of the University of Bergen said.

The discovery will help the researchers to better understand hidden internal processes and to predict how Greenland will contribute to rising sea levels in future.

# The taps run dry in Balochistan

*Overpopulation and dropping water table increase water stress and food insecurity across the province*

By MOHAMMAD ZAFAR  
BALOCH

Every morning in Quetta, before the sun clears the jagged peaks of the Sulaiman Mountains, a ritual of anxiety begins. It starts with the hollow, metallic clink of a dry tap. For thousands of households, this sound is the starting gun for a daily race for survival. With it echo the neighbourhoods with one question: "Will water come today?"

In the sprawling neighbourhoods of the provincial capital, families ration every drop, calculating whether a litre of water should be used for cooking a meal or washing a child's face.

What was once a seasonal inconvenience has hardened into a defining feature of life in Balochistan. This quiet crisis is unfolding alongside a demographic explosion that threatens to overwhelm the province's fragile ecology.

#### The arithmetic of crisis

According to Abdul Sattar Shahwani, Director PMCT, Balochistan's population has surged to 14.89 million, up from 12.34 million in 2017. This represents an average annual growth rate of 3.2 percent.

The trajectory is staggering. In 1951, Balochistan was home to a mere 1.17 million people. By 1998, that number had reached 6.56 million. Today, it has more than doubled again. Official projections suggest that by 2030, the province will host 18.57 million people. By 2050, that figure could exceed 35 million.

"We are adding millions of people to a landscape that is physically losing its ability to support life," says a local urban planning consultant. "If the population doubles while the water table halves, the math simply doesn't work. We are heading toward an impossibility."

#### Urban pressure

While Balochistan remains 69.04 percent rural, the pressure is increasingly concentrated in its thirsty cities. Quetta is the epicentre of this strain, housing 2.59 million people at a density of 753 persons per sq/km.

The city is not just growing naturally; it is absorbing people from across Balochistan. A lot of rural families abandon their ancestral homes for the promise of the city for better future prospects. But they find a city already gasping for breath. Districts like Kech (1.06 million), Khuzdar (997,214), and the port city of Gwadar (305,160) are seeing similar influxes.

The national imbalance is stark. The Population Council notes that while Pakistan's population grew by 65 percent between 2000 and 2024, per capita availability plum-



meted by 40 percent. In arid Balochistan, where rainfall is a rare blessing rather than a seasonal certainty, this gap is a chasm.

#### The drying aquifers

For decades, Balochistan has survived on its 'savings account': groundwater. But the account is now overdrawn. The World Bank reports that a staggering 95 percent of Balochistan's farmland relies on groundwater extraction, mostly through thousands of unregulated tube wells. Only five percent of the province is connected to the Indus Basin's canal system. This over-reliance has turned a lifeline into a liability.

Data from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) paints a grim picture. In 2000, groundwater could be reached at 50 metres. By 2023, that depth has plunged to over 150 metres in many areas. In Quetta, the water table is dropping by two to five metres every single year.

"Ten years ago, our community well was enough for the whole street," recalls Gul Bibi, a resident of Quetta's outskirts. "We used to see the water clear and cold. Now, the pumps just bring up sand and noise. We wait days for a tanker, and if we don't have the 3,000 rupees to pay, we simply go thirsty."

#### A map of vulnerability

The crisis is not uniform; it is a patchwork of desperation. The UK-funded District Vulnerability Index for Pakistan (DVIP) identifies 17 districts in Balochistan as being on the absolute edge. From the desert reaches of Washuk and Chagai to the mountainous terrain of Zhob and Kalat, falling water tables and rising populations are converging to create a perfect storm of food insecurity and displacement.

In Quetta, the deficit is quantified in millions of gallons. Tanveer Jamote, Deputy Secretary of the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department, notes that the city's

daily demand is roughly 60 million gallons. The government supplies about 30 million.

#### The tanker economy and the Mangi dam

Where the government fails, the private market thrives—at a steep price. In Gwadar, a recent audit revealed a shocking 956.9 million rupees was spent in a single year just on water tankers. It is a staggering sum that critics say reflects a failure of governance.

In Quetta, a family might spend 20 to 30 percent of their monthly income just to buy enough water to stay hydrated. That is money stolen from their children's education and health.

All hopes for a temporary relief have been pinned on the Mangi Dam. Designed to bring eight million gallons a day to Quetta, the project has become a symbol of bureaucratic lethargy. Originally meant to be finished in 2022, it is now nearly 42 percent over budget, with costs swelling to 19.8 billion rupees. Lawmakers at the Public Accounts Committee have expressed outrage over these delays. The new "guaranteed" completion date is March 31, 2026. For the thirsty residents of Quetta, two years feels like an eternity.

