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Houston Tragedy: Nephew of Aafia Siddiqui Laid to Rest as Murder Suspect Arrested



Houston — In a tragic incident that has deeply shaken the Pakistani and Muslim community, 18-year-old Ammad (Emad) Siddiqui, nephew of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, was laid to rest following his fatal shooting during a

Continued on page 13

World leaders praise Pakistan after US-Iran ceasefire

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on Wednesday that the United States and Iran agreed to a two-week ceasefire, marking a temporary but significant halt to the ongoing Middle Eastern conflict.


In a post on X, Shehbaz wrote, "With the greatest humility, I am pleased to



announce that the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States of America, along with their allies, have agreed to an immediate

ceasefire everywhere, including Lebanon and elsewhere, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY."

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PM Shehbaz, CDF Munir discuss Pakistan's efforts to mediate between US and Iran

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir on Thursday reviewed the "progress of Pakistan's mediatory efforts to achieve sustainable peace in the region". In a statement, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said CDF

Continued on page 13

By Hosting U.S.-Iran Talks, Pakistan Eyes an Unlikely Rebrand as Peace Broker

By Charlie Campbell

Other than a string of coups, mass protests, and terrorist attacks, it isn't often that the world's collective gaze falls upon Islamabad. But Pakistan's 1960s capital will be thrust into an unfamiliar global spotlight this weekend when it hosts arguably the most consequential diplomatic meeting of recent years.

Continued on page 23

Houston Karachi Sister City Association Delegation Meets Governor of Sindh to discuss Bilateral Cooperation



Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, President of Houston Karachi Sister City Association met the Governor of Sindh, Nehal Hashmi, at Governor House Karachi to discuss several collaboration matters of mutual interest.

A delegation of the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association, led by President Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, along with Majyd Aziz, Kashif Ghayas, Jalal Uddin and Yasir Qazi met with the Governor of Sindh at Governor House, Karachi to discuss collaboration in Education, Healthcare, Humanitarian Services, IT, and Trade.

President HKSCA highlighted ongoing collaborative efforts

Continued on page 13



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From Battlefield to Power Broker: Pakistan's Rise as the New Security Anchor of South & West Asia

The geopolitical events of the past year in South and West Asia have revealed a fundamental reality:

Pakistan has emerged on the world stage with a new confidence and strategic clarity. Its decisive military victory in 2025 and its current crucial role in mediating the end of Iran US/Israel war, while taking along all relevant nations, have proved its importance and utility as a militarily strong and diplomatically mature partner with a global reach.

Pakistan's role as a pivotal player in international conflicts is not a recent development; it is a hallmark of its foreign policy spanning decades. Throughout the Cold War, Pakistan served as a critical anchor in the global power architecture. In the 1970s, it acted as the vital bridge connecting the United States with China, a move that fundamentally re-ordered the world. From the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union to the global War on Terror, Islamabad has consistently met international security challenges—often at a staggering cost to its own internal stability and economy.

Not only these contributions often went unrecognized, Pakistan often received skepticism as an unsafe/unstable country. It all changed last year. Despite a struggling economy, Pakistan shocked the world in May 2025 by its decisive victory in the four-day war against a much bigger adversary. By neutralizing a numerically superior force through technological agility and tactical brilliance, innovations now integrated in global military textbooks, Pakistan forced the world to acknowledge its strength as a mature, and responsible nuclear power. Perhaps more telling part of this victory was Pakistan's post-war conduct.

Islamabad chose a path of high-level tactical diplomacy, rightfully giving credit for the ceasefire where it belonged—to President Trump. This demonstrated military prowess led to the signing of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Defense Pact, recognizing Pakistan's defensive umbrella as a vital asset for the security of Islam's holiest places and



By Siraj Narsi

the wider Gulf.

The recent Iran-US/Israel war has proven that the era of the Arab reliance solely on the US for security is evolving. Iran's resilience to aggression and its attacks on GCC countries have changed regional security architecture. At the heart of this transformation is Pakistan—not merely as a participant, but as a potential gravitational center for stability. By blending modern defense capabilities with a historically grounded diplomatic maturity, Islamabad has proven it is a reliable and sophisticated partner, possessing the tenacity to navigate the complex bilateral and multilateral sensitivities required at this critical moment in global history.

In contrast to Pakistan's rising profile, traditional regional anchors are facing a crisis of credibility. India's

position has been significantly weakened following the 2025 conflict. Furthermore, Prime Minister Modi's

visit to Israel in February 2026, immediately preceding the attack on Iran, has eroded any

notion of Indian neutrality. Tehran has taken notice of New Delhi's alignment with its adversary.

Simultaneously, the perceived moral authority and influence of the United States as the leader of the free world have diluted. Despite a massive military presence, Washington has struggled to provide a sense of absolute protection to its GCC allies. Furthermore, several key allies declined to offer direct support or any other involvement during current hostilities, leaving a void in mutual trust.

"Pakistan as a 'Net Security Provider'"

In this vacuum, Pakistan stands as the only actor capable of providing mature regional leadership supported by credible military deterrence.

Pakistan's unique potential is rooted in a web of relationships that no other nation can replicate:

- * A high-trust rapport with the United States balanced by an "iron-clad" partnership with China.

- * Deep cultural and neighborly ties with Iran, alongside a growing, productive rapport with Russia.

- * A historically grounded, trustworthy relationship with all GCC and Arab nations.

Given these strengths, Arab and GCC countries may find Pakistan as a natural "net security provider" in the region.

While Pakistan has proved its capability to defend its borders against its traditional rivals and emerging threats from Afghanistan, Pakistan's larger regional security role would require focused investments. For Arab and GCC countries, a strategic arrangement centered on strengthening Pakistan's economy and military-industrial capacity is a wise and sound investment, bolstering the defense resourcefulness of a partner that understands regional sensitivities and has proven its reliability under pressure. The "Return on Investment (ROI)" for the Arab and Gulf states is a security umbrella that is incredibly difficult to

challenge, possesses high-tech deterrence, and guarantees regional stability.

This acquired stability from a brotherly Muslim country also offers a unique mechanism to pacify internal frictions, such as the strategic competition between Saudi Arabia and the UAE, by aligning them within a shared, capable defense framework and regional growth. Ultimately, this unified approach provides the leverage needed to address the region's most intractable disputes, potentially paving the way for an independent state of Palestine and probably a lasting solution to Kashmir. Within this new regional order:

- Iran is integrated through diplomatic engagement and regional stability backed by shared economic agenda, and progress towards resolving historic regional disputes; Iran's key concerns.

- Israel understands to exercise caution, recognizing a unified and technologically balanced regional defense block.

- India may be restrained, understanding that the era of conventional intimidation has ended.

- The people of the region benefit from the peace and economic growth that enduring stability generates.

Pakistan has demonstrated both the tenacity to win a war and the diplomatic sophistication to maintain the peace. By investing in Pakistan as a regional stabilizer, the Arab/GCC countries would be backing their own security, enduring regional stability and a new era of prosperity for the entire region.

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About the author:

Siraj Narsi is a Business Finance professional, a filmmaker, writer and an active community volunteer. He sits on the executive and advisory boards of several non-profit organizations, and serves as President of Pakistan Association of Greater Houston. Before moving to North America, he was a faculty member at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi.

'Pakistan's Role in the Iran-U.S. Conflict and the Two Week Ceasefire'

SYED FEROUZ AHMED

Since tensions between the United States and Iran escalated in late February 2026, Pakistan has taken a calm, balanced, and responsible approach. Rather than becoming directly involved in the conflict, Pakistan has consistently called for restraint, peace, and dialogue. Its position has focused on reducing tensions and encouraging both sides to resolve their differences through diplomatic means.

As part of its efforts, Pakistan is believed to have proposed the "Islamabad Accord," a practical two step initiative. The first step

calls for an immediate ceasefire to stop further violence. The second step encourages structured and meaningful discussions aimed at reaching a long-term and peaceful settlement.

