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**ALERT: PRIMARY EARLY VOTING FEB 17-27 | FINAL ELECTION DAY MARCH 3**

Don't wait until the last minute! Ensure your registration is active and head to the polls early to avoid the crowds.

## 1,000 Registrations in 3 Minutes: Houston Iftar Sets New Record



Saeed Sheikh, Coordinator of the Houston Iftar Organizing Committee, along with representatives of partner organizations, briefing the media during the online registration process for the 27th Annual Houston Iftar at the Bayou City Event Center.

Online registration has officially closed for Houston's 27th Annual Iftar, one of the largest Ramadan gatherings in the United States, with

## Jamia Karachi Alumni Association Houston Announces Major Education Support Initiative



A major fundraising initiative was launched in support of the Jamia Karachi's support as the Jaima Alumni Association Houston announced the provision of 100 laptops, free Wi-Fi access, and 50 scholarships for deserving students. The announcement was made during a fundraising dinner held in



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FOR THE BETTER FUTURE

### Pakistan 'won't hesitate' to carry out more air strikes in Afghanistan, says Khawaja Asif

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Wednesday said Pakistan would not hesitate to conduct more air strikes in Afghanistan if no action was taken by Kabul against militants on its soil to

### Our goal? Win T20 World Cup, says Shadab as Pakistan into Super Eights

Shadab Khan said Pakistan believed they could go on and win the T20 World Cup after their best performance of the tournament secured the last Super Eights berth on Wednesday. Pakistan bowled out Namibia

### Global leaders, parliamentarians send well-wishes for a 'blessed and peaceful' Ramazan

As the Ramazan moon was sighted in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the USA, and other countries on Tuesday night, wishes poured in from politicians and parliamentarians worldwide for the start of the holy month.

Meanwhile, according to the Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (Suparco), the first day of Ramazan in

### HEIR TO A HERO: The Daughter of "Sister" Sheila Jackson Lee Takes the Helm in Harris County



Erica Lee Carter, the daughter of the late U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, has been unanimously appointed as the new Harris County Administrator, effective March 9.

While her appointment makes history as the first African American woman to hold this top executive post, for the Pakistani-American community in Houston and beyond, this moment signifies the next chapter in a

HOUSTON, TX – The legacy of one of Pakistan's greatest champions in the U.S. Congress is set to continue in a powerful new way.

### President Zardari, PM Shehbaz extend well wishes to incoming BD PM Rahman, look to ramp up ties

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari congratulated Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief Tarique Rahman on being sworn in as prime minister on Tuesday following his party's landslide victory in



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# Return to democracy

The new PM takes charge at a time when Bangladesh is at a pivotal juncture.

Zahid Hussain

DESCRIBED as the most consequential election in its recent history, Bangladesh last week voted to provide the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) an overwhelming majority. The polls have ended the political uncertainty that had gripped the South Asian nation since the overthrow of the previous regime by a student-led uprising in 2024. Yet the challenges for the new government are daunting.

While the BNP's victory was not in doubt, the landslide win came as a surprise given the forecast of tough competition from the challengers. The large turnout of voters indicated the people's faith in the restoration of democracy after a long period of authoritarian rule. The previous Awami League government, led by Hasina Wajid, had ruled the country for 15 years before being ousted in 2024. The party was barred from contesting the elections.

Bangladeshis voted for a nationalist and secular party that had ruled the country several times in the past and had suffered persecution under Hasina Wajid's regime. The defeat of the Jamaat-i-Islami-led 11-party alliance is seen as a rejection of conservative, religion-based politics. Voters also backed constitutional reforms that include a two-term limit for prime ministers, the setting up of a bicameral parliament and greater representation for women.

Post-independence, Bangladesh alternated between civilian and military rule. The country's political landscape had been dominated by two political dynasties led by two women — Hasina Wajid and Khaleda Zia — who succeeded one another in power.

While Hasina Wajid, who had been sentenced to death by a special Bangladesh tribunal for crimes against humanity, is now living in exile in India, Khaleda Zia, who led the BNP and also served as prime minister twice, passed away in December last year after being released from detention. Her party is now led by her son Tarique Rahman.

Rahman, who had returned to Bangladesh from self-exile in England only recently after the last government's ouster in 2024, has taken oath as the country's new prime

minister. He had fled the country in 2008 after being charged with corruption by a military-backed caretaker dispensation. Rahman, who had never held a government position before, led the party in the elections on a nationalist and reform agenda.

He takes charge at a time when Bangladesh is yet to recover from the political unrest that led to the overthrow of a civilian dictatorship. The Gen-Z revolt has changed the political landscape of Bangladesh. A major challenge for the new government is to improve governance and purge state institutions of political influence. The constitutional reform package that has been overwhelmingly approved by the voters may help address some of these issues.

Despite a long period of authoritarian rule and political unrest, Bangladesh has done well in economic development. From a basket case, Bangladesh went on to become one of the fastest-growing economies in the region. In social indicators, too, it's ahead of most South Asian countries. But over the last few years, economic growth has slowed down substantially and higher inflation has affected people's lives. The readymade garment sector, which is critical to the country's exports, faces a crisis. The slowing down of the economy has also exacerbated unemployment, particularly among the young generation.

Economic revival presents the biggest challenge to the new government. The prime minister has promised to diversify the economy and focus on social welfare programmes to ease the effects of high inflation. With a huge youth bulge the unemployment problem will be a major test for the government.

Additionally, although the new government has a comfortable two-thirds majority in parliament it needs to put in much effort to restore political stability. Despite being barred from contesting the elections, the Awami League, which ruled the country for a large part of its history, remains a major political force that could create problems for the government. Hasina Wajid seems to be actively guiding her supporters from exile in India. She has rejected the elections as a farce. It doesn't look like the Indian government will agree to Bangladesh's demand

to extradite her. The issue remains a sticking point in relations between the two countries.

Bordered on three sides by India, Bangladesh had developed very close ties with New Delhi under the Awami League government. In fact, critics had accused the former prime minister of turning the country into a client state of India. It was a great setback for New Delhi when Hasina Wajid was ousted from power. The Narendra Modi government has not only refused to extradite her but apparently has not stopped her political activities either. Relations between the two countries had hit a new low over the past few months, with Dhaka accusing New Delhi of providing protection to fugitives allegedly involved in murder.

Although the new government has indicated a reset in relations with India, there are some serious problems that are hard to resolve — among them water-sharing disputes and border incidents. The anti-India sentiment among large segments of the population has led to calls for a foreign policy that is independent of New Delhi.

Over the past few years, Bangladesh had managed a delicate balancing act with India and its other neighbour China, which has emerged as its biggest trading partner. China has also invested heavily in infrastructure projects. Worsening relations with India have led Bangladesh to lean more on China.

Meanwhile, relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan improved dramatically under the caretaker administration after the fall of the Hasina Wajid government. The two countries have not only established close economic and trade ties but have also been cooperating in defence areas. They have also restarted a direct air service.

In his first press conference after the elections, the new prime minister has stressed regional cooperation and building relations with all countries keeping the national interest of Bangladesh foremost. He has also talked about reviving Saarc, which had virtually become defunct because of India-Pakistan tensions. A politically stable Bangladesh under a democratic government is a good omen for regional peace.

*The writer is an author and journalist.*

## Eye of the storm

The reports of Khan's ill health have added fuel to the talk of a probable deal.

Arifa Noor

IT has been a worrying week for the PTI as the news about Imran Khan's health became public and dominated news headlines and private conversations. From the sketchy information that came out initially, it appeared that he had some problem with his eye and has lost up to 85 per cent of his vision in that eye. This was reported by lawyer Salman Safdar, after his court-appointed visit to Khan at Adiala jail, though there had been news reports about the matter earlier. According to Safdar, the percentage was communicated to Khan by the doctors who examined him.

The government's earlier reaction appeared a bit inexplicable. It took the government days to confirm the problem, after it had been reported in the media. And then it did nothing while the Supreme Court woke up to take notice, sending Safdar to the jail. Over the weekend, there were reports that a team of doctors had been sent to the jail to examine him, while his family and personal doctors continued to wait for access. As the family and party refused to accept the government's decision of giving access to only certain individuals (rather than the family being allowed to choose the person) the examination was carried out at the jail by doctors without any relative present.

The party is trying to build up pressure through protests and sit-ins, which seems to

cause no sleepless nights to the government. This is so despite reports that KP is cut off from the rest of the country. The PTI is getting criticised for this though it is hard to understand why the federal government is ignoring it.

To return to Adiala, this is a good time for a reminder that health issues, especially of imprisoned political prisoners, should not be downplayed or treated lightly. For this reason, the government should provide all help possible to Khan; this includes allowing his family and personal doctors access to him, so they can take decisions on his health, instead of the government making the call on which experts should conduct the examination and which family members can be present. This reeks of callousness.

However, there is a political angle to this entire crisis. The reports of Khan's ill health have added fuel to the talk of a probable deal or 'dheel', as it seems to share some parallels with the platelets issue which allowed Nawaz Sharif to be freed and flown to London. In fact, the question being asked again and again in Islamabad is if this is Platelets 2, implying that some backroom deal is being worked out.

It is important to point out that the rumours did not just emerge as a result of health worries but also because of the events of the past couple of weeks where the cooperation between the federal and provincial governments improved. Once this happened, the allegations of drugs and other

criminal activities directed at Chief Minister Sohail Afridi gave way to praise for his cooperation with Islamabad. So once the reports of the illness emerged, it simply lent credence to rumours that something was cooking.

At the moment, it is hard for those of us who live away from Constitution Avenue to comment on these rumours with any authority. And because I would like to feel better about my ignorance, perhaps some of those living on Constitution Avenue may also be as ill-informed as the rest of us mortals.

Despite this, there is much support for the idea of a deal. For many within the PTI think it would provide respite to Khan and others and allow them to bide their time for a return to power (as in the case of other politicians in the past). On the government side, it is seen as a way to bring some stability to the situation, allowing the focus to remain on the economy.

But all of this ignores a larger issue, beyond the comfort of those in power and in the opposition. In other words, beyond the level of high politics, where the players tend to be the establishment, the parties and individuals, what will this deal bring to dissatisfied people who have been feeding into the popularity and stature of Khan? Indeed, it is this anger which has resurrected Khan and the PTI each time a fatal blow has been struck in the direction of the party in what is 'high politics'. Be it the forcible exits

from the PTI of the more well-known faces or the decision to deprive the party of its symbol — popular support for it has ensured that none of these steps proved sufficient.

So it is perhaps worth asking what the impact of such a 'deal' would be. Suppose the deal does disillusion the supporters of Khan and undermines his popularity in a way similar to Nawaz Sharif and the PML-N. (The economy and its poor performance landed the second blow on N's popularity.) And then what options will be left for the people to still stay engaged in electoral politics. Will they opt for other, smaller political parties? Or will they look around for more radical options?

The point here is that the establishment needs to realise that it not going to be enough to win over politicians to its side; this is not what will make the system more stable. For the system to be more stable, it is not enough to quieten politicians such as Sharif or Khan and then revel in the decline of their popularity. For real stability, the anger of the people will have to be understood and then addressed through a more equitable economic system and by giving them a voice. Instead of focusing on high politics, it might help if for once attention were paid to the level at which people operate and exist. After all, electoral politics in Balochistan was tamed some time ago, but stability continues to be elusive.

*The writer is a journalist.*

# Pakistan's US test

Perhaps we need a new approach towards Afghanistan, one that is not aligned with any camp.

Muhammad Amir Rana

THE trajectory of Pakistan-US relations has once again been defined by strategic pragmatism rather than a durable partnership. Recent statements from Washington reaffirm that bilateral engagement continues to revolve around two principal pillars: access to critical mineral resources and counterterrorism cooperation.

While the evolving US strategic posture in South Asia is largely shaped by its competition with China and alignment with India, Pakistan remains embedded within this framework due to its geostrategic relevance, serving as a check on India.

Addressing the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on South and Central Asia recently, Assistant Secretary of State Paul Kapur underscored these priorities. He noted that Washington is working with Pakistan to harness the potential of its critical mineral reserves, combining US government seed financing with private sector expertise to generate mutual economic benefits. At the same time, he emphasised that continued counterterrorism cooperation serves a dual purpose, strengthening Pakistan's capacity to manage internal security challenges while addressing transnational threats that could affect the US and its partners.

Perhaps the Middle East does not fall within Kapur's portfolio, and that is why he did not comment on Pakistan's relevance in this context, especially in light of the growing crisis with Iran and the Gaza peace plan, ie, the Board of Peace, whose meeting is scheduled this month, and which Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to attend. At the meeting, he would announce Pakistan's commitment to the Gaza peace plan, particularly its contribution to a Gaza stabilisation force.

Pakistan is currently relevant across multiple domains of US geo-economic and strategic objectives, particularly in three regions: South, Central, and West Asia. In these different regions, Pakistan serves different US interests. If we set aside the Middle East for a while in Pakistan-US relations, America's priority list would include counterterrorism cooperation, containing China, and economic cooperation in the mineral sector in South and Central Asia. Even Kapur hinted at the same in his briefing. However, in South Asia, three additional elements emerge.