The situation stands in direct defiance of UN Sustainable Development Goal 6, which promises water and sanitation for all. In Balochistan, that goal isn't just distant; it is receding.

#### Learning from what already works

Even as Balochistan edges toward a water emergency, workable solutions already exist inside Pakistan. In Chakwal, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) has demonstrated how data-driven water management can dramatically reduce wastage while improving resilience. These models offer practical lessons for the Government of Balochistan.

One such intervention is the

Chameleon Soil Moisture Sensor, which allows farmers to irrigate based on real-time soil conditions rather than guesswork. By showing exactly when crops need water, the system prevents over-irrigation, reduces groundwater extraction, and protects crops during critical growth stages. For a province where agriculture consumes most available water, this technology could significantly slow the collapse of aquifers while helping farmers adapt to drought and extreme heat.

The IWMI has also deployed Eddy Covariance (EC) Flux Tower Systems in Chakwal, which continuously measure water loss, soil moisture, climate stress, and energy exchange between land and atmosphere. This real-time data enables more accurate irrigation planning, improved water allocation, and better drought monitoring. In Balochistan—where water decisions are often made without reliable field data—such systems could provide the scientific backbone needed for sustainable governance.

More such solutions installed in Chakwal include advanced soil and water monitoring technologies that provide granular insights for precision agriculture. The Heat Flux Plate, for instance, measures soil heat flux to calculate energy balance parameters critical for understanding soil-water-plant interactions. The Wetting Front Detector allows collection of highly refined water samples directly from root zones, helping farmers optimise irrigation schedules, manage nutrients more efficiently, and prevent soil salinisation. Another key tool, the Hydra Probe, simultaneously measures soil temperature, moisture levels, and electrical conductivity, offering a multidimensional view of soil health. Together, these devices allow farmers and water managers to make decisions based on real-time, location-specific data rather than broad assumptions.

Complementing them are automated rain gauges that capture even minimal precipitation events, ensuring that scarce rainfall is accurately recorded and incorporated into water management strategies. By combining soil, water, and climate monitoring, these systems create a feedback loop where every intervention—whether irrigation, fertilisation, or drainage—is informed by precise measurements. If adapted for Balochistan, such integrated tools could revolutionise water governance, slow aquifer depletion, and increase resilience against recurring droughts, while simultaneously supporting agricultural productivity in one of Pakistan's most water-stressed

regions.

Together, these interventions point to a crucial shift: water security in Balochistan will not be achieved by infrastructure alone. Without smart monitoring, regulation, and data-driven decision-making, even the largest projects risk becoming temporary fixes in a deepening crisis.

#### Expert insight

Dr Muhammad Ashraf, Country Representative with the IWMI, emphasises that sustainable groundwater management in Balochistan requires balancing water abstraction with recharge. "Both controlling groundwater use and replenishing aquifers are crucial," Dr Ashraf says. "The province can improve water efficiency by planting low-water crops such as olives, pistachios, grapes, and pomegranates, and by adopting high-efficiency irrigation methods like drip, bubbler, and well-designed bed-and-furrow systems. Protecting and rehabilitating the centuries-old karez system can further relieve pressure on groundwater."

Experts recommend an integrated approach combining rainwater harvesting, hill torrent management, watershed management, groundwater regulation, and karez revival. With proper planning and feasibility studies, harvesting even part of Balochistan's 12 MAF annual runoff—currently only 3 MAF is captured—could reduce the water gap and mitigate recurrent flash floods. Local authorities have the power to enforce regulations, while international organizations like IWMI provide technical guidance to ensure effective implementation.

#### A narrowing window

The province is approaching a threshold from which there may be no return. Infrastructure like the Mangi Dam and various filtration plants are vital, but they are band-aids on a gaping wound. Without a radical shift in water management—including strict regulation of tube wells, massive investment in rainwater harvesting, and a serious conversation about population planning—the province faces a series of crises ahead.

The window for intervention is closing. As the population continues its climb toward 35 million, the earth beneath them is drying out.

For now, the people of Balochistan continue their daily vigil. They look at the sky for rain that rarely comes, and they look at their taps for water that has vanished. And tomorrow morning, as the sun rises over the parched earth, the same question will echo again: "Will water come today?"