Pakistan has also quietly supported communication between the United States and Iran by helping to deliver messages and proposals in a neutral and trustworthy manner. Before the current ceasefire, negotiations were difficult. Iran had rejected earlier proposals, demanding a permanent end to hostilities, the removal of sanctions, and secure access through the Strait of Hormuz. In this sensitive

and complex situation, Pakistan has emerged as an important voice for peace in the region. Its leadership has worked to reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and present realistic solutions that support stability.

Recently, both the United States and Iran agreed to a two week ceasefire, temporarily halting military actions. As part of this development, Iran is also expected to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, ensuring the steady flow of global oil supplies. This pause in conflict, supported by Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, creates a valuable opportunity for both sides to focus on dialogue instead of confrontation.

During this ceasefire period, tensions are expected to ease, global energy markets may stabilize, and space is created for continued negotiations. Pakistan's role remains active, as it continues diplomatic engagement, encourages both sides to honor the agreement, and helps address any misunderstandings that may arise.

Observers note that Pakistan's involvement highlights the potential of diplomacy and dialogue in managing regional conflicts. The country's engagement demonstrates a measured approach to facilitating negotiations and supporting international stability.

Community Garden Houston Group Hosts Insightful Gathering on Sustainable Gardening



The Community Garden Houston group organized a highly productive and engaging meeting, bringing together gardening enthusiasts and community members for an enriching session of knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Participants actively exchanged seeds, discussed a variety of plants, and shared practical tips



on cultivating healthy gardens. The meeting featured a lively and informative group discussion focused on agriculture, soil health, and effective planting techniques, reflecting the group's commitment to promoting sustainable gardening practices.

Among the attendees, Mrs. Farah Tahir stood out for her valuable insights, contributing significantly

to the discussion with her experience and expertise. The event also marked a warm welcome for new members, Mr. Ilyas Chaudhry and Mr. Sajid Khan, who joined the group for the first time and were greeted with enthusiasm by fellow participants.

The presence of key members of the



Houston gardening community further enriched the session, making it a meaningful and impactful gathering. The meeting concluded on a positive note, highlighting the importance of community-driven efforts in fostering environmental awareness and strengthening local connections through gardening.

How we got here: Inside Pakistan's backchannel diplomacy that led to the US-Iran ceasefire



Diplomacy does its best work when no one is looking. In calls that stretch for hours, in proposals dismissed publicly but refined privately, in capitals that deny mediation even as they pass messages.

Over the past two weeks, as missiles crossed the Gulf and ultimatums replaced rhetoric, Pakistan tactfully slipped into that space: not loud enough to claim the stage, but persistent enough to keep the curtains from closing.

After nearly two weeks of sustained, largely unseen engagement, those quiet efforts culminated in a breakthrough Pakistan could no longer keep in the background.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced, early on Wednesday morning, that Pakistan had helped secure an “immediate ceasefire” between Iran and the United States, alongside their respective allies across the region, including in Lebanon, bringing a sudden halt to a conflict that had edged dangerously close to wider war.

The agreement, shaped through a series of proposals, relayed positions, and last-minute interventions, reflected Pakistan's role as a front-facing broker as well as a steady intermediary. It practised diplomacy in its classic form. There was condemnation without foreclosure and mediation without the vanity of naming it. Calls were made, time was bought, and just enough ambiguity preserved to keep every side in the room.

Queen's gambit: The opening move

Islamabad could have reached for spectacle. Instead, it chose something far more old-fashioned and durable: dialogue.

Even as the missiles flew and death toll rose, Pakistan offered solidarity to Tehran and pressed restraint to Washington. To Gulf capitals, it framed the war as an economic and security risk spiralling beyond anyone's control. Each outreach looked modest in isolation. By the time a ceasefire window appeared, diplomacy had seamlessly threaded itself through the conflict.

This is a story of those threads.

It began on March 24 when Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed readiness to “facilitate” comprehensive talks for settlement between the countries at war. On March 28, when US-Israeli strikes on Iranian targets triggered the latest escalation, Pakistan, almost immediately, held a parallel round of diplomacy. Within hours, PM Shehbaz spoke with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, condemning the strikes, expressing solidarity, and outlining outreach to Washington and regional capitals — the first visible sign of a mediation effort that would soon expand far beyond a single call.

Iranian President extended his gratitude to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, acknowledging Pakistan's sincere efforts to advance peace by engaging the United States, Gulf states, and other Islamic countries to facilitate dialogue.

The following day, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

Ishaq Dar met with the foreign ministers of Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, exploring pathways for de-escalation and shaping a framework to initiate US-Iran talks.

On March 31, Dar undertook a one-day visit to Beijing at the invitation of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi. That same day, Pakistan unveiled a five-point initiative, marking the first structured multilateral framework aimed at restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and the Middle East amid the US-Israeli-Iran tensions. The plan called for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the prompt commencement of peace talks, underlining Islamabad's commitment to translating diplomatic engagement into action.

On April 2, US and Israel attacked a century-old medical research centre in Tehran, a bridge near the capital and steel plants, after President Donald Trump threatened to bomb Iran back to “the Stone Ages”. As the war escalated with Iran downing multiple US aircraft, Trump's threats escalated as well. He warned of “hell” and gave a 48-hour ultimatum to Iran to “open up” Strait of Hormuz.

Pakistan, though, continued working on the backend.

Endless calls were made to foreign ministers of countries like Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Countries, Iran and the US, promoting the Pak-China five-point initiative to encourage dialogue and resolve conflict.

When immediate talks did not materialise, one expected Islamabad to give up, but according to diplomatic sources, however, it intensified its outreach rather than scaling it back.

Two days later, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi reassured Iran's willingness to visit Islamabad for negotiation talks and expressed gratitude for Pakistan for its efforts.

On April 6, Iran and the US received a proposal to end hostilities as a structured plan transmitted through Pakistan. The deal, dubbed the “Islamabad Accord,” would include a regional framework for the strait, with final in-person talks in Islamabad.

The document outlined a two-tier approach. First, an immediate ceasefire tied to the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Second, a 15-20 day window to negotiate a broader settlement. The sequencing was deliberate. De-escalation would come first; the harder political compromises would follow once the pressure of imminent conflict had eased.

Islamabad became the sole conduit through which revisions, clarifications and assurances moved between Washington and Tehran.

As the proposal circulated, Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) Field Marshal Asim Munir remained in continuous contact through the night — speaking with US Vice President JD Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi — effectively managing the back-and-forth required to keep both sides aligned on timing and language.

The mechanics mattered as much as the substance. The initial understanding was designed to be formalised as a memorandum of understanding, finalised electronically through Pakistan. That allowed both sides to commit simultaneously without the optics of direct negotiation which was a critical consideration for two governments still publicly locked in confrontation.

‘A whole civilisation will (not) die tonight’

By the eve of the ceasefire, the groundwork had already shaped the pressure points: each side knew what could be gained, or lost, if the window lapsed.

With less than two hours left before his 8pm (EST) deadline, Donald Trump — who had spent the previous day warning that “a whole civilisation will die tonight” — abruptly shifted tone. The bombing, he said, could be suspended for two weeks, but only if Iran reopened the Strait of Hormuz.

That conditional pause did not emerge in a vacuum. It followed a direct diplomatic push from Islamabad. As the clock ticked down, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly urged Trump to extend the deadline, framing the request as an opportunity: give diplomacy two weeks, and a pathway could still be salvaged. Simultaneously, Pakistan relayed a parallel appeal to Tehran — reopen the Strait for the same period as a goodwill gesture, and halt defensive operations if attacks stop.

Within hours, the pieces began aligning. Iran signalled that if strikes ceased, it would pause its military response and allow safe passage through Hormuz for two weeks. Trump's conditional suspension suddenly had a reciprocal answer.

The sequencing mattered. Washington demanded movement from Tehran; Tehran demanded relief from bombardment; neither wanted to move first. Pakistan's intervention effectively split the deadlock — asking both sides to act simultaneously, under the same two-week window. The proposal transformed unilateral demands into mirrored commitments.