First, encouraging India to develop independently, stand on its own, and preserve its freedom of action serves broader US strategic objectives, particularly preventing China or any single hegemonic power from dominating the region. At the same time, supporting Pakistan helps maintain a balance that checks Indian intentions.

Second, through financial assistance via international monetary institutions and by enhancing economic cooperation in critical sectors, the US seeks to engage Pakistan. This approach encourages segments of Pakistan's power elite to limit their inclination towards deeper strategic alignment with China, which could otherwise affect US influence and reduce India's political appeal in the region.

Third, Pakistan serves as a primary partner for counterterrorism in Central Asia, but also in the broader SCO and regional context, where Pakistan can be viewed as a partner maintaining deep relations with the US. While this may continue to irritate Russia, Pakistan's growing relations with Central Asian states also carry geo-economic advantages. However, Afghanistan remains a constraint in this design, and Balochistan, where mineral and counterterrorism interests converge, poses another critical challenge.

Interestingly, while the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs was briefing Congress, the deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, John Mark Pomeroy, was visiting Islamabad to explore and enhance partnership in the mineral sector. During a meeting with the interior minister, while condoling the tragic terror incidents in Islamabad and Balochistan, he emphasised that Pakistan believes in global partnerships to eliminate terrorism and promote investment, echoing the same position articulated by the assistant secretary himself during the congressional hearing.

The question is whether the US would partner with Pakistan to soften Afghanistan, the main hurdle in connectivity between Pakistan and Central Asia, and enhance cooperation to build Pakistan's counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities to reduce risks in Balochistan, which is essential for the utilisation of the province's mineral resources.

Interestingly, Afghanistan and Balochistan both connect to the US and China's strategic designs, particularly in counterterrorism efforts and competition in the race for rare earth minerals. China remains reluctant to intervene or deepen security cooperation beyond a certain point, as Beijing sees long-term political, strategic and economic consequences. In contrast, the US is a notoriously ambitious actor willing to take risks. If it is willing to take risks to denuclearise Iran to serve Israel and its Arab allies, would it be prepared to do something similarly provocative in Afghanistan, perhaps to create pressure or controversy over Bagram, as Trump had earlier instigated and tested reactions?

The US does not seem interested in intervening directly in Afghanistan, as it would be too early for another military involvement. The UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution recently extending by one year the mandate of the Monitoring Team that supports the 1988 Afghanistan Sanctions Committee, which oversees sanctions imposed on the Afghan Taliban, indicating continued US attention and an indication that Washington still wants to give some more time to the Taliban regime.

However, one possibility cannot be ruled out that the US may increase its diplomatic as well as equipment support to Pakistan, targeting terrorist hideouts in Afghanistan, which will keep pressure on the Taliban regime. But, this level of intervention will likely remain minimal and may not help Pakistan influence the Taliban to cooperate on counterterrorism issues, and may not even be able to force the Taliban to change their attitude towards their own people.

Perhaps Pakistan needs a new approach towards Afghanistan, one that is independent and not aligned with any camp, whether the US or China. Such an approach may help gauge the real potential for cooperation, as well as the adversity and costs involved. Pakistan also needs a different approach to dealing with Balochistan, a vision that begins a journey towards peace through peaceful means, which would enhance stability and long-term regional cooperation. But is this a wish list that the power elites would not like to read?

*The writer is a security analyst.*

## Balochistan - insurgency to integration

*Balochistan's stability rests on governance, development, and public participation*

Omay Aimen

Nations are not tested in moments of calm but in seasons of strain. Balochistan today stands at such a juncture, where grief, resilience and hard choices intersect. For years, every major terrorist incident in Pakistan has triggered a familiar chorus that intelligence agencies were negligent, that institutions were asleep, that the state has failed.

Sorrow and anger are human responses to violence, yet the reflex to treat every attack as proof of total collapse oversimplifies a far more complex battlefield. Intelligence is not a crystal ball. It is a continuous contest between the state and adaptive adversaries who evolve, hide and exploit unpredictability. The conversation on Balochistan must therefore move beyond emotional reaction and toward a sober appraisal of facts, trends and responsibilities.

The numbers from the last three years reveal a decisive shift. In 2024, around 2070 terrorists were eliminated in Balochistan, the highest figure recorded until that point. In 2025, that number was reduced to 780. In the opening weeks of 2026 alone, 282 militants

have already been neutralised, including 51 killed in the January 29 encounter, 171 during Operation Radd-ul-Fitna and 60 in subsequent sanitisation operations.

These statistics do not represent random skirmishes; they reflect a sustained campaign. In 2025, security forces conducted a record 58,778 intelligence-based operations across the province. Such frequency underscores both the scale of the threat and the state's growing capacity to penetrate hostile networks. The claim that vast tracts of Balochistan remain beyond state control is increasingly detached from operational reality. Political and military leadership have publicly affirmed that no area is a no-go zone anymore, signalling a determination to restore writ across every district. However, the vastness of Balochistan does have saturating effects on forces operating in the province.

Numbers alone cannot capture the complexity of Balochistan's situation. The unrest is largely confined to specific pockets while majority of the province remains relatively stable, inaccurate to portray the entire province as uniformly alienated. Repeated

dependence on traditional Sardars has failed to produce lasting peace, and reinforcing the same political patterns risks repeating old mistakes. The current militancy increasingly reflects the influence of misled youth shaped by radical narratives rather than purely tribal command, and glorifying armed resistance without acknowledging this manipulation only deepens the instability.

The external dimension cannot be ignored. Insurgencies of this sophistication do not sustain themselves on rhetoric alone. Technical and strategic backing from hostile actors, including India, and facilitation from across the Afghan border, have complicated the state's counterinsurgency efforts. Modern technology, intelligence operations and targeted actions against financiers and facilitators are now central to Pakistan's strategy, aiming to dismantle the insurgents' networks while preventing foreign interference from taking root.

History reminds us that even the most advanced systems can fail, as seen in the September 11 attacks despite America's vast intelligence apparatus, yet the response focused on reform, coordination and long-term resolve rather than endless blame.

Counterinsurgency, whether in Waziristan or Balochistan, demands patience, integrated intelligence, meticulous governance and consistent narrative clarity. Securing and holding cleared areas, strengthening governance through measures such as merging B Areas into A Areas, and ensuring development is deprived to ordinary citizens are essential to prevent relapse and build durable stability.

Law enforcement agencies work tirelessly around the clock, conducting surveillance, arrests and intelligence operations, but the fight against terrorism and organised crime cannot rely on them alone. The true strength of security lies in public participation through Community Intelligence, where citizens stay alert and report suspicious activities, unusual movements or extremist networks.

In areas like Balochistan, where militants exploit so-called local grievances or hide within communities, timely reporting can disrupt recruitment, logistics and safe havens, multiplying the state's capacity to prevent violence. Globally, from neighbourhood

watch programmes to structured citizen reporting systems, public cooperation has proven essential in dismantling criminal and extremist networks, building trust, reducing fear and denying terrorists the anonymity they rely on.

Balochistan stands at a crossroads defined by resolve. Building on these efforts, the path to lasting peace in Balochistan lies not only in operations and intelligence but in the broader integration of society into the state's vision of stability. When governance is visible, development is tangible and citizens feel both protected and empowered, the appeal of militancy diminishes.

Education, economic opportunities and inclusive participation must complement security measures, creating an environment where the next generation sees a future within the national mainstream rather than on the margins of conflict. In this way, Balochistan at the crossroads of Resolver can turn the tide from reactive counterinsurgency to proactive nation-building, ensuring that the province is not just a theatre of conflict but a model of resilience, unity and progress for the country as a whole.

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In the Name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful

Please visit the ISGH website [www.isgh.org/Ramadan2026](http://www.isgh.org/Ramadan2026) for Ramadan updates and resources.

*“O believers! Fasting was prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may attain taqwa (self-restraint).” (Quran 2:183)*

**FASTING** is abstaining from food, drink, and conjugal relations between husband and wife from Fajr (Dawn) to Maghrib (Sunset) with the intention of fasting in obedience of Allah (SWT). Fasting is compulsory on all sane, mature Muslims – males and females.

**INTENTION** (niyyah) to fast is required and must be made before dawn. Intention is an act of the heart. No specific wording of niyyah has been reported from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

**SAHOOR** is the meal one takes before starting the day's fast. It is NOT compulsory during Ramadan, but is blessed. The time for taking this meal extends until dawn – not beyond. Please consult the chart provided to determine the time.

**IFTAR** is breaking the fast at dusk (Maghrib). Hastening to break the fast and making supplication are Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Supplication made at the time of Iftar are answered by Allah (SWT). The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to break his fast with either dates or water. Please visit the special Ramadan page on the ISGH website [www.isgh.org](http://www.isgh.org) for more information on supplications, regulations etc. related to fasting.

**TARAWEEH** prayers are Sunnah. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to increase his efforts to recite the Quran during Ramadan and Angel Jibreel used to listen and revise with him during the month. (Al-Bukhari)

**ZAKAAT-UL-FITR** is a special charity compulsory on every Muslim – male and female. It should be paid (latest) before the Eid prayer. **The equivalent amount of this charity is \$15.00 per person. [isgh.org/fitra](http://isgh.org/fitra)**

**ZAKAAT** is one of the five compulsory pillars of Islam. The basic rate is 2.5% of one's excess assets. [isgh.org/zakat](http://isgh.org/zakat)

**FIDYA** When someone cannot fast in Ramadan (due to ill health, travelling or menstruation for example) they should make up the missed fasts when they are able to do so. However, if they will not be able to make up missed fasts (due to old age or chronic illness that is unlikely to improve) they should pay fidya for someone else to be fed. Fidya is calculated based on what you consider the value of your own average meal. **Fidya is \$15 to \$20 per meal. [isgh.org/fidya](http://isgh.org/fidya)**

**EXEMPLARY CONDUCT** is expected of all Muslims at all times, especially so during Ramadan when extra effort is made to achieve taqwa.

**INTENTIONALLY BREAKING FAST** (without any valid reason) for even one day cannot be compensated for, even if one fasts for the rest of one's life.

**KAFFARAH** (EXPIATION for breaking the fast) takes any of three forms: freeing a female slave, fasting for two consecutive months, or feeding sixty deserving persons (each person receiving the equivalent of an average meal). The number of expiations is equal to the number of days wherein the fast was broken.

**EXEMPTIONS** from fasting are granted to travelers, sick people, and certain other categories. “It is related from some of the early scholars that a type of illness allows one to break the fast, even an injury to the finger or a toothache”. (Al-Mughni). Such persons must also make up for the days of fasting missed.

**INJECTIONS** do not break the fast whether they are for feeding the person or just medicine. It does not matter if the injection was intravenous or hypodermic.

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# Whispers From the Halls of Sindh, a Season of Bribery and the Last Candle of Questioning

Sometimes history is written not in thunder but in whispers. Sindh, Pakistan's southern province, appears to be passing through such a season of whispers. The corridors of power glow brightly, yet the streets beyond them remain dim. Mansions rise higher, but civic confidence feels fragile. Wealth moves swiftly; justice seems short of breath.

When fortunes are amassed overnight, when public office transforms from a platform of service into a vehicle of capital, when the same language is spoken from the police station to the secretariat and into the provincial assembly, questions inevitably arise. What, precisely, is happening?

Among those raising such questions is Imtiaz Chandio, a Sindh-born journalist now based in the United States who has used social media to scrutinize the province's political leadership, bureaucracy and power networks. Inside Pakistan, such inquiries can come at considerable personal risk. Chandio's investigations, by his own telling, extend beyond individual acts of corruption. They challenge what he describes as an entrenched system in which representation, in the name of the people, has too often resulted in the people themselves being sidelined.

Exile alters more than geography. Journalists who leave Pakistan for countries like the United States often describe a shift in psychological terrain as well. Free expression, here, is not merely a constitutional clause but a

lived reality. Questions do not typically invite bullets, disappearances or anonymous threats. In that space, some say, they first begin to understand both what journalism can be and what fear once meant.

In Sindh, the architecture of authority may appear sturdy. Yet beneath it lie public grievances: a struggling farmer, an underpaid teacher, a patient without medicine, a young graduate without opportunity. Bribery is not merely cash slipped into envelopes. It is a culture, critics argue, cultivated over generations. Loyalty is pledged to individuals rather than principles. Laws remain in books; decisions are made on phones.

Under the long rule of the Pakistan Peoples Party in Sindh, stories of rapid enrichment have ceased to sound like rumor and begun to resemble pattern. Those who once climbed narrow staircases of rented homes are now said to preside over expansive farmhouses. Individuals who once worked modest jobs are described as standing at the gates of policy, distributing influence. Allegations circulate that connections and corruption have propelled not only personal advancement but also political elevation of family members. Supporters insist such changes reflect hard work and political acumen. Critics ask what economic system allows such extraordinary ascent in a province where poverty remains widespread.

Mr. Chandio argues that the Peoples Party today bears little resemblance to the party of Benazir Bhutto's



By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

era, when it symbolized resistance and democratic struggle. Since her assassination in 2007, he and others contend, the party's direction, leadership and internal culture have shifted. Individuals once distant from its ideological core entered through various avenues, some through wealth, others through patronage or proximity to power. Over time, these elements, critics say, consolidated influence over policy and governance.