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# Community Leaders and Volunteers Honored at PAGH Annual Grand Sehri

*Prominent political figures, community leaders, and families gathered under one roof as PAGH celebrated unity, tradition, and volunteerism during its signature Ramadan event.*



# Dr. Mubashir Choudhery Celebrates Ramadan with Heartfelt Iftar for Houston Community

From local leaders to U.S. Congress hopefuls, the Iftar dinner attracted a diverse gathering at Lasbela Restaurant celebrating faith, unity, and giving. Dr. Choudhery's hospitality and the presence of prominent figures made it a memorable night for the Pakistani-American community.



# Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA Celebrates Spirit of Ramadan with Exclusive Annual Iftar

*An evening of high-level networking and cultural tradition as the PCC-USA partners with Worldfood Express for a members-only gala at Karachi Restaurant.*





# Study links obesity to faster Alzheimer's progression

Obesity might contribute to faster progression of Alzheimer's disease, a new study says.

Some blood markers associated with Alzheimer's increased nearly twice as fast among people with obesity compared to people who didn't have obesity, results presented Tuesday at the Radiological Society of North America's annual meeting in Chicago indicate.

"This is the first time we've shown the relationship between obesity and Alzheimer's disease as measured by blood biomarker tests," senior researcher Dr. Cyrus Raji, a principal investigator in the Neuroimaging Labs Research Center of the Mallinckrodt Institute of Radiology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

For the study, researchers tracked five-year data on more than 400 participants in an ongoing brain imaging study of Alzheimer's patients.

Results showed that people with obesity had blood biomarkers for Alzheimer's that rose more rapidly, including:

Tau proteins, which form toxic clumps in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.

Protein fragments of neurofilament light chain, which are released from damaged or dying brain cells.

Glial fibrillary acidic protein, a protein produced by cells that heal and protect neurons in the brain and spinal cord.

Overall, tau levels increased up to 95% faster in people with obesity, results show. There also was a 24% faster rate of increase in NfL levels in participants with obesity versus those with Alzheimer's without obesity.

Overall, blood tests proved better than PET medical imaging scans in capturing the impact of obesity on Alzheimer's, researchers concluded.

"The fact that we can track the predictive influence of obesity on rising blood biomarkers more sensitively than PET is what astonished me in this study," Raji said.

These results imply that obesity might be a risk factor for Alzheimer's, said lead researcher Dr. Soheil Mohammadi, a postdoctoral research associate at MIR.

"According to the 2024 report of the Lancet Commission, 14 modifiable risk factors total approximately 45%, or close to half, of the risk for Alzheimer's disease," Mohammadi said in a news release. "If we can reduce any of those risk factors, we can significantly reduce Alzheimer's cases or lengthen the amount of time until the onset of the disease."

Raji believes that in the future doctors will use both blood tests and brain imaging scans to track Alzheimer's patients, particularly those being treated with newly approved drugs meant to slow the disease's progression.

"This is such profound science to follow right now because we have drugs that can treat obesity quite powerfully, which means we could track the effect of weight loss drugs on Alzheimer's biomarkers in future studies," Raji said.

"It's marvelous that we have these blood biomarkers to track the molecular pathology of Alzheimer's disease, and MRI scans to track additional evidence of brain degeneration and response to various treatments," Raji continued. "This work is foundational for future studies and treatment trials."

Results presented at medical meetings should be considered preliminary until they're published in a peer-reviewed journal.



# Sciences reveals shocking body response against heart attack

## A shocking research revealed how your body reacts to a heart attack

Heart failure is a serious and long-lasting condition that affects millions of people around the world.

It usually begins with heart muscle damage and when this happens, the heart becomes weaker and cannot pump blood as well as it should.

Over time, the heart struggles to send enough blood to the rest of the body, which leads to fatigue, shortness of breath, swelling in the legs, and many other problems that make daily life difficult.

Even though doctors have treatments that can ease symptoms and help patients live longer, there is still no cure that can stop the disease from progressing.

For decades, doctors have relied on the same medicines, and while these drugs help control blood pressure and reduce strain on the heart, they do not fix the underlying damage.

One of the biggest challenges in treating heart failure has been the lack of understanding about what truly drives the disease forward.

A research team from Penn State College of Medicine, led by Dr. Shyam Bansal, believes they may have uncovered an important piece of the puzzle.

Their work suggests that the body's own immune system, which normally protects us from infections and helps heal injuries, may actually worsen heart failure over time.

The immune system is made up of many different types of cells that work together to keep the body healthy. Among them are helper T cells, a type of white blood cell that plays a key role in organizing immune responses.

These cells are usually helpful. They help the body fight viruses and bacteria, and they assist in healing wounds after injuries. Under normal conditions, helper T cells travel through the blood, lymph nodes, and spleen, ready to respond when something goes wrong.