The result was a narrow diplomatic corridor created at the last possible moment: Trump extended the timeline, Iran offered conditional de-escalation, and the Strait (through which roughly a fifth of global energy supplies flow) was put back on the table as leverage for calm.

All eyes on Islamabad

In a crisis driven by threats and deadlines, Pakistan's intervention did something deceptively simple. It gave both sides a way to step back without appearing to retreat.

So far, Pakistan has structured a clear pathway for peace: an immediate lull in hostilities, a scheduled window for negotiations, and eventual face-to-face talks in Islamabad on April 10. And though the outcome remains uncertain, its role as a mediator has already reshaped the possibilities for de-escalation.

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Tight rope act

The government was targeted for being indecisive — and rightly so.

Arifa Noor

WITH a war in the region, Pakistan has been at the centre stage of all conversations, negotiations and talks about and around the conflict.

For this, there has also been much praise and some heartburn (from some in the neighbourhood). However, Islamabad still needs to be careful; it continues to perform a tight rope balancing act domestically and internationally, as this conflict goes on. And if the hostilities continue, staying upright will be a trick and a half.

This is primarily linked to the country's precarious economic situation and an 'unpopular' government struggling to gain a foothold with the people. And as some or many economic experts point out, there is little to fall back on if the world is facing uncertainty in terms of oil prices or other shocks. However successful this government may have been, as we are told continuously, in every aspect.

Consider the management of the petrol prices. The somersaults by the government have been quite remarkable. It began by being one of the first in the region to act decisively once the international prices went up by hiking the price by Rs55. At that point, the government defended its move by arguing that it was not possible to take any other decision, but for the next couple of weeks, it moved to a different tactic. The prime minister himself came on air to announce that he was not passing on the price, while a story in Dawn reported that he told his colleagues that he and the army chief had agreed to not pass on petrol price hikes for the near future.

Government representatives were at pains to explain this 'subsidy' could not go on forever but there was little clarity on how long this would last and what would come next. Then came a spate of meetings as Islamabad tried to convince the provincial governments to share the burden, from funding the subsidy to providing relief. But even then,

few expected the bombshell. Late Thursday night, which just passed, three government ministers announced a raise in prices that overshadowed the previous hike.

The next day wasn't easy for the people or for the government, it seems, because within 24 hours, the prime minister turned up on television again. He announced a new lower price, explaining that he had reduced the tax on the fuel.

The government was targeted for being indecisive — and rightly so. The explanation from government quarters that the tax could only be lowered after permission from the IMF (which apparently came a day later) is not really being bought. In addition, it has highlighted once again the government's failure in reducing its expenses or widening the tax base, which forces it to impose high indirect taxes on fuel. This was emphasised by an interview of the petroleum minister in which he acknowledged that there should be accountability of those who agreed to these revenue targets and then failed to meet them. In fact, questions are being raised whether the government is a house divided or if there are serious reservations within about some key people.

It is hard to say how serious the blame game is. But it is worth asking whether recriminations will intensify if oil prices go up further and other economic shocks make the tight rope walking even more difficult. After all, news about the possible impact on exports, balance-of-payments and inflation is yet to become visible.

Add to this, the people and the situation becomes even more wobbly. Can the petrol price be the final straw on the camel's back? No one can predict for sure but the fear is always there that the next economic shock will lead to chaos on the streets. That the powers that be share this fear is evident from their overreaction to any protest. Just consider that the Federal Constitutional Court has taken notice of the Imran

Rehai Force, a kooky idea of Chief Minister Sohail Afridi that even the PTI didn't take seriously. However, the court wants to know more about it and there are guesses galore about why this is so.

But the economic balancing act is simply not limited to the domestic headaches. Even internationally, the country, with its weak economy, moves to please many Pied Pipers, struggling to ensure no tune is ignored. There is the Fund and the US, at one end, then friends in the Gulf on the other, as well as those further east.

The recent fracas was over the UAE loan, which Islamabad has 'decided' to return if reports are to be believed. A loan that was given in the 1990s and now is being returned because the UAE is apparently no longer interested in rolling it over is being linked to Islamabad's policy of maintaining relations with the Gulf Arab states as well as Iran. There are reports that the UAE (and perhaps others) are not happy that Islamabad is trying to balance its various relations, especially maintaining an even keel with its immediate neighbour Iran.

Upsetting anyone in the Gulf comes with its own economic costs, while relations with Iran can impact the Shia community within the country. Along with this, there are concerns about what it will mean for Pakistan if there is a different regime in Tehran.

Indeed, if any of the friends or benefactors in the Gulf take offence at the support for Iran or Pakistan's refusal of any demand, the economic situation for the government can become more difficult. And the longer the conflict goes on, the more complicated this delicate balancing act can become. Especially, if the US also decides to take a second look at Pakistan's role. Indeed, the conflict in the Middle East may be tough for the world but it is taking its own toll on Islamabad. The sooner it ends, the better it is for the country.

The writer is a journalist.

IMF and subsidy

FEW expected the IMF's silence over a capped, targeted fuel subsidy to be a green light for blanket price suppression. But the prime minister's Friday night dash to slash the petrol levy — undoing a massive price hike meant to fully pass on the global increase in fuel prices over supply disruptions from just 24 hours earlier — suggests the government is back to its old economic playbook. While the move might not immediately blow up the latest staff-level agreement, the lender remains concerned about existing distortions, particularly in diesel pricing, introduced after the first adjustment amid the US-Israel war on Iran on March 7,

and is pressing for their early removal. Initially, the government had sought to offset the revenue loss from the petroleum levy on diesel, currently at zero against the Rs80 per litre targeted in the budget, through higher levy rates on petrol. But this cushion has narrowed sharply after the prime minister slashed the petrol levy by Rs80 per litre to extend relief to all income groups, rather than maintaining a targeted subsidy.

The IMF quietly tolerated the targeted subsidy declared by the government, presumably because it did not undermine the levy's revenue target. Last week's announcement, however, has significantly

altered that position. It suggests that the government's attempt to balance public relief and fiscal discipline is becoming increasingly untenable. A populist move, the decision to slash the levy will weaken a major revenue source at a time when tax collection continues to fall short of the target. This raises serious questions about the feasibility of meeting key programme benchmarks such as the primary surplus. The lender's insistence on removing distortions is therefore grounded in sound economic logic. Islamabad's predicament is largely self-inflicted. Years of delayed tax reforms and a reluctance to decisively

curb wasteful public expenditure have left the state with limited fiscal space to respond to external shocks. The current oil price surge, exacerbated by disruptions in global supply routes, has merely exposed these underlying vulnerabilities. Stable macroeconomic indicators notwithstanding, the space for relief is steadily shrinking. This is not about difficult trade-offs; it is about having the political will to execute tough reforms. Without effective tax reforms and a credible reduction in wasteful public spending, such dilemmas will persist regardless of how often they are repackaged in political rhetoric.

Terror fissures

The terror spectre from across the western frontier continues unabated. This past weekend, the terrorists belonging to TTP tried to infiltrate North Waziristan, but the intrusion attempt was repulsed by security forces. As many as 37 of the dreaded elements were condemned to hell. It is the violent activities like this one — reflecting Kabul's appeasement of terrorists — that compelled

Pakistan to launch Operation Ghazab Lil Haq in February.

The hot pursuit, thus, was inevitable, as rather than take action against the terrorists, the Taliban rulers have continued to indulge in unprovoked attacks from across the border, forcing Pakistan to close the check-posts at Torkham and Chaman.

In a lawful retaliation in self-

defence, Pakistani forces targeted 81 hideouts, killing more than 800 terrorists, destroying 286 Afghan posts, in addition to razing 249 tanks and armoured vehicles. The ceasefire attained on the eve of Eid-ul-Fitr was in good faith, but this Waziristan shootout has proved, yet again, the complicity of Taliban 2.0 in the terrorist onslaughts.