In this telling, corruption in Sindh is not confined to financial irregularities. It resembles a network, a system in which politics, policing and bureaucracy intersect. From banditry in the rural riverine belts to powerful urban networks, a term has emerged in public discourse: "urban bandits." It is used metaphorically to describe not only armed criminals but also those accused

of exploiting authority under the cover of legality. Organized crime, narcotics, gambling operations and land mafias are often cited in the same breath. At the center of it all, critics suggest, lies a shared motive: interest. That thin thread, they say, binds office, influence and money into a single strand, one that ultimately weighs on ordinary citizens.

Prisons, too, form part of this narrative. From Landhi Jail in Karachi to other detention centers across Pakistan, prominent politicians have served time. Jails, observers note, are not merely sites of punishment but sometimes crucibles of alliances. This is not a definitive claim, but a social observation: in the theater of power, actors may change, yet the script often appears familiar.

The names that surface in Sindh's politics sometimes carry controversial pasts and powerful presents. How those trajectories unfolded should not be an illicit question. In a democracy, questioning is its essence. If inquiry provokes fear, it may suggest a deficit of transparency.

This essay is not intended to sow despair. Societies possess an inherent capacity for renewal. No system of power, however entrenched, is more enduring than the act of questioning. History shows that decisions made behind closed doors rarely remain immune to scrutiny. Public silence is seldom permanent.

Sindh's own intellectual and political heritage reinforces that tradition of dissent. The poetry of Shah

Abdul Latif Bhittai still resonates with themes of dignity and resilience. Sachal Sarmast ignited philosophical rebellion. Shaikh Ayaz wielded language as resistance. Hyder Bux Jatoti championed the rights of peasants. G.M. Syed's ideological debates, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's populist politics and Benazir Bhutto's speeches of hope all belong to this province's memory.

The tradition here has been one of questioning, not submission. Yet many residents now speak of pervasive graft and institutional decay. Critics argue that corrupt politicians and compromised bureaucrats have normalized shortcuts to wealth, fostering a culture in which rapid enrichment is pursued without regard for ethics. The critique does not spare men or women; it describes a system in which corruption has seeped broadly.

If today is a season of bribery, tomorrow could yet bring a season of accountability. That possibility rests on whether the courage to ask questions endures. Revolutions, after all, are not always born of bullets. Often they begin with awareness. And awareness begins with the willingness to look into the mirror.

**Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada** is a senior journalist of wide repute, with more than four decades of experience across print and digital media. He has been associated with Pakistan's leading news organizations, including *Geo News* and *the Jang Group*.



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# PEARL VUORINEN

CANDIDATE FOR U.S. CONGRESS CD-22



**PEARL VUORINEN, A DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR CONGRESS IN TEXAS DISTRICT 22, CONTINUED HER CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY LAST WEEK WITH APPEARANCES AT VOTER FORUMS, COMMUNITY FUNDRAISERS, AND LOCAL MEDIA.**

On February 10, Vuorinen attended the 2026 Democratic Primary Forum at the Steve Radack Community Center, an event organized by Indivisible Katy that brought together candidates from Harris and Fort Bend Counties competing in state and local races. The forum offered residents an opportunity to hear directly from contenders ahead of the March primary. The following day, on February 11, she attended a meet-and-greet in support of Brittanye Morris, a Democratic candidate for Fort Bend County Commissioner, Precinct 4, joining other local candidates and community members.

On February 12, Vuorinen attended the SAAF PAANI Fundraiser supporting access to clean drinking water in Pakistan. On February 13, she attended a reception marking the 65th National Day of the State of Kuwait and the 35th Liberation Day, hosted by Consul General H.E. Azzam Alasfoor at the Hyatt Regency Houston/Galleria.

The series of appearances signaled a campaign focused not only on message discipline, but on building the relationships and visibility that can shape primary turnout. **Early voting in Texas runs from February 17 through February 27**, with Election Day scheduled for March 3, giving voters across the district an opportunity to participate in the primary.

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# Here's who will be on March primary ballots in the Houston area

*With the candidate filing deadline having passed this week, Houston Public Media has a rundown of the Democratic and Republican hopefuls for notable county-level races as well as races for Houston-area seats in Congress.*

Midterm election season is already upon us as voters in the Houston area and across Texas will head to the polls in less than three months for the March 3 primaries. They will pick the Democratic and Republican nominees for congressional seats after Texas' controversial mid-decade redistricting, and for high-profile statewide offices such as governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general.

All 150 seats in the Texas House of Representatives will be on the ballot in 2026, along with 16 state senate seats and eight seats on the Texas State Board of Education. Voters also will elect four justices for the Texas Supreme Court as well as judges at the state and county levels.

There are lots of local races as well, including for the top elected offices in Harris, Fort Bend, Galveston and Montgomery counties.

The candidate filing deadline for the March primaries was Monday evening, and Houston Public Media has a breakdown of who will be on the ballots for local voters.

Below is a rundown of the Democratic and Republican candidates for notable county-level races, the race for one of Texas' two seats in the U.S. Senate and races for Houston-area seats in Congress. A record number of congressional members are not seeking reelection in 2026, including five from the Houston area.

## CANDIDATES FOR MARCH 3 PRIMARY ELECTIONS

### HARRIS COUNTY

#### Harris County Judge

**Democrats:** Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo announced in September she would not seek a third term. Three fellow Democrats have filed to succeed her, and two of them already have high profiles.

Running in the Democratic primary in March are former Houston Mayor Annise Parker, Houston City Council member Letitia Plummer and Matt Salazar, a University of Houston graduate and real estate agent.

**Republicans:** Six members of the GOP have filed to run for county judge, a seat that was held by a Republican until Hidalgo upset Ed Emmett in 2018.

The crowded race for next year's GOP primary includes Marty Lancton, the president of the Houston Professional Fire Fighters Association, former Harris County treasurer and city council member Orlando Sanchez and Aliza Dutt, the mayor of Piney Point Village. The other Republicans to file as candidates are former Harris County Sheriff's Office deputy Oscar Gonzales, former county judge candidate Warren Howell and George Harry Zoes, a Spring Branch business owner and former candidate for city council.

#### Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 2

**Democrat:** Incumbent Adrian Garcia is running unopposed in the Democratic primary.

**Republicans:** Two candidates are vying for the GOP nomination to take on Garcia in next November's general election. They are Raquel Hernandez Boujourne, a construction business owner, and pastor Richard Vega.

#### Harris County Commissioner, Precinct 4

**Democrat:** Incumbent Lesley Briones does not have an opponent for the March primary.

**Republican:** Steve Radack, a former commissioner for Precinct 3, will be unopposed in the GOP primary before trying to unseat Briones next November.

#### Harris County Attorney

**Democrats:** In compliance with Texas' resign-to-run rules, acting Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee is leaving his post to run for the vacant seat in the 18th Congressional District.

The fellow Democrats who filed to succeed Menefee as the county's top legal advisor are Houston City Council member Abbie Kamin and Judge Audrie Lawton-Evans, who presides over Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 1.

**Republican:** Jacqueline Lucci Smith, who narrowly lost to Menefee in 2024, is the lone candidate for the GOP primary. She has previously served as a judge for Harris County Civil Court at Law No. 2.

#### Harris County District Clerk

**Democrats:** Eight candidates are running to succeed fellow Democrat Marilyn Burgess, who announced she would not seek reelection a few days after Harris County commissioners struck down her request for an \$81,000 raise.

The field for the March primary includes Desiree Broadnax, a former candidate for Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector; Pernell Davis, a deputy chief of staff for Harris County Precinct 2; and Angie Dozier, a special services administrator for the district clerk's office. Also running are Donna Glover, an IT program manager, attorney Darrell Jordan, nurse practitioner Carlis Lollie, teacher Jose "Alex" Maldonado and Roslyn "Rozzy" Shorter, a vice chair for a community development board.

**Republican:** Chris Daniel, a former Harris County district clerk, is running unopposed in the GOP primary.

#### Harris County Clerk

**Democrat:** Incumbent Teneshia Hudspeth, who serves as the county's chief election official, is seeking another term and will be unopposed in the Democratic primary.

**Republicans:** Lynda Sanchez and Mike Wolfe are running in the GOP primary, with the winner taking on Hudspeth in the November 2026 general election.

### FORT BEND COUNTY

#### Fort Bend County Judge

**Democrats:** With incumbent County Judge KP George having switched from the Democratic to Republican party earlier this year amidst legal troubles, several candidates have lined up for the Democratic primary. Those to have filed include District Court Judge J. Christian Becerra, attorney Rachelle Carter, Houston City College trustee Cynthia Lenton-Gary, Fort Bend County Commissioner Dexter McCoy and entrepreneur Eddie Sajjad.

**Republicans:** George, the incumbent who switched political parties this year, will attempt to hold off a handful of challengers in the Republican primary. Those to have filed include Daryl Aaron, Kenneth Omoruyi, Melissa M. Wilson and Daniel Wong, a former Sugar Land City Council member.

#### Fort Bend County Commissioner, Precinct 2

**Democrats:** Incumbent Grady Prestage is facing a primary challenge from Larry Blackmon, a retired teacher from Missouri City.

**Republican:** Antonio Aranda of Missouri City was the only candidate to appear on the Texas Secretary of State website.

#### Fort Bend County Commissioner, Precinct 4

**Democrats:** With incumbent Dexter McCoy seeking the county judge seat, several candidates have filed to succeed him as commissioner. The group of Democrats includes Maggie Salomon, April L. Jones, Brittanye Lashay Morris, Haroon Mughal, Robert Nnake, Nicole Roberts and Nabile Shike, a constable who previously was running for county judge.

**Republicans:** Seeking the Republican nomination are engineer Abolaji Ayobami, financial advisor Ramesh Kumar Cherivirala, business owner Ken Mathews and peace officer Adam Schoof.

### GALVESTON COUNTY

#### Galveston County Judge

**Democrat:** Albert Smith of Texas City was the lone candidate to file, according to the Texas Secretary of State website.

**Republicans:** Longtime County Judge Mark Henry, first elected in 2010, is seeking another term. He'll be challenged in the March primary by Chris Kinard, the wife of Galveston County District Clerk

John Kinard.

### MONTGOMERY COUNTY

#### Montgomery County Judge

**Democrat:** James Graf was the lone candidate to file for the Democratic primary, according to the Texas Secretary of State website.

**Republicans:** Incumbent Mark Keough has drawn a primary challenge from longtime Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack.

#### Montgomery County Commissioner, Precinct 2

**Democrats:** No candidates filed to run, according to the Texas Secretary of State website.

**Republicans:** Bob Harvey of The Woodlands is challenging incumbent Charlie Riley of Magnolia in the March primary. Riley is serving his third term.

#### Montgomery County Commissioner, Precinct 4

**Democrats:** No candidates filed to run, according to the Texas Secretary of State website.

**Republican:** As of Wednesday, the Texas Secretary of State website did not show that any candidates had filed to challenge incumbent Commissioner Matt Gray.

### FEDERAL

#### U.S. Senator from Texas

**Democrats:** U.S. Rep. Jasmine Crockett, a Dallas Democrat and University of Houston law school graduate, entered the race on Monday – when former Congressman Colin Allred dropped out. State Rep. James Talarico of Austin is another prominent Democrat vying for the seat occupied by U.S. Sen. John Cornyn.

Ahmad Hassan of Katy also filed to run in the Democratic primary.

**Republicans:** Cornyn is seeking a fifth term in Washington but faces a stiff challenge from the right in Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt of Houston also is gunning for Cornyn's seat.

The other Republicans to have filed as candidates are John O. Adefope, Anna Bender, Virgil John Bierschwale and Gulrez "Gus" Khan.

#### U.S. Representative, District 2

**Democrat:** Shaun Finnie, an investment banker from Spring, was the only Democrat to file in this race.

**Republicans:** Incumbent U.S. Rep. Dan Crenshaw is facing a primary challenge from state Rep. Steve Toth of The Woodlands and Martin Etwop.

#### U.S. Representative, District 7

**Democrat:** Incumbent Lizzie Fletcher of Houston was the only candidate to file for the March primary, according to a list of candidate filings on the Texas Secretary of State website.

**Republicans:** Tina Cohen, a Houston business owner, was the only candidate listed on the Texas Secretary of State website as of Tuesday afternoon.

#### U.S. Representative, District 8

**Democrats:** The retirement of Republican U.S. Rep. Morgan Luttrell is leaving this Montgomery County-based seat open. Keith Coleman of Montgomery and Laura Jones of Coldspring filed for the Democratic primary.

**Republicans:** Brett Jensen of Pinehurst, Stephen Long and Nick Tran of The Woodlands, Conroe attorney Jessica Hart Steinmann and Dedrick T. Wilmer of Cypress have filed to run in a district that favors the GOP.

#### U.S. Representative, District 9

**Democrats:** Incumbent U.S. Rep. Al Green is shifting to the 18th Congressional District after he was drawn out of the 9th by Texas Republicans. The candidates to file for the Democratic primary include former NASA astronaut Terry Virts, a one-time senate candidate, along with Leticia Gutierrez, Earnest Clayton Jr., Peter Filler, Todd Ivey and Marty Rocha.

**Republicans:** In a district that was redrawn to include Liberty County and favor Republicans, state

Rep. Briscoe Cain of Deer Park and former Harris County Judge candidate Alex Mealer are the most prominent GOP candidates.