Dr. Bansal became interested in helper T cells because of a simple but important question. If these cells can help heal a cut on the skin, why do they fail to repair damage in the heart after a heart attack?

In their new study, they examined heart tissue from healthy people and from patients with heart failure and studied closely how immune cells behave inside failing hearts.

In failing human hearts, helper T cells were far more active and more numerous than in healthy hearts. In particular, a group called CD4+ helper T cells stood out.

These cells were not only more active, but they were also multiplying at a higher rate. This level of immune activity suggested that inflammation was playing a much larger role in heart failure than previously thought.

The researchers also discovered that these CD4+ helper T cells showed increased activity in a signaling pathway linked to estrogen. When this pathway becomes too active, it can promote inflammation and scar tissue formation in the heart. Over time, this scarring contributes to worsening heart function.

Dr. Bansal and his team plan to continue studying these immune pathways to see whether new drugs can be developed to block the harmful immune response without weakening the body's ability to fight infections.

## PAGH and PULSE Launch Pakistan Coaching Center in Landmark Ceremony to Empower Houston's Next Generation

*Continued from page 17*

(PAGH) officially launched the Pakistan Coaching Center. This flagship initiative marks a transformative moment for Pakistani-American youth in Houston, establishing a dedicated platform for leadership and academic excellence. Speakers at the event described the launch as more than just an educational opening; it is the foundation of a brighter, more empowered future, designed to strengthen cultural roots while equipping students with the globally competitive skills needed to succeed in America's dynamic professional landscape.

During the ceremony, PULSE President Faysal Aziz Khan emphasized that the center represents a complete educational and empowerment model rather than a traditional school. He stated that the initiative provides a structured platform where youth remain connected to their identity while gaining the modern knowledge required to compete on a global stage. PULSE Executive Director Najia Ashar further highlighted that the vision for the center is to promote confidence and real-world readiness alongside academic mastery, focusing heavily on building self-esteem and leadership qualities among the students. This "leaders over learners" philosophy was met with widespread acclaim from the various community representatives in attendance.

The curriculum unveiled at the event is a comprehensive 360-degree model that merges cultural values with high-tech advancement. Students will engage in Urdu language instruction, cultural awareness, Quranic education, and character-building, while simultaneously mastering core subjects such as Mathematics, Science, IT, and Artificial Intelligence. PAGH President Siraj Narsi noted during the proceedings that the community has long needed a dedicated space where children can stay connected to their language and values, calling the center the definitive answer to that need. A special message from PAGH General Secretary Aamir Askari Zaidi was also displayed, reaffirming that the partnership with PULSE is a milestone that turns a long-held vision for the next generation into a reality.

The ceremony concluded with the announcement that the first phase of the Pakistan Coaching Center is expected to enroll hundreds of students, with expansion plans for other parts of Houston already under consideration. Attendees hailed the launch as a new ray of hope for youth development and long-term community progress. As the center begins its operations, it stands as a testament to the power of collaboration in fostering identity and excellence for the leaders of tomorrow.

## Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA Hosts Annual Iftar Dinner at Karachi Restaurant

*Continued from page 17*

Chamber members utilized the exclusive setting to forge new connections, discuss upcoming economic endeavors, and strengthen existing corporate ties within the Pakistani-American business diaspora.

The collaboration with Worldfood Express was widely praised by the attendees, adding a layer of corporate synergy to the cultural celebration. As the night concluded over traditional desserts and tea, the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA reaffirmed its dedication to facilitating growth, advocacy, and unity for its members throughout the year.

## Celebrate Eid in True Texas Style at Marquee Texas Ranch — A Grand Gala of Flavor, Family & Festivities Awaits!

*Continued from page 17*

celebration. Guests can select from convenient food court dining slots between 6:00 and 10:00 p.m., ensuring a smooth and enjoyable buffet experience for all attendees. Organizers are encouraging early reservations as tickets are selling quickly and strong attendance is anticipated.

This is far more than a traditional dinner. The Grand Eid Buffet offers a complete family experience, featuring ATV adventures, go-kart racing, pony and horse rides, ziplining, bumper boats, paddle boats, bounce houses, and cycle boats — creating a dynamic atmosphere where children and adults alike can celebrate together. The combination of outdoor charm and festive décor will provide the perfect backdrop for cherished Eid memories.

At the heart of the celebration is a lavish buffet showcasing a rich selection of traditional and popular dishes designed to delight every palate. From the aroma of freshly prepared specialties to the warmth of shared meals among family and friends, the evening promises to capture the true spirit of Eid — unity, gratitude, and joy.