Needless to mention that Afghanistan needs to take stock of its policies, and the best way forward is to mend fences with Pakistan. The

least that is desired is to act against the terror elements and eradicate them in the interest of regional peace and prosperity. The Urumqi dialogue has rightly bred a three-point demand — to declare TTP a terrorist organisation, dismantle its infrastructure, and provide verifiable proof of action taken. This is not a Pakistan-specific demand, as the same has been reiterated by the UN and other regional countries, too.

The spike in terror incidents in Pakistan has a direct relevance

to domestic unrest in Afghanistan. The Bannu police station suicide attack last week, which came a day after the Urumqi talks, is proof of open interference. Similarly, the fire-spitting declarations from the Taliban leaders and putting irresistible issues — such as refugees' rehabilitation and transit trade — on the back burner confirm their narrow-mindedness. Kabul must come out of this callous syndrome to undo bilateral fissures in all sincerity.

When War Becomes a Bet: Iran, Money, and the Market of Human Fate

As I write these lines, twenty hours remain in the forty-eight-hour ultimatum issued by the American president to Iran. But time, in moments like these, does not move on a clock alone. It travels through nerves, through markets, through the quiet anxieties of a watching world. Military experts lean over their maps. Journalists shape their analyses. International media calls this a decisive moment. And yet, there is no certainty. Only conjecture. Only possibilities. Only roads not yet built, but already debated.

Some say the war will expand. Others insist it will remain contained. A few hold on to the fragile hope that diplomacy might still find a way through the smoke. But nearly all agree on one truth: ultimatums are rarely about immediate outcomes. They are instruments of pressure, performances of power, sentences placed deliberately on the table so that the man across from you sits a little straighter in his chair.

But this time, the story does not end there.

There was a time, in our childhood, when we watched cricket and heard whispers, half-believed and half-understood, that betting lurked behind the game. That somewhere beyond the stadium, another contest unfolded, one where runs did not matter, only money did. That even players, it was said, sometimes became part of that invisible game. It felt distant then. Shadowy. Like a side stage hidden from the ordinary eye, a world that existed, yet remained unseen.

But the world has changed.

Now, the world is not only watching war. It is pricing it.

This is the moment that alters everything. Once, news arrived and was followed by analysis. Now, news arrives and is followed by wagers. Bets are placed. Gambles are made. And it is all given a more respectable name: markets, shares, trading. But the truth remains, standing quietly but firmly in place: it is betting. It is gambling. Only the costume has changed.

On digital platforms today, the betting around Iran, the United States, and global conflict has reached extraordinary levels. Hundreds of millions of dollars are in motion.



By Raja Zahid Akhtar
Khanzada

Between \$250 million and \$500 million alone are circulating on questions related to Iran. These are not singular questions. They are dozens, each circling the same unease: Will there be war? Will it escalate? Will it end? Or will it spread?

And here lies the strangest transformation of all. It is no longer diplomats who answer these questions. It is those who risk their own money. A marketplace has emerged where the question is not how peace will come, but when it will come, and how much profit can be made from its arrival. More than \$100 million may sit on the possibility of a ceasefire. Elsewhere, traders speculate whether fourteen consecutive days of calm are even possible. And in one of the more chilling formulations, the question is posed plainly: will the war end first, or will oil reach \$120 a barrel?

It is here that one must pause and ask: where have we arrived?

To understand this world, one must understand the machinery behind it. Digital platforms known as prediction markets, including names like Polymarket and Kalshi, have turned global events into tradable outcomes. Users buy "Yes" or "No" shares on whether something will happen. If a "Yes" share trades at sixty cents, the market is effectively saying there is a sixty percent chance of that event

occurring. If the event happens, the share pays out one dollar. If it does not, it becomes worthless.

Thus, every headline becomes a financial instrument. Every war becomes an opportunity.

Despite regulatory restrictions in the United States, access persists. Through VPNs and cryptocurrency, users from around the world participate in these markets. And within this ecosystem, even political proximity finds its place. Donald Trump Jr. is not the founder of such a platform, nor its day-to-day operator, yet his association with its advisory structures and financial interest underscores something deeper: politics, capital, and technology are no longer separate spheres. They are converging into one.

War, once an unambiguous tragedy, has become something else entirely. For some, it remains a threat. For others, it is an opportunity.

Look closer, and the pattern sharpens. Tens of millions of dollars are placed on whether the United States will directly strike Iran. In some markets, up to \$50 million rides on the question of who will launch the next attack. But perhaps the most unsettling truth is this: people are betting less on the beginning of war and more on its end, as if watching a game, as if awaiting a final score.

And this phenomenon is not confined to one region. During the Gaza-Israel conflict, during the war between Russia and Ukraine, the same pattern emerged. With every strike, the odds shifted. With every statement, prices rose and fell. It was as if the war itself was not breathing, but its price was.

This is the architecture of a new digital world. A world in which events are not merely lived, but measured, bought, and sold. A world where probability becomes currency.

And yet, beneath this innovation lies a deeper unease. Global media has not treated this trend as mere technological evolution, but as an ethical rupture. There have been instances where bets were placed on the fate of pilots shot down in conflict. Human lives, reduced to positions on a ledger. Some have called it a "death market," a place where mor-

tality itself becomes a commodity. Reports have surfaced suggesting that individuals have profited by placing bets ahead of major events, raising questions that are as troubling as they are difficult to prove: is there, somewhere within this system, a shadow of insider knowledge?

When politics, capital, and technology converge, complexity is inevitable. But so is danger.

There are figures who do not operate these platforms, yet stand close enough to influence their gravity. Their presence lends legitimacy, visibility, and trust. And in such a system, price is no longer just a number. It becomes a signal.

And so, we arrive at a different set of questions.

No longer: where is the war being fought?

But: where is the war being priced?

Are decisions being shaped in the battlefield, where soldiers stand, or on screens, where strangers wager on the fate of others?

This is not a scene from fiction. It is our world.

We are living in an era where war is no longer only reported, but performed. Where it becomes spectacle. And in this spectacle, we are all, to some degree, participants.

There was a time when history was written in blood. In sacrifice. On the ground. Today, it is increasingly written in dollars. And the pen is no longer held by the soldier, but by the trader, seated before a screen, pressing a button, attempting to predict tomorrow.

And perhaps that is the most unsettling truth of all.

Power is no longer shaped only by weapons. It is shaped by money. And perhaps even more by belief, by the collective wager on what comes next.

And when the future itself becomes something to be bought and sold, when war becomes a form of gambling, the question is no longer who will win.

The question is: where is humanity losing?

Perhaps this is the moment to pause and ask, quietly but honestly, if everything can be priced, can anything still be valued? Or have we entered a world where everything has a price, and nothing has meaning?

Future scenario and security architecture in Middle East

Post-war, increased insecurity in West Asia may result in enhanced dependence upon US-designed security architecture

Dr Raza Muhammad

The 40-day US-Israel war on Iran, punctuated by a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire, neither had a just cause nor a crystallised war aim. The fluctuating war objectives included: elimination of Iranian leadership to engender a regime change; halt of Iran's nuclear programme that was claimed to have been obliterated in June 2026; destruction of its missile and drone programmes; total capitulation; capture of Kharg Island; control of Strait of Hormuz; etc.

The previous talks with Iran, in June 2025, were used by the US as a charade. Unfortunately, requisite consensus at home, allies' support and deliberations to carve out a war fighting and war ending strategy appear to be amiss too. The resignation of Joseph Kent, the NCTC Director, with the assertion that "Iran posed no imminent threat to USA" adds to the illegitimacy of this war being fought for Israel at the cost of the US.

Death and destruction, erosion of peace and increased instability in the region has helped no one but Israel, given that the KSA-Iran rapprochement brokered by China has

become a casualty of this war. Also, the US efforts remained focused on defending US assets in the Gulf region and Israel, to the disappointment of the Arab states.

Now that a ceasefire is holding and peace talks begin in Islamabad, it is difficult to predict the future of this conflict that has engulfed the whole region like an inferno. The unstated war aims could be: 1) to carve a new regional order/security architecture dominated by Israel, for which they seek to maul Iran to the extent that it ceases to remain a challenge to Israel for decades; 2) to control Iranian oil, the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea; and 3) to increase the cost of US security umbrella for the GCC countries.