Others include Jaimy Blanco of Pasadena, Michael A. Curran, Dan Mims of Channelview, Crystal DeLeon Sarmiento of Manvel, Dwayne Stovall of Cleveland and Terry Lee Thain.

#### U.S. Representative, District 10

**Democrats:** In this seat held by retiring Republican U.S. Rep. Michael McCaul, Dawn Marshall, Bernie Reyna and Caitlin Rourk have filed for the Democratic primary.

**Republicans:** With the retirement of McCaul, this district that stretches from the Houston area to the Austin area is up for grabs. The fellow Republicans to have filed are Rob Altman of Bryan, Ben Bius of Huntsville, Chris Gober of Austin, Brandon Hawbaker of Sealy, Jessica Karlsruher of Austin, Kara King of Lakeway and Jenny Garcia Sharon, a Houston native.

#### U.S. Representative, District 14

**Republican:** Incumbent Randy Weber of Friendswood is being challenged in the March primary by Jessica Forgy, a farmer from Alvin.

**Democrat:** Thurman Bill Bartie, Richard Davis and Konstantinos Vogiatzis have filed as Democratic candidates for the primary.

#### U.S. Representative, District 18

**Democrats:** U.S. Rep. Al Green, the longtime representative of the 9th Congressional District, is switching to the 18th after Texas' mid-decade redistricting. In the March primary he could end up facing both Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee and former Houston City Council member Amanda Edwards, who are the candidates in the upcoming special election runoff to complete the term of late U.S. Rep. Sylvester Turner. Both Menefee and Edwards have filed as candidates, as has defense analyst Gretchen Brown of Kemah.

**Republicans:** In a heavily Democratic district, Ronald Dwayne Whitfield was the only GOP candidate listed on the Texas Secretary of State website as of Wednesday.

#### U.S. Representative, District 22

**Democrats:** The field for the Democratic primary will include Chris Fernandez, Marquette Greene-Scott, Robert "Puga" Thomas and Pearl Vuorinen.

**Republicans:** Incumbent U.S. Rep. Troy Nehls is retiring and has endorsed his twin brother, Trever Nehls, for this seat based on Fort Bend County. The other Republican to have filed is Rebecca Clark of Fulshear.

#### U.S. Representative, District 29

**Democrats:** Incumbent U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia has drawn a primary challenge from Jarvis Johnson, a former state representative and Houston City Council member, in this district that was redrawn by Texas Republicans.

**Republicans:** No GOP candidates were listed on the Texas Secretary of State website as of Wednesday.

#### U.S. Representative, District 36

**Democrats:** The March primary will include Rhonda Hart of Dickinson and Doug Alan Rogers of Beaumont.

**Republicans:** Incumbent Brian Babin of Woodville is facing a primary challenge from Jonathan "Pipeliner" Mitchell.

#### U.S. Representative, District 38

**Democrats:** The primary field for this Houston congressional seat includes Marvalette Hunter, who worked as chief of staff for former Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner, along with school counselor Theresa Courts and Melissa McDonough, a real estate from professional from Tomball.

**Republicans:** Seeking to succeed U.S. Rep. Wesley Hunt, who is running for the U.S. Senate, are Avery Ayers, Jon Bonck, Shelly DeZevallos, Barrett McNabb, Michael Pratt and Jeffrey Yuna.

# 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.)

“Mouth Watering BBQ, Halal Steaks and Karahi & Curries”

**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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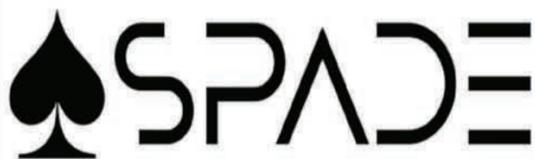
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## Lasbela Hosts Comedy Legends Shakeel Siddiqui & Rauf Lala in a Power-Packed Houston Show



Houston: A spectacular Comedy Night was held at a local hall in Houston under the auspices of Lasbela Restaurant, drawing a large crowd from the Pakistani-American community.

The evening was headlined by renowned Pakistani comedians Shakeel Siddiqui and Rauf Lala, who created a storm

*Continued on page 28*

## Aliana Celebrates Culture and Community at Arwa Yemeni Coffee House Ribbon-Cutting



RICHMOND, Texas — The heart of the Aliana community was filled with festive energy as Arwa Yemeni Coffee House officially marked its arrival with a prestigious opening ceremony. The event, which celebrated the expansion of Dallas's original Yemeni coffee experience into the Houston area, was headlined by Texas

*Continued on page 28*

## ICNA & APPNA Distribute \$150,000 Worth of Ramadan Food to 1,500 Families in Houston



A large-scale Ramadan food distribution drive was organized in Houston, Texas, through a collaboration between Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (APPNA) South Texas Chapter, benefiting thousands of underprivileged families.



The ceremony was held at the ICNA office in Houston, where food baskets worth approximately \$150,000 were distributed to more than 1,500 individuals in need. The initiative is part of ICNA's annual Ramadan relief efforts aimed at supporting vulnerable

*Continued on page 28*

## A Masterclass in Heritage: Houston's Elite Gather for "Kitab aur Chai" Honoring Parvez Jafri



HOUSTON — The Pakistan Association of Greater Houston (PAGH) hosted a premier cultural salon titled "Kitab aur Chai" (Books and

*Continued on page 28*

## 51,560 Lives Transformed: How Houston's "Welcome Ramadan" Gala is Changing the Face of Global Orphan Care



(Special Correspondent: **Abdul Rehman Patel**)

A dignified and well-attended fundraising event titled "Welcome Ramadan" was

*Continued on page 28*

## Houston Leaders and Community Unite for "Saaf Paani" Fundraiser to Combat Water Crisis



HOUSTON, TX (February 13, 2026) – A spirit of compassion and cross-border solidarity filled the Marquee Banquet Hall last night as the Houston community gathered for the Saaf Paani (Safe Water) Briefing Session and Fundraising Dinner. Hosted by the organization's Board of Directors, including founding

member Abdul Majid Adam, the event brought together diplomats, local political leaders, and philanthropists to support the installation of clean water projects in Pakistan.

The event, held on Thursday evening, underscored the critical importance of

*Continued on page 28*

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# Community Celebrate Grand Opening of Arwa Yemeni Coffee House

Texas State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani (Chief Guest) joins owner Faheem Akhun and PAGH President Siraj Narsi to officially inaugurate Arwa Yemeni Coffee House in Richmond. The ceremony marked the arrival of Dallas's original Yemeni coffee experience to the Aliana community, bringing together local leaders and residents for an afternoon of rich culture and warm hospitality at 16733 West Airport Blvd.



## "Houston Deserves Better" — Alex Kalai Outlines Vision at Community Gathering



A packed house and energized conversations set the tone Monday evening as congressional candidate Alex Kalai hosted a Meet & Greet at the Arab American Cultural Community Center in Houston. Supporters and first-time voters alike gathered for an evening of direct engagement, policy discussion, and grassroots momentum. With refreshments and light dinner served, the atmosphere blended community warmth with political urgency.

Kalai, a Houston-raised professional and son of immigrant parents, delivered a confident message centered on opportunity, safety, and accountability. He spoke passionately about tackling the housing crisis, strengthening public safety, and improving care and access for veterans. "Houston deserves leadership that listens and delivers," Kalai told attendees, drawing applause as he emphasized his commitment to practical, community-driven solutions.

**Key Priorities Highlighted:**

- Making Homes Affordable Again: Addressing investor-driven housing pressures and protecting local buyers.
- Protecting Families & Neighborhoods: Supporting smart public safety policies.
- Standing by Veterans: Expanding access to earned healthcare and benefits.

The evening concluded with a lively Q&A session where residents voiced concerns about rising living costs, neighbor-

hood security, and economic opportunity. Kalai responded directly, reinforcing his message of transparency and accessibility. Organizers described the event as a major boost for the campaign, with strong volunteer sign-ups and growing enthusiasm heading into the next phase of outreach. With visible energy and increasing community engagement, Alex Kalai's campaign appears to be gaining momentum across Houston.



# Jeffrey Epstein: Polio work, intelligence briefings and a shadowy presence in Pakistan's tribal belt

*Email reveals he was receiving detailed intelligence briefings on Taliban leadership crisis after Mullah Omar's death*

**From:** Andrea Pfanzerler <[redacted]>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 30, 2013 1:09 AM  
**To:** Terje Rod-Larsen; Jeff Epstein  
**Subject:** Fwd: hello update from nasra

Just got this from Nasra who is still in Pakistan. It is self-explanatory Andrea

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Nasra Hassan <[redacted]>  
**Date:** April 30, 2013, 1:13:21 GMT+08:00<[redacted]>  
**To:** Andrea Pfanzerler <[redacted]>; Bettina Kempf <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>  
**Subject:** hello update from nasra

Finally left Peshawar, the jihad capital of the world, sorry had no internet owing to constant bombings in and around town, pre-elections-turbulence. Hotel fairly safe, targeted only 4 times in suicide bombings in the past. This was the right time to come, 2 more days and the place will be in shut-down mode. Had successful meetings right after arrival all day Saturday, all day Sunday and today Monday. Met reps from each of the 7 tribal agencies as well as from the frontier regions. Pak security guys who are based in every hotel lobby wanted to know what this was all about, I think my Paki name and the subject of polio disarmed them. Fier had-organized very well. Also had useful meetings with FATA Secretary Health, who is a public health specialist & very good. Also met Secretary Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa KP Provincial Govt, turned out we were together in peacekeeping in Kosovo! Have just checked into the hotel in Islamabad, will have meetings here tomorrow & Wednesday 1 May, will fly back to Vienna late that night. Very useful granular-level information, both from the Govt authorities met, plus from the tribal reps. Even managed via Fier to speak on cellphone to a senior Taliban guy about their position on polio...! It appears that religion-based refusal is a very tiny part, the rest is pressure tactics, one-upmanship, and the vast amount of jobs & money involved. Some of the stuff I was aware of, other aspects were new. Funding is no problem, eg. FATA about to sign MOU with UAE Govt, which will give a huge grant covering all polio vaccination campaigns 100% for the next 3 years! Unlikely that the new post-elections Govt will be ready before mid-June, at the earliest, hence makes little sense to return here before then, but this we can discuss in Vienna once we are all back there including Mark. This also gives IPI time to draft stuff. More later, N.

Email forwarded to Jeffrey Epstein from Nasra Hassan via Andrea Pfanzerler, dated April 30 2013. PHOTO: United States Department of Justice

KARACHI: Among the thousands of documents emerging from the Jeffrey Epstein saga, two emails from 2013 and 2015 stand out for their unusual subject matter.

Far from the financial dealings and social connections that have dominated headlines since the American financier's 2019 arrest on sex trafficking charges and subsequent death in custody, these communications reveal Epstein receiving field reports from operatives working in Pakistan's tribal areas on polio eradication, along with detailed intelligence briefings on Taliban leadership dynamics.

The correspondence involves Epstein receiving forwarded field reports from Nasra Hassan, associated with the International Peace Institute (IPI), working in Pakistan's tribal areas, via Director IPI Vienna Andrea Pfanzerler. The emails also involve Boris Nikolic, Epstein's science advisor and an associate to Bill Gates.

Together, they reveal an organisational structure that blurs the line between humanitarian work and intelligence gathering in the volatile Pakistan-Afghanistan border region during a critical period of the War on Terror – with field operatives reporting through humanitarian institutions to a private financier with no official role in public health or government.

One email in the chain references someone named "Bill" who had "raised all money for Polio," which may refer to Bill Gates, whose foundation has been a major funder of global polio eradication efforts

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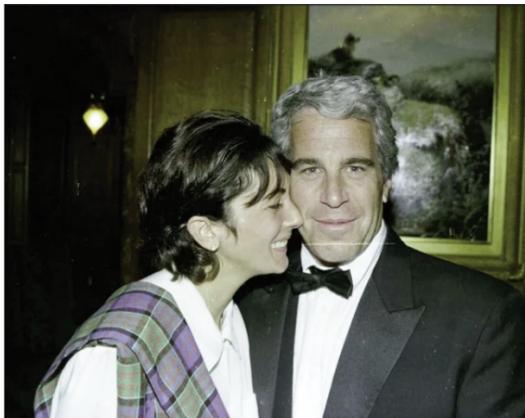
In April 2013, as Pakistan prepared for national elections amid a backdrop of Taliban violence, Nasra Hassan was in Peshawar. In an email dated April 30, 2013, Hassan wrote to Pfanzerler describing leaving the city she called "the jihad capital of the world," apologising for her silence due to "constant bombings in and around town, pre-elections turbulence." Pfanzerler forwarded this field report to Epstein, noting "Just got this from Nasra who is still in Pakistan. It is self-explanatory."

The email revealed an extensive operation.

Hassan claimed to have met with representatives from each of Pakistan's seven tribal agencies – semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that served as Taliban and Al-Qaeda strongholds. She met with the FATA secretary health and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa secretary health, with whom she claimed to have previously worked "in peacekeeping in Kosovo."

Pakistani security personnel, who Hassan noted "are based in every hotel lobby," questioned her activities. According to her account, her "Paki name and the subject of polio disarmed them."