Organizers describe the event as a full-scale Eid experience where tradition meets adventure in a welcoming community setting. Tickets are now available, and those interested in attending one of the most exciting Eid gatherings of 2026 can reserve their spot by calling (346) 508-5547.

With its blend of festivity, flavor, and family fun, the Grand Eid Buffet at Marquee Texas Ranch is poised to become one of the season's most talked-about celebrations.

## Dr. Mubashir Choudhery Brings Houston Together in a Heartwarming Ramadan Iftar

*Continued from page 17*

guests. The event offered attendees a chance to share in the blessings of Ramadan while enjoying a sumptuous spread of traditional delicacies.

Dr. Choudhery emphasized the importance of community unity, cultural heritage, and the spirit of generosity during the holy month. Guests praised the warm hospitality, festive ambiance, and the opportunity to connect with both community members and public leaders.

The Iftar dinner was more than a meal; it was a celebration of togetherness, civic engagement, and the rich traditions of Houston's Pakistani-American community.

## Under Allah's Mercy, PAGH Brings Houston's Pakistani Community Together in Grand Sehri

*Continued from page 17*

What began as a pre-dawn Ramadan meal transformed into a vibrant celebration of unity, drawing hundreds of Pakistani Americans from across Houston and neighboring communities. The gathering stood as a testament to the strength, visibility and growing influence of one of the city's most dynamic diaspora communities.

The evening brought together an impressive cross-section of civic, political and business leadership. Among the distinguished attendees were former Federal Minister Babar Ghouri and former Members of the National Assembly Rashid Godil, Salman Razaqi, and Fahim Akhund, alongside prominent community leaders and entrepreneurs. Their presence elevated the occasion, reinforcing the bridge between homeland heritage and American civic engagement.

In his remarks, PAGH President Siraj Narsi emphasized that such landmark gatherings are only possible through collective spirit and volunteer dedication. Vice President Sarah Khan and Secretary Zafar Iqbal echoed this sentiment, praising the tireless efforts of volunteers who worked behind the scenes to ensure a flawless event. Several community members were honored with certificates of appreciation — a moving tribute to those who quietly strengthen the fabric of the diaspora.

The culinary experience, curated by Haider Catering, featured a rich spread of traditional South Asian favorites, filling the air with the aromas of home. Families and friends shared laughter and reflection over steaming

plates, embodying the spirit of Ramadan — gratitude, generosity and togetherness.

Outside, the atmosphere was equally electric. Vendor stalls offered clothing, gifts and festive items, creating a lively Ramadan marketplace. Women preparing for Eid browsed and shopped, children played, and conversations flowed freely — turning the spiritual gathering into a full-fledged community festival.

More than a meal, the Grand Sehri symbolized something deeper: the evolving identity and growing confidence of Houston's Pakistani diaspora. In a city celebrated for its cultural diversity, such events reinforce tradition while building bridges across generations.

As attendees departed for Fajr prayers beneath the fading night sky, one message resonated clearly — Houston's Pakistani community is not only preserving its heritage, but strengthening its unity and expanding its footprint with every passing year.

A night before dawn — and a community shining brighter than ever.

## Harris County and Fort Bend County Primary Election Results

*Continued from page 17*

open County Judge race (Lina Hidalgo is not running). Both parties will require runoffs. In the Democratic primary, former Houston mayor Annise Parker led with 46.62%, defeating City Council member Letitia Plummer (37.29%). Parker told supporters she was "excited" by the turnout and expected to make the November ballot. In the Republican primary, no one cleared 50%; former state Rep. Orlando Sanchez topped the field with 26.46%, with firefighter-union leader Warren "Marty" Lancton a close third (20.57%) and Harris County Municipal Court Judge Warren Howell at 20.79%. (The Houston Chronicle similarly reported Sanchez and Lancton leading the GOP contest.) Sanchez and Howell will advance to the May 26 runoff on the Republican side, while Parker and Plummer will vie for the Democratic nomination.

Other Harris County local contests saw decisive results. (Texas Public Radio reported former Houston City Council member Abbie Kamin easily won the Democratic primary for County Attorney — her chief challenger, Audrie Lawton Evans, trailed far behind.) Most races for positions such as county clerk, sheriff, and district clerk were won by the frontrunners without need for runoff (early results showed clear margins). As one local observer noted, "the top Democratic and Republican contenders [for

county judge] are now headed for a May runoff". All precincts have reported, and with record turnout, Harris County officials expect to certify results on time.