Iran wouldn't acquiesce to become a compliant state. If the US wishes to avoid a non-ending expensive war, then it will have to recalibrate its war aims. To an extent, some change is already visible in the utterances of the US president and the secretary of state. They are already claiming victory saying that Iranian economic and military capabilities have been destroyed; that they are negotiating with 'a new Iranian leadership'; and that Strait

of Hormuz is partially open.

If both sides don't readjust to the ground realities and the ceasefire fails, it may become a protracted war spanning years. Iran is well prepared for a non-linear, asymmetric hybrid war. The US troops would dilute in gigantic Iranian mountains, deserts and ravines studied with tunnels; trapped and targeted from all around. It could evolve into a catastrophic war destructive for the whole region, including Israel. Russia and China may support Iran indirectly but are unlikely to join the war physically. This war, in all probabilities, shall end at a stalemated embarrassment. It could also act as a catalyst hastening US and Israel decline.

In case of the ceasefire failing, the global economy will see worst of the times. Escalating cost and dearth of energy, food, water, health and environmental hazards will make the life on this planet a nightmare. Entrapped in a non-profitable war, the US-Israel coalition may resort to irrational and unexpected choices. The consequent mayhem benefits no one but the US-Israel coalition, the conglomerate of proxies and terrorists,

and the military industrial complex.

Israel's desires for prolongation of the war to ensure as much weakening of Iran as possible is a hurdle to the ceasefire graduating into permanent peace. However, what could make the situation more complex is the ego of the world's most powerful country and the Zionist dream of 'Greater Israel'. Nonetheless, it is presumed that the world wishes end of the conflict, albeit with face saving for all warring factions. Therefore, the best option for the US is to end this war and exit by choice. The snowballing opposition to President Trump comprising more than eight million 'No King' protesters also points in the same direction.

Post-war, increased sense of insecurity in West Asia might result in enhanced dependence upon US-designed security architecture with Israel accepted as a regional power with no challengers; expansion of Abraham accords; and more oil, gas and weapon contracts for US companies. And Iran, being a resilient civilisation, will resurrect like phoenix from the ashes of this war in due course.

Pakistan to return \$3.5bn UAE debt before month end: official

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided to return \$3.5 billion in debt to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) before the end of this month, a senior Pakistani official said.

The official described the move as a cost the country was willing to bear to uphold “national dignity,” even as it is set to significantly draw down foreign exchange reserves.

The official disclosed that Abu Dhabi had sought the immediate return of the amount.

“The amount will be returned as soon as possible,” the official said, adding that “national dignity could not be compromised for financial considerations”.

These funds were part of external financing support extended by the UAE in 2019 to help

stabilise Pakistan’s balance of payments.

The official said the decision had ended the uncertainty surrounding the deposits placed through the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, which had been rolled over multiple times since 2019. In recent months, the extensions had become as shorter as month long, reflecting Emirati unease over the continuation of the arrangement.

Under its ongoing International Monetary Fund programme, Pakistan is required to secure around \$12.5bn in rollovers from three key partners — China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — to maintain reserve levels and meet external financing needs. The UAE deposits were, therefore, a critical part of this arrangement.

The latest available data shows Pakistan’s central bank reserves at about \$16.3bn. A payment of \$3bn from the reserves would reduce these holdings sharply by 18 per cent, significantly lowering the external buffer and import cover.

Other officials acknowledged that the return of the funds would have implications for reserve levels but said the decision was taken in view of evolving bilateral considerations and the UAE’s demand for immediate settlement.

Economic analysts say the return of the funds could increase pressure on the rupee and complicate Pakistan’s position under the IMF programme if not offset by fresh inflows. However, officials did not indicate any immedi-

ate arrangement for replacement financing.

On the other hand, Ministry of Finance, through a post on X, said it was “continuously monitoring and managing Pakistan’s external flows in order to ensure stable foreign exchange reserves”.

“The government of Pakistan remains committed to fulfilling all its external obligations,” it added.

The post referred to “speculation and commentary in some section of the media regarding the government of Pakistan’s external flows”, saying that it may be noted that the finance ministry was “continuously monitoring and managing external flows in order to ensure stable foreign exchange reserves”.

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Proudly served as Head of Operations at the Fort Bend County District Clerk’s Office.

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- Supported court and jury administration to ensure responsible, transparent government operations.

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Will ensure transparency, accountability, and efficient use of taxpayer funds.
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Emotional Farewell: Ammad Siddiqui, Nephew of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, Laid to Rest in Houston

A large number of mourners from the Pakistani and Muslim community, especially youth, gathered at Masjid Sabireen in Houston to offer funeral prayers for 18-year-old Ammad Siddiqui, nephew of Aafia Siddiqui. The atmosphere was filled with grief and sorrow as attendees paid their final respects to the young victim, whose tragic death in a carjacking incident has deeply shaken the community.



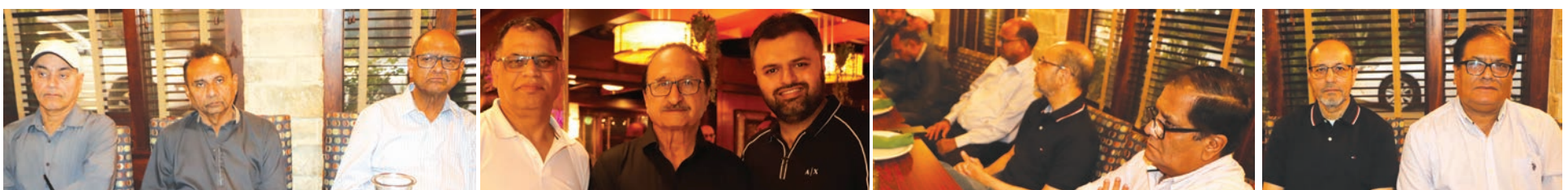
Zeeshan Khan & Iqra Rasheed's Elegant Valima Celebrated in Houston

The Valima ceremony of Zeeshan Khan and Iqra Rasheed was gracefully held on April 5, 2026, at Embassy Suites by Hilton, Houston. Hosted by the groom's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Rehan, the event gathered family, friends, and community members for a memorable evening of joy, prayers, and warm celebrations, marking the beginning of the couple's new journey together.



Bhutto Remembered in Houston: PPP Leaders and Community Unite in Powerful Tribute on 47th Death Anniversary

The 47th death anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), was observed in Houston with a prayer ceremony organized by the PPP Houston Chapter. Attendees included Kashif Somro, Riaz Kakakhel, Mumtaz Chang, Qazi Sohail, Fahad Junejo, Takhleek Lashari, Easa Bhargari, Taufiq Dandia, Sarwar Khushk, Zafar Iqbal, Ghulam Bombaywala, Mehmood Daiheri, Wahid Lala, Salman Razaqi, Lala Gulfaraz, Siraj Narsi, Sajid Mehar, Farhan Soomro, Ghulam Memon, Anwar Nizamati, Tahir Mama, Imran Memon, Mian Nazeer, Mumtaz Khan, Ghulam Mohiuddin Chishti, and Azam Akhtar. Speakers paid tribute to Bhutto's legacy and reaffirmed commitment to his ideology.



Researchers find heart benefits in tea, coffee, nuts and berries

The bright lights of the big city might seem dazzling, but they can be hard on your heart health, a new study says.

People exposed to high levels of artificial light have an increasingly higher risk of heart disease, researchers are scheduled to report at a Nov. 10 meeting of the American Heart Association in New Orleans.

Higher exposure to artificial light at night was associated with a 35% increased risk of heart disease within five years, and a 22% increased risk over 10 years, researchers found.

"We found a nearly linear relationship between nighttime light and heart disease: the more night-light exposure, the higher the risk," senior researcher Dr. Shady Abohashem, head of PET/CT cardiac imaging trials at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, said in a news release.