Most significantly, Hassan wrote that she "managed via Fier to speak on cellphone to a senior Taliban guy about their position on polio." This direct communication with Taliban leadership, facilitated by an unnamed intermediary



An undated photo shows Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell. The photo was entered into evidence by the US Attorney's Office on December 7, 2021 during the trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, the Jeffrey Epstein associate accused of sex trafficking, in New York City.

referred to only as "Fixer," raises fundamental questions about the nature of this operation. Hassan's detailed reporting of this contact – forwarded through institutional channels to Epstein – suggests not opportunistic access but systematic intelligence gathering with an established reporting structure.

**Behind the polio campaign: money and influence**

Hassan's analysis of Taliban resistance to polio vaccination departed sharply from conventional narratives. Rather than religious objection being the primary barrier, she wrote that "religion-based refusal is a very tiny part, the rest is pressure tactics, one-upmanship, and the vast amount of jobs & money involved."

This assessment suggests a sophisticated understanding of the political economy of the tribal areas, where control over international aid programmes represented significant power and patronage opportunities.

On the funding front, Hassan reported major developments. "FATA about to sign MOU with UAE Govt, which will give a huge grant covering all polio vaccination campaigns 100% for the next 3 years!" she wrote.

In response to these forwarded field reports, the email chain also contains a cryptic exchange with Boris Nikolic, who wrote: "BTW – Bill raised all money for Polio. Even more than he needed. Can you imagine with your mechanism?"

The reference to "Bill" and "your mechanism" takes on new significance in light of the revealed structure – it suggests Epstein had developed an operational infrastructure or network (the "mechanism") that could be deployed beyond just receiving reports, potentially for fundraising, coordination, or distribution of resources through this web of field operatives and institutional intermediaries.

**The intelligence briefings: inside the Taliban succession**

If the 2013 emails raise questions, an August 2015 email confirms a pattern. By this point, Epstein was routinely receiving detailed intelligence briefings forwarded through the IPI on one of the most sensitive geopolitical situations in South Asia: the succession crisis within the Taliban following the death of Mullah Omar. The continued use of IPI as a forwarding channel for such sensitive intelligence, two years after the initial field reports, suggests an established operational structure rather than isolated incidents.

Mullah Omar, the one-eyed cleric who founded the Taliban movement in 1994 and led it through its rule of Afghanistan and subsequent insurgency, had died. His death, kept secret for two years, created a leadership vacuum that threatened to fracture the movement.

The August 10, 2015 email sent by Nasra Hassan to Pfanzerler, with Advisor for Polio Eradication and Peace & Health IPI Michael Sarnitz copied – and forwarded to Epstein by Terje Rod-Larsen who himself received the email from Pfanzerler – provided the kind of analysis typically reserved for intelligence agencies or high-level policy advisors.

The briefing assessed that Mullah Akhtar Mansour, who

**From:** Boris Nikolic <[redacted]>  
**To:** Jeffrey Epstein <jeevacation@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** RE: jeffrey  
**Date:** Wed, 01 May 2013 15:14:29 +0000

Thank you!

BTW – Bill raised all money for Polio. Even more than he needed.

Can you imagine with your mechanism?

Email forwarded to Jeffrey Epstein from Nasra Hassan via Andrea Pfanzerler, dated April 30 2013. PHOTO: United States Department of Justice

**From:** Nasra Hassan <[redacted]>  
**Date:** August 10, 2015 at 12:13:43 PM CDT  
**To:** Andrea Pfanzerler <[redacted]>  
**CC:** Michael Sarnitz <[redacted]>  
**Subject:** Brief update on post-Mullah Omar situation

Just now sent to Max, Chris Elias, CC to Sarnitz -- up to you whether you wish to do the high-level parallel TRI system, nasra

BT Vienna  
 10 Aug 2015

**Brief update on post-Mullah Omar situation:**

1. The Taliban and succession & counter succession have stalled down.
2. Mullah Mansour appears to be gaining ground, although the support of the tribal commanders & shadow senior Taliban figures inside Afghanistan have not yet directly pronounced themselves.
3. The pro-Mullah Mansour coalition (the anti-Mullah Omar coalition) - the former also carry the more weight (eg. pro-PEP Maulana Samiul Haq of Pakistan, who has been the number 1 security of the Taliban Taliban leaders in the embassies including Mullah Omar - even the Taliban has not been necessary to intervene, & almost all agree that in the past 7-8 years, i.e. well before Mullah Omar's death, Mullah Mansour has only run Afghan Taliban affairs as well as the Quetta Shura.
4. A total point is that there is no other senior figure who poses a serious challenge to Mullah Mansour, both his deputies are respected figures, especially Sirajuddin Haqqani.

From: some of post-Mullah Omar leaders can be potential opponents

EFTA0065795

1. Mullah Mawlawi Akhtar Mansour, head of the Political Office in Doha has resigned, he has been replaced by his deputy Sher Afghan Stanekzai - who has no own field and that of the Taliban set up against Mullah Omar.
2. Mullah Mansour is active in both FATA and across the border in Afghanistan, supports Afghan Taliban TTP/Deek & other militant groups, including the Program, & is said to be the founder of the Taliban in Pakistan & to be the main contact for the Taliban in the West. He is also said to be the main contact for the Taliban in the West.
3. The most recent Afghan Taliban & Haqqani senior tribal officials in Afghanistan are being increasingly excluded by post-Mullah Omar power players - so that the Taliban have lost most senior tribal officials in the US & EU. Also, some tribal officials are being increasingly excluded by post-Mullah Omar power players - so that the Taliban have lost most senior tribal officials in the US & EU. Also, some tribal officials are being increasingly excluded by post-Mullah Omar power players - so that the Taliban have lost most senior tribal officials in the US & EU.
4. Pak security forces (ISAF & NATO) are still in control of the situation, despite the increased tribal, while they are very active in trying to get all their checks in one case and offer security assistance they are not wanted - their support is based on the above report, especially the part that there is no figure other than "the" Mullah Mansour who could conceivably, stand a chance of the "other" the remaining tribal officials in the West, who have a good record of support for Mullah Mansour in the past 7-8 years, i.e. well before Mullah Omar's death. Mullah Mansour has only run Afghan Taliban affairs as well as the Quetta Shura.
5. To make three other main objectives to Mullah Mansour in the tribal areas of the group which remained him succession, a large gathering of clerics is expected to meet in the near future, right now all efforts are geared to getting this large group safely in one place - no easy task, given the security situation as well as AA/Northern Alliance/NDS forces targeting groups which gather to pledge allegiance to Mullah Mansour!
6. No date set for the meeting - but both Pak forces as well as the UN are keen to stabilize the situation.

PEP is stated in the last report, no direct effect except that the violence & security affect PEP delivery on the field and the situation of the Kabul assistance to be found elsewhere.

Will submit further on developments take place.

End

Email briefing situation in Afghanistan, dated August 10 2015. PHOTO: United States Department of Justice

had effectively been running the Taliban's military and political operations through the Quetta Shura for five to six years even before Omar's death, "appears to be gaining ground" in the succession struggle. The document noted that pro-Mansour voices "outweigh the anti-Mullah Mansour voices" and carried "far more weight."

Among the key figures supporting Mansour was Maulana Samiul Haq of Pakistan, described in the briefing as "the teacher of the majority of the Afghan Taliban leaders at his madrassa, including Mullah Omar."

Significantly, Haq was characterised as "pro-PEP" – supporting the Polio Eradication Programme – suggesting the programme's entanglement with Taliban politics ran deep. The briefing noted that then-Afghan president Ashraf Ghani had "sent him an emissary to intervene" in the succession matter.

The document identified Sirajuddin Haqqani, leader of the Haqqani Network designated as a terrorist organisation by the United States, as one of Mansour's respected deputies, and concluded that "there is no other senior figure who poses a serious challenge to Mullah Mansour." Mansour's succession would face initial resistance from Mullah Omar's family members before they eventually pledged allegiance in September 2015.

**The mechanics of Taliban legitimisation**

To address concerns about the small size of the group that had initially nominated Mansour as Mullah Omar's successor, the document stated that "a large gathering of clerics is expected to meet (& voice support for him) – right now all efforts are geared to getting this large group safely in one place – no easy task, given the security situation as well as AA/Northern Alliance/NDS forces targeting groups which gather to pledge allegiance to Mullah Mansour!"

This passage reveals the violent contestation around Taliban leadership, with Afghan government forces

*Continued on Page 20*

# Strategic opportunity for Pakistan

*Several high-level exchanges followed, underscoring the renewed warmth*

ISLAMABAD: On February 9, Pakistan military's media wing issued a statement marking the conclusion of multinational drills. The handout was accompanied by a series of images. One photograph, however, stood out: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir standing alongside a contingent of Bangladesh's army. It was not a mere optic. It symbolised the quiet but unmistakable transformation under way in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations.

Only two weeks earlier, the two countries resumed direct flights after a 14-year hiatus. Last year, DPM/FM Ishaq Dar travelled to Dhaka, the first visit by a Pakistani foreign minister in 13 years. Several high-level exchanges followed, underscoring the renewed warmth.

Such developments would have been unthinkable a few years ago. During the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh virtually shut the door on any meaningful rapprochement with Pakistan. The Awami League government forged exceptionally close ties with India, prompting critics to argue that New Delhi, not Dhaka, had become the ultimate seat of influence.

That calculus changed dramatically in August 2024, when Hasina was ousted following a violent uprising spearheaded by Bangladeshi students. The shift was tectonic. Many young Bangladeshis accused India of propping up an increasingly authoritarian regime and undermining democratic institutions. Their anger deepened when New Delhi provided shelter to the fleeing Hasina and continued to shield her despite repeated calls for extradition.

Amid this reset, Bangladesh's ties with Pakistan gathered momentum. The interim government rolled back years of restrictions on Pakistani diplomats, eased visa curbs and removed barriers to exports. There have been growing calls within Bangladesh for closer defence cooperation. The Bangladesh Air Force chief recently visited Islamabad, where discussions reportedly focused on a



Pakistan sent first batch of quality rice to Dhaka as direct trade between the nations has been resumed. PHOTO: FILE

potential JF-17 fighter jet deal. Initiatives that once seemed politically impossible are now firmly on the table.

Against this backdrop, Thursday's landmark elections in Bangladesh carried not just domestic significance but profound geostrategic implications. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), marginalized during Hasina's tenure, swept the polls with a two-thirds majority. The Jamaat-e-Islami, previously banned, won parliamentary representation for the first time in years.

Tarique Rahman, who returned from exile days before the vote, is set to become Bangladesh's next prime minister. The son of former premier Khaleda Zia and late president Ziaur Rahman, Tarique represents a political tradition historically more open to balanced regional engagement.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quick to call Tarique Rahman to congratulate him, an early indication that New Delhi is keen to retain influence in Dhaka despite recent turbulence.

**What it means for Pakistan and the region**

Under the Awami League rule, Pakistan struggled to reset ties. Hasina repeatedly linked normalisation to a formal apology over the events of 1971. Islamabad maintained that its leaders had already expressed regret and argued that the matter was addressed under the 1974 tripartite agreement signed by Pakistan, India and the newly formed Bangladesh.

The BNP's return alters the equation. Historically, Pakistan-Bangladesh relations were relatively smoother during governments led by the BNP. Yet experts caution against simplistic assumptions. Tarique Rahman is unlikely to pursue an anti-India or anti-Pakistan policy. Bangladesh's economic rise and strategic location demand a pragmatic, multi-vector foreign policy.

Still, Pakistan appears to enjoy a relative advantage at this juncture. Public sentiment in Bangladesh has shifted, particularly among the youth. Defence cooperation, trade, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges are expanding. If nurtured carefully, these openings could institutionalize a more durable partnership.

For India, the challenge will be recalibration rather than confrontation. Bangladesh remains too important, geographically, economically and strategically, for New Delhi to lose ground. Expect India to intensify diplomatic outreach and economic incentives to preserve its stakes.

The emerging picture suggests not a zero-sum contest but a rebalancing. Bangladesh under Tarique Rahman is likely to diversify its partnerships, reduce overdependence on any single power and assert greater strategic autonomy.

For Pakistan, the opportunity is real but so is the test. Converting symbolic gestures into sustained cooperation will require patience, sensitivity to history and a forward-looking agenda. If managed wisely, the image of Pakistan's army chief standing with Bangladeshi troops may well be remembered as more than a photo-op, it could mark the beginning of a new regional alignment in South Asia.

## Jeffrey Epstein: Polio work, intelligence briefings and a shadowy presence in Pakistan's tribal belt

*Continued From Page 19*

(referred to as AA/Northern Alliance) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS) actively targeting gatherings of pro-Mansour clerics.

The briefing also tracked developments within the Taliban's political apparatus. While Mullah Tayyeb Agha Mutasim, head of the Political Office in Doha, had resigned, "he has been replaced by his deputy Sher Abbas Stanekzai" who had accepted Mullah Mansour's leadership – suggesting the Doha office, which had been engaging in peace talks, would remain under Mansour's control.