Fort Bend County — Local Offices and Runoffs

In Fort Bend County, local races were largely decided on Tuesday, with one notable runoff on the horizon. On the Republican side, Sugar Land attorney Daniel Wong won the County Judge nomination handily, taking about 56% of the five-way field. (FOX26 notes Wong is a former Sugar Land city councilman.) Several other GOP primaries were decided outright: U.S. Rep. Trever Nehls cruised to renomination in Congressional District 22 (over 81% of the vote against Rebecca Clark); Tamara McFarlane won the County Clerk primary with 52%; Audrey Lee won the District Clerk race with 54%; longtime prosecutor Shawn McDonald captured over 75% in the District Attorney (268th) race; and attorney Asha Reddi won the District Judge (240th) seat with 57%. The only Republican runoff will come in Commissioner, Pct. 4: businessman Ken Mathews (43.11%) and Adam Schoof (31.50%) finished one-two and will meet again.

On the Democratic side in Fort Bend, no countywide candidate hit 50% in several races. In the County Judge primary, former Baylor Bears player Dexter McCoy led with 42.06%, followed by ex-commissioner Rachele Carter at 18.05%. Neither reached the majority, so McCoy and Carter will face off in May. Similarly, Sonya Jones (36.79%) and Maria T. Jackson (23.11%) will go to a runoff for County Clerk, and Jeffrey L. Boney (35.99%) will face Sara Khan (31.97%) in a Treasurer runoff. In the most crowded race, the Democratic Commissioner Pct. 4 contest was decided by just 5 votes out of over 13,000: Brittanye Morris (17.83%) narrowly beat April L. Jones (17.79%), forcing a runoff. Fort Bend's incumbent County Judge KP George, who had switched from the Democratic to Republican Party last year, drew only a few percent in the GOP race and actually finished last among Republican candidates. State legislative primaries in Fort Bend were mostly settled: Elizabeth "Eliz" Markowitz won the House District 26 Democratic primary with 56.91%, and Suleman Lalani took House District 76 with 55.65%, avoiding runoffs in those races.

Clerk's offices in both counties cautioned that these results are unofficial until certified. But with near-complete reporting, most county offices know who will be on the November ballot. All the runoff matchups (Parker vs. Plummer and Sanchez vs. Howell in Harris; McCoy vs. Carter — and the other Fort Bend runoffs listed above) are set for May 26. Harris County Clerk Hudspeth called Tuesday a "good day" for election workers, and both counties expect to finalize totals in the coming days.



# Shocking reason behind type 2 diabetes revealed by scientists

**Currently, more than 400 million people are suffering from diabetes**

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic metabolic diseases and right now about 415 million people have diabetes, and most of them, almost 90% of them have type 2 diabetes.

This condition happens when the body cannot make enough insulin, which leads to chronically high levels of sugar in the blood.

Insulin is the hormone made by cells in the pancreas called beta-cells which helps lower blood sugar when it gets too high by assisting the cells in absorbing it.

For a long time, doctors believed that the main issue in type 2 diabetes was having too much sugar in the blood. But new research from the University of Oxford is changing that idea.

The study shows that it's not just the sugar (glucose) itself that damages the pancreas, instead, it's what happens to sugar once it gets inside the body's cells. When glucose is broken down inside cells, it creates byproducts—also called glucose metabolites.

These byproducts may be the real reason why the insulin-producing beta-cells stop working overtime.

The research suggests that the process of glucose metabolism,

how its broken down inside the body, may be more harmful than the sugar levels alone.

This is a big discovery because it changes how scientists and doctors might treat type 2 diabetes.

If we can find ways to slow down or change how glucose is broken down in the body, we might be able to protect the beta-cells and help people with diabetes make insulin for longer.

Keeping blood sugar levels balanced is very important for health. If blood sugar goes too low, it can make a person feel dizzy, confused, or even faint.

But if blood sugar stays too high for a long time, it can harm the eyes, kidneys, nerves, and heart.

The Oxford study, led by Dr. Elizabeth Haythorne, shows that a certain glucose byproduct builds up in the cells because of a blockage in how glucose is broken down.

This buildup supposedly causes damage to the beta-cells and makes it harder for them to release insulin. This changes the focus from just blood sugar levels to the entire process of sugar metabolism.

This research gives hope to the millions of people living with type 2 diabetes and opens the door to new ways of treating the disease.