For the new study, researchers analyzed the health of 466 adults with an average age of 55 who'd undergone a PET or CT scan at Massachusetts General Hospital between 2005 and 2008.

The team compared the participants' health and brain scans to their exposure to artificial light, based on their home address.

Results showed that higher levels of artificial light caused brain stress activity and blood vessel inflammation.

"Even modest increases in nighttime light were linked with higher brain and artery stress," Abohashem said. "When the brain perceives stress, it activates signals that can trigger an immune response and inflame the blood vessels. Over time, this process can contribute to hardening of the arteries and increase the risk of heart attack and stroke."

Over a decade, 17% of the people

developed a major heart condition. Their light exposure was associated with risk of heart disease, even after accounting for other risk factors.

Heart risks were even higher among people who lived in areas with high traffic noise, lower neighborhood income or other environmental factors that can add to stress, researchers said.

To counter these ill effects, "people can limit indoor nighttime light, keeping bedrooms dark and avoiding screens such as TVs and personal electronic devices before bed," Abohashem said.

Cities also might improve folks' health by reducing unnecessary outdoor lighting, shielding street lamps, or using motion-sensitive lights, researchers said.

"These findings are novel and add to the evidence suggesting that reducing exposure to excessive artificial light at night is a public health concern," Julio Fernandez-Mendoza, an American Heart Association spokesman, said in a news release.

"We know too much exposure to artificial light at night can harm your health, particularly increasing the risk of heart disease. However, we did not know how this harm happened," said Fernandez-Mendoza, director of behavioral sleep medicine at Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine, who was not involved in the study.

"This study has investigated one of several possible causes, which is how our brains respond to stress," he explained. "This response seems to play a big role in linking artificial light at night to heart disease."

Researchers next plan to see whether reducing nighttime light exposure might improve people's heart health.



World leaders praise Pakistan after US-Iran ceasefire

Continued from front page

The prime minister, who played a vital role in mediating the ceasefire, also invited both parties to convene in Islamabad on April 10 "to further negotiate for a conclusive agreement to settle all disputes."

"We earnestly hope that the 'Islamabad Talks' succeed in achieving sustainable peace and wish to share more good news in coming days!" the prime minister added.

Pakistan has played a vital role in aiding diplomatic efforts during the conflict, including hosting consultations with regional powers and facilitating back-channel discussions between Tehran and Washington. Further, Pakistan worked closely with Beijing on a framework that advocates for de-escalation, the protection of critical infrastructure, and a comprehensive peace agreement. The announcement has garnered global attention and praise from various world leaders.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

The secretary-general expressed his support for the ceasefire in a statement delivered by his spokesperson, Stephane. According to a post on X, Guterres called for all parties involved in the conflict to adhere to international law and the ceasefire's terms, expressing "sincere appreciation for the efforts of Pakistan and other countries involved in facilitating the ceasefire."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

Leyen posted on X, supporting the "two-week ceasefire the US and Iran agreed last night," adding that it brought "much-needed de-escalation."

She also thanked Pakistan for its mediation.

EU Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas

Kallas also took to X to voice her support for the ceasefire, terming it a "step back from the brink after weeks of escalation." She added that the development "creates a much-needed chance to tone down threats, stop missiles, restart shipping, and create space for diplomacy towards a lasting agreement."

"The Strait of Hormuz must be open for passage again," Kallas wrote. She noted that she also spoke to Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, thanking him for securing the deal. "The door to mediation must remain open, as the underlying causes of the war remain unresolved," the chief stated.

EU Council President António Costa

Costa has also posted on X in favour of the temporary ceasefire, urging "all parties to uphold its terms in order to achieve sustainable peace in the region."

He vouched for the EU's support for the cause. He also thanked Pakistan's intervention, saying, "I thank Pakistan and all other parties involved in facilitating this agreement."

UK High Commissioner Jane Marriott

British High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott praised Pakistan's "quiet, effective" diplomacy in a post on X, expressing gratitude for its role in bringing about "this vital ceasefire."

United Kingdom

Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed the ceasefire agreement, saying it will "bring a moment of relief to the region and the world."

The premier added that the ceasefire

must be sustained through collective effort, writing, "Together with our partners we must do all we can to support and sustain this ceasefire, turn it into a lasting agreement and re-open the Strait of Hormuz."

Germany

Chancellor Friedrich Merz welcomed the ceasefire, calling it an opportunity to pursue a lasting end to the conflict. "We thank Pakistan for its mediation," Merz wrote on X.

He added that, "The aim now is to negotiate a lasting end to the war," adding that Germany is in "close coordination with our partners on this matter."

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the announcement by President Trump and PM Shehbaz, regarding the USA and Iran having reached an agreement to cease fire, "noting in this context the fruitful efforts made by Pakistan and General Asim Munir, Commander of the Defence Forces and Chief of Staff of the Pakistani Army, in reaching this agreement."

Turkey

The foreign ministry of Turkey posted a statement on X in favour of the ceasefire, emphasising the "necessity of the full implementation of the temporary ceasefire on the ground and express our expectation that all parties will adhere to the agreement reached."

The ministry also added that, "We will continue to extend all necessary support for the successful conclusion of the negotiations to be held in Islamabad."

It thanked Pakistan for its mediation, saying, "We congratulate brotherly Pakistan for its role throughout this process and express our wish for the continuation of all initiatives that contribute to peace."

Russia

Dmitry Medvedev, the Deputy Chair of Russia's Security Council said the ceasefire showed that common sense has prevailed, but that "there'll be no cheap oil".

Ukraine

Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha expressed his support for the ceasefire, writing on X that "We welcome the agreement between President Trump and the Iranian regime to unblock the Hormuz strait and cease fire, as well as Pakistan's mediation efforts."

The minister added, "American decisiveness works," adding that Ukraine believes "it is time for sufficient decisiveness to force Moscow to cease fire and end its war against Ukraine."

South Korea

South Korea welcomed the ceasefire and hoped it would bring about the safe passage of all vessels, including its own, through the Hormuz Strait.

"The South Korean government hopes that negotiations between the two sides will be successfully concluded and that peace and stability in the Middle East will be restored at an early date," South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement.

"The South Korean government hopes that the free and safe navigation of all vessels, including those of South Korea, through the Strait of Hormuz will be swiftly ensured, and will continue to engage in communication and consultations with relevant countries to this end," it added.

Japan

Japan said that "concrete steps" are needed to de-escalate the crisis, including ensuring the safe passage of vessels through the Strait of Hormuz. The world's fourth-largest economy is the fifth biggest importer of oil, with around 70

per cent coming through the vital waterway before the war.

"The most important thing is that concrete steps will be taken to de-escalate the situation, including ensuring the safety of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz," Japanese government spokesman Minoru Kihara said. "We hope the final agreement will be reached through diplomacy at an early date," he added.

Malaysia

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim took to X to express his wholehearted welcome of the ceasefire "in respect of the ten-point plan as proposed by Iran and positively received by the US."

He also commended Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, calling them "tireless and courageous." The prime minister added that "Pakistan's willingness to speak to all sides, without fear or favour, reflects the highest traditions of Muslim solidarity and international responsibility," affirming Malaysia's readiness to "support and complement all efforts in this regard."

In his post on X, Ibrahim added that the proposal "augurs well for the restoration of peace and stability, not only to the region but also the rest of the world," voicing hope that "the negotiation process will be conducted in good faith, with a firm resolve to seeking lasting resolution to the issues currently facing the region."

However, the premier noted, "Peace talks cannot succeed if the proceedings are cloaked in deception and double-dealing," terming it imperative that "the ten-point plan be translated into a comprehensive peace deal, not just for Iran, but also for Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen."

Ibrahim also called for the concerned parties "to ensure the end of the genocide and dispossession of the people of Palestine, not least in Gaza." He concluded his post by urging: "Let this be a turning point towards lasting peace. The world cannot afford for it to be anything less."

New Zealand

Foreign Minister Winston Peters joined in praising Pakistan's diplomatic intervention, writing on X, "We are grateful for the work of Pakistan, and others such as Turkiye and Egypt, to seek to find a solution to the crisis."