**The great game continues**

Perhaps most revealing were the briefing's assessments of great power maneuvering. The document described ongoing US drone operations in both FATA and across the border in Afghanistan, targeting "Afghan Taliban, TTP/Daesh & other militant groups, including the Haqqanis." It noted that the US "would like the Rounds to proceed & begin to yield results before Prez Obama's term ends" but were "simultaneously miffed as to why ISI did not support 'their' Doha process."

This reference to competing peace processes – one allegedly backed by

Pakistani intelligence (ISI) and another by the Americans through Doha – captures the fundamental tensions in Afghan peace efforts.

The briefing stated bluntly that Pakistani security forces "are still in control of the process" despite the succession complications, and were "very active in trying to get all their chickens in one coop." It indicated that "both Pak forces as well as the US are keen to stabilize Prez Ghani" while no date had been fixed for "Round 2" of negotiations.

Tellingly, the briefing concluded with a reference to "PEP" (Polio Eradication Programme), noting that "violence & insecurity affect PEP delivery in the field and the attention of the Kabul authorities is focused elsewhere." The casual inclusion of polio programme updates within a high-level intelligence briefing on Taliban succession underscores how deeply intertwined the humanitarian effort had become with intelligence operations.

**The question of cover and purpose**

The emails raise a fundamental question: was the polio work undertaken by operatives like Hassan genuine humanitarian effort that happened to provide access to sensitive locations and information, or

was the humanitarian work itself a cover for intelligence gathering – with field reports being systematically forwarded through institutional channels to someone like Epstein who had no public health credentials?

The email structure itself is revealing. Hassan's field reports didn't go directly to Epstein but were routed through the IPI – a humanitarian organisation.

Epstein, despite having no public health background or official government position, cultivated relationships with scientists and positioned himself as a patron of cutting-edge science and global health initiatives. His unexplained wealth, connections to powerful figures in politics and intelligence circles, and the questions that continue to swirl around his activities have made every revelation from his archives a subject of intense scrutiny.

The correspondence reveals a pattern more sophisticated than typical humanitarian operations. Rather than a single individual operating under cover, the emails suggest an organised network: field operatives like Hassan with access to Taliban leadership, institutional intermediaries like IPI providing legitimacy and cover, and recipients like Epstein with no official role

but clear interest in the intelligence being gathered.

The emails leave numerous questions unanswered. What was Epstein's actual role in this entire network of polio eradication? What was the nature of his relationship with Pakistani and possibly US intelligence services? Why were Nasra Hassan's field reports being systematically forwarded to someone with no public health background or official government position?

Perhaps most fundamentally, what do these emails reveal about the intersection of humanitarian work, intelligence gathering, and private influence in one of the world's most strategically sensitive regions during a critical period of the War on Terror?

As more materials from Epstein's archives surface, these questions may find answers. For now, the emails stand as evidence of operations in Pakistan's tribal belt that blur the lines between public health, intelligence, and private intrigue – a reminder that in places like the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region, nothing is quite what it seems, and the boundary between humanitarian and intelligence work can become dangerously indistinct.

# India accused of using legal process as punishment

*BCB president says the aim is for them to watch match, engage in dialogue, and ease tensions with India*

An international intervention has pulled Kashmiri journalist Irfan Mehraj's long, uncertain wait for justice into the global spotlight, with a New York-based advocacy group warning that his continued detention is not an aberration but part of a pattern — one in which Indian authorities jail first and dispense justice, if it comes at all, much later.

"Mehraj's case exemplifies India's practice of 'trial by jail,'" said Hannah Van Dijke, legal and research officer at the Human Rights Foundation, adding that dissidents are subjected to indefinite pre-trial detention, where the legal process itself becomes the punishment.

Last month, the Human Rights Foundation (HRF) and Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development submitted an individual complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on Mehraj's behalf, urging the body to declare his detention arbitrary and in violation of international law.

More than 1,000 days behind bars, the Kashmiri journalist remains confined in a maximum-security prison in New Delhi — over 500 miles from Srinagar — with his trial yet to begin and his bail unresolved, according to the Human Rights Foundation. In its statement on the case, the advocacy group accused Indian courts of repeatedly extending his detention, leaving him trapped in pre-trial limbo.

Indian authorities claim Mehraj's detention is linked to his former work with the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), accusing him of terrorism and secession under the so-called "NGO terror funding case." This case is part of a broader probe launched in 2020 against JKCCS and other Kashmiri NGOs, which has drawn widespread international criticism, including from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

HRF said that despite these allegations, Mehraj's reporting shows a consistent commitment to highlighting human rights issues in Kashmir, documenting everything from young women volunteering during the 2014 floods in Srinagar to the struggles of the Pandit community and ongoing abuses by authorities.

Condemning Miraj's detention, Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, executive director of Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, said: "Holding a journalist and human rights defender like Irfan Mehraj under this case is a blatant violation of press freedom and human rights."

His imprisonment, she added, appears to punish him for legiti-



Human Rights Foundation urges UN to declare Kashmiri journalist's detention since 2023 unlawful

mate reporting and advocacy, and reflects a wider pattern of silencing independent voices in Kashmir. "Alongside Khurram Parvez, his case underscores the authorities' failure to uphold freedom of expression and meet international obligations," Diez-Bacalso concluded.

Earlier this year, HRF also expressed concern over the Indian Supreme Court's decision to deny bail to activist Umar Khalid, who has been held for more than five years without trial or conviction. The rights group said Khalid has spent years confined in Delhi's notorious Tihar Jail, trapped in a trial that has been repeatedly postponed.

A tireless advocate for India's minorities and marginalized communities, Khalid is also the co-founder of United Against Hate, a grassroots organization campaigning against the rise of hate crimes in an increasingly intolerant India.

Khalid was arrested over five years ago, after emerging as a leading voice in nationwide protests against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act, which excludes Muslims from a fast-tracked path to citizenship.

For his activism, the Human Rights Foundation said, he and 11 other still-detained protesters were slapped with 29 charges, including terrorism, sedition, and promoting religious enmity. "Authorities have invoked the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) — a vague law often used to silence dissent — to keep him

behind bars," the advocacy group said in a January statement.

"Khalid stands as a courageous symbol of dissent in an increasingly authoritarian India. For five years, he has remained one of the country's most prominent political prisoners — his case exposing the lengths to which the government will go to crush voices of dissent, particularly from the Muslim minority," said HRF's Hannah Van Dijke.

In an interview with The Express Tribune, Van Dijke said India's political freedoms have eroded and the country is no longer fully democratic. "We reclassified India from a democracy to what we call a hybrid authoritarian regime, a system that falls between a fully democratic and an authoritarian state."

Irfan's case, she added, is a clear example of where the judiciary and the legal system are failing in India. "He has been in detention, without any trial, for more than 1000 days. That is something you will never see in a democracy, as the general rule in international law is that pre-trial detention should be as short as possible," Van Dijke explained.

Van Dijke flagged another worrying pattern in India, where authorities are using anti-terror laws to target journalists and activists. "At the core of many of these cases, including Irfan's case, we can see the same law at work.

It's the anti-terror law, the UAPA, which has a provision allowing for very lengthy pre-trial detention. It makes it much easier for Indian authorities to imprison dissidents because they don't have to go to official trial," she said, referring to the weaponization of laws in India.

In practice, the UAPA, officially a terrorism prevention law, has routinely been used by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) administration to intimidate and detain those critical of the government—from lawyers and activists to journalists, poets, academics, civil society members, and Kashmiri civilians.

Before Narendra Modi's government came to power in 2014, the law's use was negligible. However, as reported by The Guardian, between 2014 and 2020, 10,552 people were arrested under the UAPA. Among those detained under UAPA in 2021 was Khurram Parvez, who documented violence, torture, and enforced disappearances of Kashmiris by Indian armed forces. The Indian government was contacted for comments on HRF's latest submission, but no response was provided.

## Indian writer Roy pulls out of Berlin Film Festival over Gaza row

**Says she was 'shocked and disgusted' over festival official's statement on Palestinian territory**

BERLIN: Award-winning Indian writer Arundhati Roy said Friday she was withdrawing from the Berlin Film Festival over jury president Wim Wenders's comments that cinema should "stay out of politics" when he was asked about Gaza.

Roy said in a statement sent to AFP that she was "shocked and disgusted" by Wenders's response to a question about the Palestinian territory at a press conference on Thursday.

Roy, whose novel "The God of Small Things" won the 1997 Booker Prize, had been announced as a festival guest to present a restored version of the 1989 film "In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones", in which she starred and wrote the screenplay. However, she said that the "unconscionable" statements by Wenders and other jury members had led her to reconsider, "with deep regret". When asked about Germany's support for Israel at a press conference on Thursday, Wenders said: "We cannot really enter the field of politics", describing filmmakers as "the



counterweight to politics".

Fellow jury member Ewa Puszczyńska said it was a "little bit unfair" to expect the jury to take a direct stance on the issue.

Roy said in her statement that "to hear them say that art should not be political is jaw-dropping".

She described Israel's actions in Gaza as "a genocide of the Palestinian people by the State of Israel".

"If the greatest film makers and artists of our time cannot stand up and say so, they should know that history will judge them," she said.

Roy is one of India's most famous living authors and is a trenchant critic of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, as well as a firm supporter

of the Palestinian cause.

The Berlinale traditionally has a reputation for topical, progressive programming, but so far this year's edition has seen several stars shy away from taking a stance on the big political issues of the day.

US actor Neil Patrick Harris, who stars in the film "Sunny Dancer" being shown in the festival's Generation section, was asked on Friday if he considered his art to be political and if it could help "fight the rise of fascism".

This year's Honorary Golden Bear recipient, Malaysian actor Michelle Yeoh, also demurred when asked to comment on US politics in a press conference on Friday, saying she "cannot presume to say I understand" the situation there. This isn't the first edition of the festival to run into controversy over the Gaza war.

In 2024 the festival's documentary award went to "No Other Land", a portrayal of the dispossession of Palestinian communities in the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

## Hania Aamir jokes about 'fake wedding' amid marriage rumours



Pakistani actress Hania Aamir has stirred fresh debate on social media after a viral video showed her joking about getting married, amid ongoing speculation linking her with singer Asim Azhar.

In the widely shared clip posted on Instagram, Aamir is heard saying: "Everyone wanted us to get married, so we had a fake wedding." The remark appeared to be made in a light-hearted tone.

The video surfaced as rumours continue to circulate online about a possible wedding between Aamir and

Azhar, with some social media users claiming the pair could tie the knot during the holy month of Ramadan.

Responding to a question from a follower about whether her supposed nikah would take place after sehri or iftar, Aamir replied jokingly: "Friday afternoon".

Speculation surrounding the two entertainers has intensified in recent weeks. The rumours resurfaced after Azhar's engagement to actor Merub Ali ended, prompting renewed discussion about his past relationship with Aamir.

Although neither Aamir nor Azhar has formally confirmed or denied reports of a reconciliation, fans have pointed to Aamir's presence at Azhar's concerts and her use of his songs on Instagram as signs of renewed closeness.

A separate viral clip circulating online appeared to show the two dancing together discreetly at a private gathering, further fuelling speculation.

Neither artist has issued an official statement regarding the nature of their relationship.

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# "Water is Life": Abdul Majid Adam and Local Leaders Raise Hope for Thirsty Villages

In a remarkable display of cross-cultural solidarity, the Saaf Paani (Safe Water) organization held its annual briefing and fundraiser in Houston, attended by the Consul General of Pakistan, State Rep Suleman Lalani and a delegation of Fort Bend County candidates including Congressional candidate Pearl Vuorinen and Saaf Paani Directors Abdul Majid Adam and Ali Mir Basit, addressed the urgent need for clean drinking water in underserved regions.



# Hope Before Ramadan: \$150,000 Food Drive Brings Relief to Houston Families

At the ICNA office in Houston, the Islamic Circle of North America and Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America South Texas Chapter joined hands to distribute thousands of food baskets ahead of Ramadan, with plans to provide \$300 Eid gift packages to deserving families.



# PAGH Hosts: A Literary Evening with Parvez Jafri

A captivating look at "Kitab aur Chai," where Houston's intellectual community gathered to celebrate the life, poetry, and enduring cultural legacy of Mr. Parvez Jafri.



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# Jamia Karachi Alumni Association Houston Announces 100 Laptops, 50 Scholarships at Fundraising Gala

Community leaders, alumni members, and distinguished guests gather at the fundraising gala where \$55,000 was pledged to support underprivileged students in Karachi. The initiative includes distributing 100 laptops, providing free Wi-Fi facilities, and awarding 50 scholarships to help students meet modern academic and technological demands.



# Autism in our classrooms

*Should children with autism be placed in mainstream classrooms when schools are unprepared to support them?*

By Rabia Khan/Eisha Anwar

The teacher was halfway through explaining a lesson when she suddenly stopped. A piece of chalk slipped from her fingers and clattered to the floor as her eyes fixed on a child sitting in the corner of the classroom. The boy had begun rocking his chair back and forth, his hands pressed tightly over his ears, whispering to himself as the rising noise of the classroom and his chair rocking began to overwhelm him.

A few students turned to look. Some whispered. A couple laughed. To many in the room, it appeared as if the child was being disruptive or disobedient. In reality, he was experiencing sensory overload — a silent distress response common in children with autism.

The teacher felt panic rise within her. She had no training to recognise autism, no support staff to assist her, and no guidance on how to adjust her lesson for a child whose brain processed sound, movement, and stress differently. Faced with a crowded classroom and constant pressure to maintain control, she was left to manage the situation alone.