# Most Women Fear Breast Cancer—but This Is the Bigger Health Risk

**Breast cancer is a common fear, but heart disease poses a greater threat. The good news: small daily choices can help safeguard your health.**

When asked about the health issue they fear most, breast cancer may jump to the top for many women. Breast cancer is a threat, with about 13 percent of females receiving a diagnosis in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> But nearly half of women in the U.S. are already living with another condition that kills more of us each year than all types of cancer put together: heart disease.<sup>2</sup>

"Heart disease is not rare or a distant risk," says Chippy Ajithan, MD, board-certified cardiologist. "It is the single biggest threat most women face over their lifetime."

## Why Women Need to Be Concerned About Heart Disease

### It's the #1 Killer Among Women

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S. and worldwide, claiming more lives than the second and third causes (cancer and accidents) combined.<sup>3</sup> This is true for both men and women, but "I think many women still think heart disease is a man's disease," says Sandra Tsai, MD, an obstetrics cardiologist. That could be why only about 44 percent of women recognize it as the biggest threat to their health.

There's evidence that this bias affects medical training as well. In a nationwide survey, only 22 percent of primary care doctors and 42 percent of cardiologists said they feel extremely well prepared to assess heart disease risks in women.

### We Often Dismiss Women's Heart Attack Symptoms

Both men and women experience chest pain as the most common symptom of a heart attack, says Anais Hausvater, MD, cardiologist and co-director of the Cardio-Obstetrics Program at NYU Langone Health.

However, in women especially, "sometimes it does not feel exactly like a pain—it can be a pinch or a heaviness or a soreness," Hausvater says.

Women are also more likely than men to experience multiple symptoms at once, such as shortness of breath, nausea or vomiting, fatigue, and pain in the arm, neck or jaw. For this reason, they may attribute their symptoms to something less serious, like heartburn or the flu, and delay getting the emergency care they need.<sup>6</sup>

### Women Have Unique Risk Factors

High blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity increase the risk of heart disease for anyone.<sup>7</sup> But women have other risk factors specific to their sex. Pregnancy complications are one example. A history of issues such as gestational diabetes, preeclampsia and preterm birth is closely tied to heart issues later in life, Tsai says.<sup>8</sup>

Early menopause (before age 45) is another.<sup>9</sup> And risk climbs after starting menopause in general, even at a "normal" age (around 51). That's because the decline in estrogen can worsen cholesterol and increase central obesity (abdominal fat), insulin resistance and blood pressure, Ajithan says.

Women are also more likely to have autoimmune disorders like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis, which cause plaque to build up faster in their arteries.<sup>11</sup>

### You Can Look and Feel Fine and Still Get Heart Disease

"I feel fine, so my heart is fine," is a persistent myth Ajithan says she often hears among her patients. But, "Heart disease often progresses silently for decades," she says.

Likewise, Ajithan says many people—females especially—make the mistake of equating weight with health. They think: "I'm thin, so I'm low risk," she says. But weight is only one risk factor for heart disease—cholesterol levels, diet, alcohol intake and physical activity also matter.

### How to Support Your Heart

"I wish more women knew that the vast majority of heart disease is preventable and treatable," Hausvater says. These healthy habits can go a long way toward lowering your risk:

**Eat a plant-based diet:** "What we eat affects our blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight and much more, which are all risk factors for heart disease," says Ashley Kitchens, M.P.H., RDN, LDN. The Mediterranean diet, specifically, has been linked to a lower risk of heart disease.<sup>13</sup> This is a plant-based approach to eating that includes vegetables, fruits, beans, whole grains, nuts, seeds and olive oil with some fish and limited red meat and ultra-processed foods, Kitchens says.

**Move your body:** Regular physical activity is a boon for heart health. Aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate- to high-intensity exercise (brisk walking, biking, tennis, swimming—they all count).<sup>14</sup> And make sure to include strength training in the mix, especially if you're in menopause or perimenopause, Hausvater says.

**Get enough sleep:** Consistently getting at least seven hours of sleep per night is important for your heart health. Snoozing less than that is linked to high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes and obesity, all of which are risk factors for heart disease.<sup>15</sup> To get better sleep, try going to bed and waking up at the same time each day, avoiding screens and big meals close to bedtime and keeping your bedroom cool, dark and quiet.

**Manage your stress:** Stress is a significant risk factor for heart disease among women.<sup>16</sup> "We cannot avoid stress, but we can find ways to cope," Hausvater says. She suggests research-backed strategies such as meditation, therapy, deep breathing, exercise and spending time in nature.

**Quit smoking:** Avoiding tobacco smoke can help protect your heart health. Your risk of heart disease goes down immediately after you quit, and it continues to decrease over time.