Peters welcomed the development but noted, "While this is encouraging news, there remains significant important work to be done in the coming days to secure a lasting ceasefire."

He added that the conflict has had "wide-ranging impacts and disruptions - for both those in the Middle East and further afield including in New Zealand and the Pacific region," affirming New Zealand's "support of all efforts to bring about a lasting, durable end to this conflict."

Iraq

Iraq's Foreign Ministry expressed its welcome for the ceasefire but called for "serious and sustainable dialogue" between the US and Iran to address the root causes of the conflict.

"As the ministry asserts its support for regional and international efforts to contain crises and prioritise the language of dialogue and diplomacy, it stresses the need for full commitment to the ceasefire and refraining from any escalations," the ministry said, according to Al Jazeera.

Oman

Oman welcomed the ceasefire between the US and Iran, appreciating "the efforts "exerted by the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in this regard and all parties calling for an end to the war."

Further, the ministry affirmed the "importance of intensifying efforts now to find solutions capable of ending the crisis at its roots and achieving a permanent cessation of the state of war and hostile acts in the region."

Australia

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese highlighted the de-escalation achieved by the ceasefire as a significant step towards resolving the conflict.

He added, "We thank and support the work of negotiators, including Pakistan, Egypt, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia, in advancing de-escalation efforts."

"Australia wants to see the ceasefire upheld and a resolution to the conflict," Albanese added in his statement.

Australia's High Commissioner to Pakistan, Timothy Kane, congratulated Pakistan for its "effective diplomacy and efforts to bring peace!" He also affirmed Australia's desire to see the ceasefire upheld and the conflict resolved.

Italy

Italy's former premier Paolo Gentiloni posted on X, saying Pakistan deserves the Noble Peace award.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh's Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on X, Bangladesh appreciates all parties involved in the diplomatic efforts in facilitating the ceasefire.

Kazakhstan

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev lauded the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan, attributing the ceasefire agreement to the mediation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir. Tokayev's office expressed hope that the truce would contribute to global trade and economic prosperity.

Tokayev's office noted that the "agreement became possible due to the goodwill and wisdom of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, and the senior leadership of Iran, as well as all countries involved in the military conflict."

Portugal

The foreign ministry posted on X welcoming the ceasefire agreement and reopening the Strait of Hormuz. The ministry also thanked Pakistan for its mediation "and, likewise, the efforts of all its partners in the negotiations."

It added, "This is a decisive first step toward a lasting and sustainable diplomatic solution to the conflict. Portugal has supported and continues to support this diplomatic path with all its commitment, as it made clear in the contacts over the past two days with the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and Egypt."

Azerbaijan

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement regarding the ceasefire in its support. The ministry said, "We hope that this ceasefire will contribute to reducing tensions in the region, as well as to establishing lasting peace and stability. We call on the parties to engage in a productive dialogue aimed at resolving existing issues and building mutual trust."

Egypt

Egypt calls on all parties to engage seriously in negotiations, leading to lasting peace and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region and the world, the Egypt's president posted on X.

Kuwait

The State of Kuwait reaffirms its support for all mediation efforts and endeavors aimed at restoring calm, expressing hope that this announcement will lead to a comprehensive and sustainable settlement that enhances security and stability in the region, stated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on X.

Sweden

Minister of Foreign Affairs Maria M Stenegerd said that they welcomed the ceasefire, "following important mediation efforts by, among others, Pakistan." The ceasefire could "create conditions for restoring free passage through the Strait of Hormuz," she posted on X.

She highlighted dampening Iran's nuclear program, saying, "It is also important now to build on this toward a long-term sustainable solution that prevents Iran from developing nuclear weapons, threatening regional security, and carrying out destabilising activities in the region and the West."

She added that Sweden was participating in the talks led by the UK on reopening the Strait of Hormuz. "We are therefore participating in the format with some 30 countries initiated by the United Kingdom to discuss the conditions for reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Sweden is prepared to contribute to this in an appropriate manner, including toward political solutions," she said.

Latvia

Prime Minister Evika Siliņa posted on X saying that they are in favour of the ceasefire agreement between Iran and the United States, urging for the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz.

The PM said, "Latvia welcomes the ceasefire agreement reached by the US and Iran last night. Its implementation is key to achieving long-lasting peace in the region," adding that "Latvia appreciates the efforts of all countries involved in making the agreement possible."

Spain

Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs Jose Manuel Albares posted on X, "Spain will not spare any efforts in supporting the Pakistani mediation efforts in the war in the Middle East and in paving the way for diplomacy."

Romania

Romania President Nicosur Dan posted on X, "I welcome the agreement between the United States and Iran to establish a ceasefire, and we are grateful to Pakistan and other regional mediators for their work. Weeks of conflict have pushed energy & food prices to painful levels for families and businesses across the world and in Europe."

The General Secretariat of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) welcomed the announcement of the agreement on a temporary ceasefire.

"It is a positive step towards de-escalation in the region and an opportunity that must be seized to move towards a serious negotiation process capable of addressing the root causes of the crisis and leading to a permanent and comprehensive cessation of hostilities, while adhering to the principles of international law, respect for state sovereignty, and peaceful, meaningful measures, guarantees, freedom of navigation, preventing the resurgence of tension, and strengthening the pillars of regional security and stability," it said.

The OIC commended the valuable efforts made by the member states to de-escalate the situation, particularly the efforts of PM Shehbaz in reaching the agreement.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, Yvette Cooper, in a statement, said, "This is a vital step towards establishing some security and stability in the region and getting international shipping and the global economy moving properly again. I also welcome the proposed talks between the US and Iran scheduled for later this week and thank Pakistan and all those involved for their continued work on the negotiations."

Houston Tragedy: Nephew of Aafia Siddiqui Laid to Rest as Murder Suspect Arrested

Continued from front page

vehicle-related dispute, as police confirmed the arrest of the prime suspect.

According to the Alvin Police Department, the incident occurred on April 2 at approximately 10:29 PM in Alvin. Authorities received a 9-1-1 call from a friend of the victim, reporting that Ammad had been shot while they were traveling on State Highway 35. Officers located the vehicle in the 3100 block of the highway, where the victim was found in the back seat with a gunshot wound. He was transported to a nearby hospital but was later pronounced dead.

Investigations revealed that the shooting took place at a convenience store about a mile away and stemmed from a dispute over a previously arranged vehicle trade between the victim and the suspect.

In a major development, police confirmed that 23-year-old suspect Eric Olvera has been taken into custody without incident and is being held without bond on murder charges. Authorities had earlier described him as armed and dangerous and were actively searching for him.

Ammad Siddiqui, a resident of Sugar Land, had recently enrolled in university and was also involved in online car trading. On the day of the incident, he had gone to the location with friends to sell a vehicle when the confrontation turned fatal.

His funeral prayer was held at Masjid Sabireen in Houston, where a large number of mourners from the Pakistani and Muslim community—particularly youth—gathered to pay their final respects. The atmosphere was filled with grief, with many struggling to hold back tears as the young victim was laid to rest in a local cemetery.

Ammad's father, Muhammad Ali Siddiqui—brother of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui—has long been residing in Sugar Land, while his mother, Dr. Lubna Khawaja, serves as a Professor of Internal Medicine.

The tragic loss of a young life and the circumstances surrounding the incident have sparked concern within the community, even as the arrest of the suspect brings a measure of relief. Authorities say the investigation remains ongoing.

PM Shehbaz, CDF Munir discuss Pakistan's efforts to mediate between US and Iran

Continued from front page

Munir called on PM Shehbaz.

"The dignitaries reviewed the progress of Pakistan's mediatory efforts to achieve sustainable peace in the region. The two leaders expressed satisfaction over the de-escalation achieved so far and stressed upon the need for maintaining peace and ceasefire by all parties," it said.

"The leadership appreciated

the restraint demonstrated by all sides and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to facilitate and provide all-out support to both sides to arrive at a peacefully negotiated settlement," the statement said.