By the end of the day, exhaustion had replaced panic. Sitting alone in the staff room, she wondered how long she could continue. For the first time, the thought of leaving her job crossed her mind — not because she lacked compassion, but because she felt unequipped to teach children with needs she had never been trained to understand.

As her frustration deepened, an uncomfortable question emerged — one now confronting schools and families across Pakistan: should autistic children be placed in mainstream classrooms when the education system itself is unprepared to support them?

This is not an isolated incident. It is a daily reality unfolding in classrooms, homes, and school offices, where inclusion is promised but preparation is missing, and where autistic children are caught between good intentions and harsh realities. Across Pakistan, autism is frequently misunderstood, stigmatised, and inadequately supported, making education decisions fraught with emotion, confusion, and conflicting interests. Even highly educated parents struggle to accept a proper autism diagnosis, often attributing their child's behaviour to vaccines or other external factors.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects a person's behaviour, communication, and social skills. It is most commonly diagnosed in children between the ages of three to 12. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that every individual exhibits different symptoms and levels of severity, which can range from mild challenges to significant needs for support.

Estimates suggest over 350,000 children in Pakistan are affected by ASD, with prevalence rates showing approximately 1 in 89 to 1 in 100 children. Studies indicate a 1.3 percent to 1.45 percent prevalence rate in major cities like Karachi and Lahore. The condition, which has rising diagnosis rates, shows a 4.4:1 male-to-female ratio.

Despite growing awareness, many people still rely on myths and misconceptions. One common myth is that autism is a disease that can be cured, when in reality it is simply a different way the brain functions, *m a n a g e a b l e* through therapies. Another misconception is that autism is a mental illness; while individuals with ASD may develop conditions like schizophrenia or anxiety later in life, autism itself is not a mental disorder.

Some believe only boys can have

autism, but recent data shows a male-to-female ratio of approximately 3:1, and girls are often underdiagnosed because they mask symptoms or are misdiagnosed. Others blame bad parenting or childhood vaccines. Autism is also often confused with speech delays or other behavioural challenges. Autistic children may use robotic speech, echolalia, avoid eye contact, struggle with social cues, display repetitive behaviour, and have sensory sensitivities to sound, light, and textures. These symptoms vary widely; some children face mild challenges, while others require extensive support from parents and caregivers.

Many people mistakenly assume that autistic individuals are unintelligent or incapable, but in reality, they are often highly intelligent, with unique learning styles. Popular culture, such as Korean dramas, has shown characters with high IQs and photographic memory struggling with social interactions and empathy, reflecting real-life challenges faced by autistic individuals.

Yet, Pakistan's education system continues to operate on a one-size-fits-all model, leaving autistic children either mis-

placed in mainstream classrooms or isolated in institutions that often prioritises profit over care.

In many classrooms, such children are misunderstood and treated harshly. Teachers label them as weak or lazy students, scold them for not paying attention, and in some cases even resort to physical punishment.

The idea of admitting autistic children into normal schools is rooted in good intentions. Inclusion promises social exposure, reduced stigma, and equal opportunity. However, inclusion without preparation becomes neglect disguised as progress. Most mainstream schools in Pakistan lack trained special educators, classroom aides, behavioural therapists, or even basic awareness about autism. Teachers are expected to manage large classes, rigid curricula, and exam pressures, adding special needs without support overwhelms them emotionally and professionally.

Teachers are rarely at fault. Many want to help but simply do not know how. They are not trained to recognise sensory overload, communication difficulties, or meltdowns. When an autistic child cries, refuses to sit still, avoids eye contact, or reacts aggressively, it is often labelled as misbehaviour rather than distress.

During an interview, Isha Shaikh, principal of a school in Islamabad, discussed the challenges faced by children on the autism spectrum in mainstream education. "Autism exists on a spectrum, and higher-functioning cases may not be immediately noticeable," she says. "Our school primarily admits children with mild autism, who have some verbal skills, and medium to high functionality, with careful attention to classroom balance so teachers can support all students."

Shaikh emphasised the urgent need for trained teachers and support staff, noting that children who initially show aggression or social difficulties often improve with proper counselling and guidance. "Developmental delays such as poor handwriting, speech delays, or retained reflexes are sometimes mistaken for autism," she explains. "While factors like excessive screen time can affect development without causing autism."

She stressed the importance of professional evaluation. "Some children struggle due to late schooling rather than autism," says Shaikh. "Teachers are often the first to notice developmental concerns, which should be referred for assessment. Early diagnosis, parental involvement, and collaboration between trained educators and professionals are essential for successful inclusion of autistic children in mainstream schools."

Moreover, parents face a painful dilemma. Fearing rejection, discrimination, or lowered expectations, many hide their child's diagnosis when enrolling them in school. Some hope their child will eventually cope if treated like everyone else.

This secrecy harms everyone. Schools remain unable to respond appropriately, systems avoid responsibility, and the child suffers the most; misunderstood, unfairly punished, and emotionally exhausted from constantly masking their needs in an environment that offers no accommodation.

Psychologist Erum Khan raised serious concerns about placing autistic children especially those with moderate to severe needs in mainstream schools without proper support. "It is emotionally harmful for children and

*Continued on Page 29*



## Houston Leaders and Community Unite for "Saaf Paani" Fundraiser to Combat Water Crisis

*Continued from page 17*

accessible drinking water, themed around the profound Islamic tradition that "The best form of charity is giving someone water."

### Consul General Praises Diaspora's "Bridge of Hope"

The Chief Guest, Consul General of Pakistan Muhammad Aftab Chaudhry, delivered a moving address highlighting the role of the expatriate community in Pakistan's development.

"Water is not just a resource; it is life itself. By gathering here tonight, you are not merely donating to a project; you are extending a lifeline to the most vulnerable," the Consul General stated. "The work of Saaf Paani, led by dedicated alumni of NED University and supported by the Pakistan Business Forum, serves as a bridge of hope between Houston and the underserved villages of Pakistan. Your generosity transforms statistics into saved lives, ensuring that children can attend school instead of walking miles for water that might make them sick."

### Local Leaders Voice Support for Humanitarian Cause

The occasion was graced by the prominent Fort Bend County leaders and candidates, demonstrating strong local support for the global humanitarian initiative.

Pearl Vuorinen, candidate for Congressional District 22, spoke passionately about the universal right to clean water.

"Compassion knows no borders," Vuorinen remarked in her address. "Whether in Texas or Pakistan, the health of a community depends on its most basic infrastructure. I am honored to stand with Saaf Paani today because this organization represents the best of our shared values—service, integrity, and the relentless pursuit of human dignity."

Sara Khan, candidate for Fort Bend County Treasurer, and Muzaffar Vohra, candidate for District Clerk, also took the podium to commend the organizers.

"Transparency and trust are the bedrocks of any successful charity," said Sara Khan. "It is inspiring to see the Fort Bend community come out in such numbers to support a transparent, impactful cause that delivers aid directly to those who need it most."

Nabil Shike, Fort Bend Commissioner for Precinct 4, and Haroon Mughal, Chief Deputy District Clerk and candidate for Precinct 4, highlighted the power of civic engagement.

"We are blessed to live in a community that looks outward and lifts others up," Nabil Shike noted. "To Abdul Majid Adam and the Saaf Paani team: your work is a testament to how local leadership can drive global change. You have our full support in this noble endeavor."

### Abdul Majid Adam: "A Drop of Water, A Ocean of Mercy"

In his keynote address, host and Saaf Paani Board Director Abdul Majid Adam expressed deep gratitude to the attendees, the "Resident of Aliana" sponsor, and the volunteers.

"We started this journey with a simple realization: that while we take a glass of water for granted, millions pray for it," Mr. Adam said. "Tonight, thanks to your presence—from our Consul General to our local commissioners—we are answering those prayers. Every hand pump and solar RO plant we install is a 'Sadaqah Jariyah' (continuous charity) for you and your loved ones. We are not just drilling wells; we are planting health, education, and future prosperity for thousands of families. Thank you for making this noble cause your own."

The evening concluded with a successful fundraising drive, with pledges directed toward new solar-powered water filtration plants in the arid regions of Sindh and Balochistan.

## A Masterclass in Heritage: Houston's Elite Gather for "Kitab aur Chai" Honoring Parvez Jafri

*Continued from page 17*

Tea). The evening was a sophisticated tribute to the legendary Mr. Parvez Jafri, a man whose name has become synonymous with the preservation of Urdu heritage in the United States.

The atmosphere was one of refined intellectual fervor as Houston's most prominent literary figures, scholars, and community leaders gathered to celebrate a titan of the diaspora. As the founder and President of the Aligarh Alumni Association Houston and the visionary behind the Urdu Markaz website, Jafri's influence on the global Urdu landscape was the focal point of the night.

The event was opened by Siraj Narsi, President of the America Pakistan Association of Greater Houston, who welcomed guests with a stirring address on the vital necessity of literary sittings. Narsi emphasized that such gatherings are the lifeblood of a community, ensuring that the flame of cultural identity continues to burn bright across generations.

As teacups were filled and the conversation flowed, a panel of literary heavyweights took the stage to offer their reflections. Adeel Zaidi, Arif Imam, and Tazeen Zahida spoke with deep admiration for Jafri's tireless service to the arts. The evening gained further prestige with a poignant tribute from the celebrated poetess Ishrat Afreen, whose words painted a vivid portrait of Jafri's artistic legacy, followed by an insightful discourse from Ilyas Baig.

The true crescendo of the

evening arrived when Mr. Parvez Jafri himself took the floor. The room fell into a captivated hush as he recited his own poetry and shared reflections from his storied career. His verses, marked by a rare blend of classical depth and contemporary resonance, left the audience spellbound, bridging the gap between tradition and the modern day.

The "Kitab aur Chai" initiative proved to be more than just an event; it was a sensory experience where the fragrance of books and the warmth of high-level dialogue created an unforgettable ambiance. For those in attendance, it was a night that reaffirmed the power of literature to unite, inspire, and endure.

## ICNA & APPNA Distribute \$150,000 Worth of Ramadan Food to 1,500 Families in Houston

*Continued from page 17*

communities ahead of the holy month.

According to organizers, the Ramadan Food Drive has become a consistent tradition, ensuring that struggling families have access to essential groceries before the start of Ramadan. This year, APPNA's South Texas Chapter joined hands with ICNA to expand the outreach and impact of the program.

Speaking at the event, ICNA Houston representative Shabbir Hussain said that following the Ramadan food drive, the organization also plans to distribute Eid gift packages worth \$300 each to thousands of deserving individuals before Eid-ul-Fitr.

Dr. Bilal, a leader of APPNA Houston Chapter, stated that APPNA proudly partnered with ICNA in this noble cause to support deserving families and ease their financial burden during Ramadan.

APPNA Houston Chapter President Dr. Mansoor Zaidi also highlighted the active participation of the organization's volunteers, emphasizing their commitment to community service and humanitarian efforts.

The collaborative initiative reflects the strong spirit of charity and unity within the Muslim and Pakistani-American communities in Houston, ensuring that those in need can observe Ramadan with dignity and peace of mind.

## 51,560 Lives Transformed: How Houston's "Welcome Ramadan" Gala is Changing the Face of Global Orphan Care

*Continued from page 17*

organized by Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD) at Marquee Banquet and Event Center in Houston, drawing prominent community members, philanthropists, and a large number of attendees including significant participation from women.

During the event, HHRD representative Ilyas Chaudhry delivered a

detailed slide presentation outlining the organization's global humanitarian initiatives, future plans, and the scope of its orphan support program. According to the presentation, since 2006, a total of 23,260 orphaned children have successfully graduated from the program, while approximately 28,300 children are currently under sponsorship. Overall, 51,560 orphans have benefited from the global orphan support initiative.

He further highlighted that the organization is actively operating in 21 countries, with a strong focus on supporting orphaned children within Palestinian, Syrian, Yemeni, and Rohingya refugee communities through structured programs in education, healthcare, and social rehabilitation.

A key feature of the program, as emphasized during the briefing, is that instead of placing children in traditional orphanages, HHRD supports them within their family or guardian environments through monthly sponsorship, alongside regular monitoring visits by organizational representatives to ensure their well-being and development.

The event was professionally hosted by Sobia Siddiqui, whose composed and structured moderation maintained the program's flow and purpose. Hospitality and guest management were efficiently handled by Moez Khan and Saad Ansari, contributing to a welcoming and well-organized atmosphere.

An emotional and impactful moment unfolded during the fundraising appeal for orphan sponsorship, as attendees — particularly women — responded generously and pledged donations with sincerity and compassion. With the arrival of Ramadan approaching, the spirit of charity, empathy, and humanitarian service was visibly reflected among the participants.

Speakers emphasized that ongoing wars, displacement, and global humanitarian crises are contributing to a rising number of orphaned children worldwide, making the role of relief organizations increasingly vital in today's fragile socio-political landscape.

The event concluded with a collective message of humanitarian commitment and a warm welcome to the holy month of Ramadan, reinforcing the importance of sustained support for orphan care and global relief efforts.