# Skipping This Morning Habit Can Increase Your Blood Pressure Over Time

Picture this: You've got 30 minutes to get out the door. You turn on the coffeepot, get dressed, grab a quick bite while helping everyone else get ready. Notice anything missing? Water.

Most of us reach for coffee before a glass of water in the morning. Skipping the simple habit of drinking water first thing won't make your blood pressure spike instantly—but like many daily habits, doing it consistently over time can affect long-term health.

We spoke to dietitians to explain how skipping this important morning habit may be quietly impacting your blood pressure, along with other lifestyle tips for better heart health.

## Why Not Drinking Water in the Morning Can Increase Blood Pressure Over Time

As we're still sleeping soundly in the early morning hours, our blood pressure is already on the move. "Our blood pressure naturally rises in the early morning (the "morning surge") due to hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, and what we do then can either amplify or blunt that rise," explains Michelle Cardel, Ph.D., RD.

Most body systems operate on a circadian rhythm, meaning they "turn on" when we wake. For example, when we wake up in the morning, the sympathetic nervous system becomes more active, increasing heart rate and naturally pushing blood pressure higher.

Hydration plays an important role here, too. "Not drinking water in the morning keeps you in a slightly dehydrated state from overnight, which triggers hormones like vasopressin and the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system," says Michelle Routhenstein, M.S., RD, CDCES, CDN.3 Both of these hormones help regulate blood pressure and fluid balance, but when elevated, they tighten blood vessels and make the heart work harder. Over time, this can contribute to higher blood pressure.

While missing a glass of water isn't dangerous, studies show that consistently starting the day dehydrated can elevate blood pressure readings. "Dehydration also makes the blood thicker and reduces the fluid in your vessels, so your heart has to pump against more resistance, making blood pressure rise," Routhenstein explains.

"Overall, the concern is cumulative," Cardel says. "Regularly starting the day dehydrated—then adding coffee, excess salt, stress and sedentary activity—can repeatedly push the morning blood pressure surge higher. Over years, this pattern may contribute to stiffer arteries, higher resting pressure and increased cardiovascular risk."

## What to Do Instead of Skipping Water in the Morning

**Keep It on Your Nightstand.** Set a glass

or water bottle next to your bed so it's the first thing you see when you wake up—yes, before your phone. Keeping water in your line of sight makes it an easy habit to stick with.

**Drink Warm Water.** If you prefer hot beverages like coffee, start with a warm mug of water first to gently hydrate.

**Add Flavor.** Not a fan of plain water? Add citrus like lemon, lime or orange slices, or prepare a jug of infused water to sip throughout the day.

**Make a Hydrating Breakfast.** Blend up a smoothie packed with fruits, vegetables and milk for a fluid boost. This Berry-Banana Cauliflower Smoothie is a great option.

**Prioritize Electrolytes.** Eat a balanced breakfast rich in potassium, magnesium and calcium to support healthy blood pressure and vascular function, says Routhenstein. Fruit, nuts, seeds and dairy are excellent sources.

**Wait to Drink Coffee.** Delay caffeine and avoid coffee on an empty stomach, says Cardel. "Have at least one glass of water before your first coffee and consider keeping caffeine moderate (around 2 cups). Caffeine can transiently raise blood pressure; going into it dehydrated may amplify that effect."<sup>6</sup>

## Tips for Managing Blood Pressure

In addition to staying hydrated and starting your day with water, there are several other habits that can support healthy blood pressure:

**Watch Sodium.** Aim to keep sodium intake to no more than 1,500 milligrams per day, which can help lower blood pressure, says Routhenstein. Sodium isn't just in the saltshaker—it's common in many packaged and restaurant foods, including canned and frozen meals, condiments, sauces, dressings and snack foods like chips and pretzels.

**Eat Potassium-Rich Foods.** Eat more potassium-rich foods like vegetables, fruits and legumes, which help counteract sodium's effect on blood pressure, says Veronica Rouse, RD.<sup>8</sup>

**Exercise Regularly.** Physical activity is linked to better heart health and blood pressure control. Ideally, aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-to-vigorous activity plus two days of strength training.<sup>9</sup>

**Prioritize Sleep.** Getting enough sleep—ideally seven to nine hours per night—and maintaining a wind-down routine is linked with improvements in nighttime and early-morning blood pressure, says Cardel.<sup>10</sup>

## Expert Take

Skipping water in the morning may seem harmless, but over time, experts say not making this a habit can contribute to higher blood pressure. Before reaching for coffee or your phone, make a glass of water your first act of the day.





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