Community members attended in large numbers, with a notably strong presence of women who actively participated in the fundraising efforts with enthusiasm and dedication. Guests were also served a special dinner featuring delicious cuisine arranged by Tempura Restaurant, which further enhanced the dignified and pleasant ambiance of the evening.

## Aliana Celebrates Culture and Community at Arwa Yemeni Coffee House Ribbon-Cutting

*Continued from page 17*

State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani, who attended as the Chief Guest.

The ceremony brought together local leaders, community members, and coffee enthusiasts for an afternoon of cultural celebration and connection. Owner Faheem Akhun opened the proceedings by warmly welcoming the guests, sharing the vision behind bringing the authentic flavors and traditions of Yemeni coffee to Richmond.

Joining the festivities as a special guest was Siraj Narsi, President of the Pakistani American Greater Houston (PAGH), further highlighting the strong community support and the diverse cultural tapestry that the new establishment represents.

"This is more than just a place for coffee; it's a space for community building," said Rep. Lalani during his address. "Seeing small businesses like Arwa Yemeni Coffee House thrive in District 76 is a testament to the vibrant growth of Richmond and Aliana."

Located at 16733 West Airport Blvd., the venue has quickly become a local favorite for its "checks all the boxes" experience—combining a cozy, modern ambiance with rich, spiced coffee and traditional desserts. The ceremony featured a formal ribbon-cutting, followed by guests enjoying the shop's signature blends and authentic Yemeni fare.

With the official opening ceremony concluded, Arwa Yemeni Coffee House is now fully operational, welcoming all Houstonians to experience a piece of Yemeni heritage in a warm, inviting setting.

Location:

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

## Lasbela Hosts Comedy Legends Shakeel Siddiqui & Rauf Lala in a Power-Packed Houston Show

*Continued from page 17*

of laughter with their sharp wit, spontaneous humor, and engaging performances. Their lively interaction with the audience turned the event into a truly unforgettable experience.

Adding a musical touch to the night, Pakistani singer Sanam Sheikh captivated attendees with her melodious voice and energetic performance, further elevating the festive atmosphere.

The event was graced by Texas State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani, a Pakistani-American lawmaker, who presented appreciation certificates to the guest artists and event promoter Aziz Noorani in recognition of their contributions to promoting cultural entertainment in the community.

The program was skillfully hosted by well-known emcees Rehan Ahmed and Nabeel Ishaq, who kept the audience engaged throughout the evening.

The Comedy Night not only provided wholesome entertainment but also served as a vibrant celebration of Pakistani culture in Houston, strengthening community bonds and leaving attendees with lasting memories.

# Autism in our classrooms

*Continued From Page 27*

overwhelming for teachers,” she says. She noted that most teachers in Pakistan lack training in autism awareness, behaviour management, and sensory needs, making inclusion unrealistic.

She criticised some private schools for exploiting “inclusive education” as a business model without having trained staff or systems in place. While stressing that mainstream schooling should not be the default, Khan emphasised the need for autism awareness training for all teachers to reduce stigma and mislabelling. “We need special schools, early intervention, and better-equipped therapy centres, with mainstream inclusion considered only when the child is ready.”

At the same time, a troubling reality exists within private education. Many schools admit autistic children but fail to provide the support such students require. Although they do not refuse admission or charge higher fees, there is often a lack of trained staff, classroom accommodations, and structured assistance. Consequently, parents are forced to arrange shadow teachers, while children remain excluded from activities, left unattended, or quietly pressured to leave when their needs become more visible.

In many cases, shadow teachers are untrained individuals with no background in psychology or special education. They are underpaid, unsupported, and expected to manage complex needs without guidance. Inclusion becomes a marketing slogan rather than a genuine educational commitment.

The emotional toll on parents is immense. Mothers, especially, carry the burden of guilt, blame,

and exhaustion. “It is difficult for me to provide answers to all kinds of questions, people ask me,” says Rehana Vakeel\*. “They relentlessly question me about vaccines, parenting styles, and family history as if autism is a personal failure of mine. It is this kind of social stigma that isolates families, forcing them into silence and self-doubt.”

One of the most persistent and damaging myths surrounding autism is the belief that vaccines cause the condition. Shansay Khan\*, a mother of two autistic children, is deeply concerned that when she was living in the United States, a particular vaccine might have caused autism in her children. “Both my children appeared developmentally typical before the vaccination, which makes me think that the diagnosis has something to do with immunisation.” Such beliefs are common and stem from fear, grief, and the human need to find answers.

However, decades of large-scale, high-quality scientific studies conducted across multiple countries have conclusively found no link between vaccines and autism. Medical experts confirm that autism is influenced by genetic and biological factors that begin before birth. Promoting vaccine myths not only misinforms parents but also endangers public health by discouraging essential immunisation.

Instead of chasing false causes, society must focus on real solutions early diagnosis, teacher training, family support, and policy reform.

In recent years, there have been encouraging signs of state-level recognition. The establishment of the Maryam Nawaz School and Resource Centre for Autism marks a significant milestone. It is Pakistan’s first government-run school dedicated exclusively to autism, launched under the leadership of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. The centre caters to children aged three to 16 years and offers structured

treatment, education, and therapeutic support under one roof.

The school provides age-appropriate learning environments, sensory gardens, speech and sound therapy, vocational training, and IT skill development. More importantly, it represents a shift in state responsibility — acknowledging autism not as a private burden but as a public concern. Such initiatives set a precedent for other provinces, demonstrating that inclusive education requires investment, expertise, and long-term commitment.

At the federal level, autism has also begun to enter policy discussions. Under various social welfare and health programmes, government initiatives have emphasised disability inclusion, early screening, and rehabilitation services. While implementation remains uneven, recognition at the highest level of governance is a necessary first step. Without political will, inclusion remains a hollow promise.

Yet, specialised schools alone cannot be the answer. The real question is not whether autistic children should attend mainstream schools or special institutions but under what conditions. For some children, mainstream classrooms with trained teachers, flexible curricula, and support staff can be empowering. For others, specialised settings offer safety, routine, and dignity.

Parents play a crucial role in developing their child’s confidence and helping them navigate daily life. They should not rely solely on schools, as many mainstream institutions remain unprepared, overburdened, or more focused on managing numbers than providing genuine support. Parents must also closely observe and understand their child’s behaviour, seek professional guidance, and avoid hiding concerns or assuming that challenges will disappear once the child reaches college or university. Early diagnosis is

essential, ideally between 18 and 24 months, as timely intervention and appropriate therapies can significantly improve the quality of life for children with ASD.

While no medicine or vaccine exists to cure autism, therapies like speech therapy, occupational therapy, and behavioural interventions can make a meaningful difference.

In Pakistan, autism is increasingly recognised, and several NGOs, including the Autism Society of Pakistan, Pakistan Centre for Autism, and ASD Welfare Trust are working hard to support affected children. The government has also taken steps, establishing centres of excellence, specialised schools, and awareness programmes to provide world-class education, therapy, professional training, and transportation for autistic children, aiming to give them the support and confidence they need to thrive.

Pakistan stands at a crossroads. Autism can no longer remain hidden behind closed doors, mislabelled as bad behaviour, or exploited for profit. Teachers must be properly trained, parents must be supported, and schools must be regulated, with regular seminars and awareness programmes conducted to build understanding at every level. Inclusion should not be a privilege for those who can pay extra, but a right grounded in dignity, empathy, and informed practice.

The child rocking his chair in the classroom corner is not a disruption. He is a reminder of a system that has yet to learn how to listen. Until classrooms become spaces of empathy rather than endurance, the debate over inclusion will remain incomplete. Autism does not demand special treatment; it demands informed humanity.

*All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer.*

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# Can brain stimulation make people kinder & less selfish?

Scientists may be closer to reverse selfishness in people and make them more “generous and kind.”

According to a new research study, the researchers have been successful in making people “less selfish” by simulating certain areas of the brain.

In an experiment conducted at the University of Zurich, 44 volunteers were asked to divide an amount of money between themselves and an anonymous partner.

During their decision-making stage, an electrical current was applied to the frontal and parietal areas of the brain.

According to findings published in the journal PLOS Biology, these two areas when in the simulation stage influence participants’ decision-making, urging them to give away more money.

Although the generosity effects were proved to be temporary, it sets the stage for future research on cooperation.

These findings also suggest that generosity may be more than a moral lesson. It is possible to reduce selfishness while reshaping the working of the brain.

Prof Christian Ruff, one of the lead authors who carried out the experiments said, “The effects were not huge, but they’re consistent.” offering the hope for futuristic opportunities.

“We identified a pattern of communication between brain regions that is tied to altruistic choices. This improves our basic understanding of how the brain supports social decisions, and it sets the stage for future research on cooperation – especially in situations where success depends on people working together,” Ruff added.

In future, the researchers could leverage these findings to develop intervention tools to improve individuals’ social function who are dealing with psychiatric conditions.



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# Lasbela Restaurant Mega Comedy Night: Shakeel Siddiqui & Rauf Lala Steal the Show in Houston

Renowned Pakistani comedians Shakeel Siddiqui and Rauf Lala entertain the audience during a lively Comedy Night organized by Lasbela Restaurant. The event also featured a musical performance by singer Sanam Sheikh, while Texas State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani presented appreciation certificates to the guest artists and promoter Aziz Noorani.





# Ramadan 2026

## Sahur, Iftar & Adhan Timings

1447 Hijri  
Feb/Mar  
2026

RAMADAN	Date	Day	IMSAK FAJR	SHURUQ SUNRISE	ZUHUR NOON	**ASR AFTERNOON	MAGHRIB SUNSET	ISHA LATE EVENING
* 1	Feb 18	Wed	5:52 AM	6:58 AM	12:37 PM	3:48 PM	6:14 PM	7:19 PM
2	19	Thu	5:51 AM	6:57 AM	12:36 PM	3:48 PM	6:15 PM	7:20 PM
3	20	Fri	5:51 AM	6:57 AM	12:36 PM	3:49 PM	6:16 PM	7:21 PM
4	21	Sat	5:50 AM	6:56 AM	12:36 PM	3:49 PM	6:16 PM	7:21 PM
5	22	Sun	5:49 AM	6:55 AM	12:36 PM	3:49 PM	6:17 PM	7:22 PM
6	23	Mon	5:48 AM	6:54 AM	12:36 PM	3:50 PM	6:18 PM	7:23 PM
7	24	Tue	5:47 AM	6:53 AM	12:36 PM	3:50 PM	6:19 PM	7:23 PM
8	25	Wed	5:46 AM	6:52 AM	12:36 PM	3:51 PM	6:19 PM	7:24 PM
9	26	Thu	5:45 AM	6:50 AM	12:36 PM	3:51 PM	6:20 PM	7:25 PM
10	27	Fri	5:44 AM	6:49 AM	12:35 PM	3:51 PM	6:21 PM	7:25 PM
11	28	Sat	5:43 AM	6:48 AM	12:35 PM	3:52 PM	6:21 PM	7:26 PM
12	March 01	Sun	5:42 AM	6:47 AM	12:35 PM	3:52 PM	6:22 PM	7:27 PM
13	02	Mon	5:41 AM	6:46 AM	12:35 PM	3:52 PM	6:23 PM	7:28 PM
14	03	Tue	5:40 AM	6:45 AM	12:35 PM	3:53 PM	6:23 PM	7:28 PM
15	04	Wed	5:39 AM	6:44 AM	12:34 PM	3:53 PM	6:24 PM	7:28 PM
16	05	Thu	5:38 AM	6:43 AM	12:34 PM	3:53 PM	6:25 PM	7:29 PM
17	06	Fri	5:36 AM	6:42 AM	12:34 PM	3:54 PM	6:25 PM	7:30 PM
18	07	Sat	5:35 AM	6:41 AM	12:34 PM	3:54 PM	6:26 PM	7:30 PM
DST Starts 19	08	Sun	6:34 AM	7:40 AM	1:33 PM	4:54 PM	7:27 PM	8:31 PM
20	09	Mon	6:33 AM	7:38 AM	1:33 PM	4:54 PM	7:27 PM	8:32 PM
21	10	Tue	6:32 AM	7:37 AM	1:33 PM	4:55 PM	7:28 PM	8:32 PM
22	11	Wed	6:31 AM	7:36 AM	1:33 PM	4:55 PM	7:29 PM	8:33 PM
23	12	Thu	6:30 AM	7:35 AM	1:32 PM	4:55 PM	7:29 PM	8:34 PM
24	13	Fri	6:28 AM	7:34 AM	1:32 PM	4:55 PM	7:30 PM	8:34 PM
25	14	Sat	6:27 AM	7:33 AM	1:32 PM	4:55 PM	7:31 PM	8:35 PM
26	15	Sun	6:26 AM	7:31 AM	1:32 PM	4:56 PM	7:31 PM	8:36 PM
27	16	Mon	6:25 AM	7:30 AM	1:31 PM	4:56 PM	7:32 PM	8:36 PM
28	17	Tue	6:24 AM	7:29 AM	1:31 PM	4:56 PM	7:32 PM	8:37 PM
29	18	Wed	6:22 AM	7:28 AM	1:31 PM	4:56 PM	7:33 PM	8:37 PM
*30	19	Thu	6:21 AM	7:27 AM	1:30 PM	4:56 PM	7:34 PM	8:38 PM

\* Pending moon sighting confirmation

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