The statement said the premier lauded the commitment of the parties involved in the process and wished them success in their pursuit of peace.

"He also renewed his invitation to the arriving delegations and assured them of the highest consideration and support by Pakistan," the statement concluded.

The meeting takes place as delegations from the US and Iran are due in Islamabad to hold negotiations over the weekend.

Pakistan positioned itself as a facilitator in the peace process between Tehran and Washington after the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on February 28, setting off a conflict that gave rise to a global fuel crisis.

The day the conflict started, PM Shehbaz and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar began dialling Iranian and Gulf leaders and other regional players, stressing the need for dialogue and de-escalation.

On March 24, PM Shehbaz said Pakistan stood "ready and honoured" to host "meaningful and conclusive talks" between the US and Iran.

The next day, Washington sent a 15-point peace proposal to Tehran, which was conveyed through Pakistan. In response, Iran put forward its own set of five conditions for ending the war.

While Iranian media had initially reported Tehran's rejection of the US proposal, Dar on March 26 confirmed that "indirect talks" were underway with Pakistan relaying messages.

Subsequently, foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Egypt were in Islamabad on March 29 and participated in a quadrilateral moot focused on de-escalation efforts in the Middle East. Dar had also said after the quadrilateral moot that Iran and US had expressed confidence in Pakistan to facilitate talks and Islamabad would be honoured to host the dialogue "in the coming days".

A day after the moot, Dar was in Beijing, where Pakistan and China issued a five-point initiative for restoring peace and stability in the Gulf and the Middle East.

The threats of the war prolonging and intensifying escalated on April 5, when Trump, after making an expletive-laden post, issued an unusually precise deadline for Iran to agree to a ceasefire deal with Washington and allow traffic through the Strait of Hormuz — a key maritime corridor through which 20pc of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flowed before the Middle East war began.

"Tuesday, 8:00 P.M. Eastern Time," he wrote, coupled with the warning of bombing Iran's power plants and bridges on that day, increasing pressure to prevent a worsening situation.

Meanwhile, Iranian media reported that Tehran had conveyed

its response to a US proposal for ending the war to Pakistan, again rejecting a ceasefire and emphasising the necessity of a permanent end to the war.

The Iranian response consisted of 10 clauses, including an end to conflicts in the region, a protocol for safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz, lifting of sanctions, and reconstruction, the agency added.

On the day of his deadline, Trump doubled down on his threats against Iran, alarming the world.

"A whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back," he wrote, prompting backlash from even within his country.

With hours left for the deadline to end, PM Shehbaz publicly requested Trump to "extend the deadline for two weeks", noting that diplomatic efforts for a peaceful settlement of the ongoing war were "progressing steadily, strongly and powerfully".

He also requested Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz for a corresponding period of two weeks.

Shortly thereafter, Trump took to his Truth Social platform to say that he had spoken with PM Shehbaz and CDF Munir.

"Subject to the Islamic Republic of Iran agreeing to the COMPLETE, IMMEDIATE, and SAFE OPENING of the Strait of Hormuz, I agree to suspend the bombing and attack of Iran for a period of two weeks," Trump announced.

Subsequently, Iran's FM Araghchi shared a statement on behalf of Iran's Supreme National Security Council declaring that if attacks against the country were halted, it would cease its defensive operations.

The two-week truce is based on a 10-point Iranian proposal accepted by Washington as a general framework for talks. But it remains fragile as Israel continues its attacks in Lebanon, which Israel and the US say are not part of the temporary ceasefire.

Iranian officials have rejected that interpretation, saying partial ceasefires are unacceptable and warning of a "decisive response" if violations continue.

Iran has warned it will withdraw from the ceasefire if Israeli attacks on Lebanon continue. "The Iran-US ceasefire terms are clear and explicit: the US must choose — ceasefire or continued war via Israel. It cannot have both," Iranian Foreign Minister Araghchi said.

Later, PM Shehbaz, in a statement on X, noted the violations without naming the violator and urged restraint to allow diplomacy to proceed towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

On Thursday, he also held multiple phone calls, including with Lebanese PM Nawaf Salam and Bahrain's king, Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa, and Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani.

The leaders commended Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, with Salam also seeking Islamabad's support for bringing an immediate end to Israeli attacks on his country, according to the PMO.

Houston Karachi Sister City Association Delegation Meets Governor of Sindh to discuss Bilateral Cooperation

Continued from front page

of HKSCA, HHRD, AFDR, PAGH, APPNA-STC in Pakistan in response of 2025 Floods relief.

He also briefed other permanent projects with the implementing partners Helping Hands for Relief and Development and initiatives such as youth cricket training programs, while also exploring opportunities for greater cooperation between Houston and Karachi.

The Governor of Sindh appreciated the Houston Karachi Sister City Association's contributions in the fields of Education, Humanitarian assistance, and youth skills development programs. He commended the concept of sister cities and acknowledged the Association's establishment and achievements, assuring his full support and cooperation in all ongoing and future HKSCA initiatives.

During the meeting, as a goodwill gesture on behalf of the Mayor Houston, Sheikh presented the Seal of the City of Houston to the Governor, who also presented a memento of appreciation to the delegation.

PML-N lawmaker submits resolution in PA, calls for nominat- ing CDF Munir, PM Shehbaz, DPM Dar for Nobel Peace Prize

LAHORE: A PML-N lawmaker submitted on Thursday a resolution in the Punjab Assembly, calling for the nomination of Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The resolution, submitted by PML-N Chief Whip Rana Muhammad Arshad, stated that Pakistan's leadership demonstrated "effective diplomacy" amid escalating tensions between Iran and Israel and the United States. The growing tensions, the resolution added, threatened global peace.

It said Pakistan's leadership played a significant role in promoting peace and stability at the international level during a period of heightened tensions.

The resolution also commended former PM and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif's "guidance" in the matter, further highlighting Pakistan's "positive and balanced global role".

It called for the nomination of Field Marshal Munir, PM Shehbaz and DPM Dar for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Moreover, another Punjab Assembly member, Sarah Ahmad, who is also chairperson of the Punjab Child Protection and Welfare Board, submitted a resolution commending PM Shehbaz and CDF Munir in connection with efforts for de-escalation in the Middle East.

The resolution commended to their "wise leadership, timely diplomacy, and effective use of global engagement" in

helping make progress toward a two-week ceasefire between the US and Iran, and averting a potentially large-scale conflict.

It further praised Pakistan's efforts as a "responsible state" working for peace, stability, and brotherhood in the region.

The House also acknowledged the role of the government and armed forces' leadership in preventing a major conflict and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continuing its positive role in promoting global peace, security, and stability in the future.

Pakistan positioned itself as a facilitator in the peace process between Tehran and Washington after the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on February 28, setting off a conflict that gave rise to a global fuel crisis.

In the days that followed the attacks, PM Shehbaz and Dar spoke with more than a dozen world leaders and senior officials in Washington, Moscow, Beijing, key European capitals, Gulf Cooperation Council states, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The objective was to build consensus around a limited ceasefire as a first step toward formal negotiations.

Pakistan's military leadership has also reportedly played a part. Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir held conversations with senior US officials, including President Donald Trump, diplomatic sources said, reinforcing civilian diplomatic efforts at a critical juncture.

The threats of the war prolonging and intensifying escalated on April 5, when Trump, after making an expletive-laden post, issued an unusually precise deadline for Iran to agree to a ceasefire deal with Washington and allow traffic through the Strait of Hormuz — a key maritime corridor through which 20pc of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas flowed before the Middle East war began.

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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.

58 tortillas, five hot sauces and one toilet: life aboard spacecraft Orion

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ARTEMIS II SPICE LEVEL

There are 5 different hot sauces flying around the Moon with the crew.

HOW MANY CUPS OF COFFEE DOES IT TAKE TO POWER THE ARTEMIS II CREW?

43

CULINARY FLAVORINGS

- Maple Syrup, Chocolate Spread, Peanut Butter, Hot Sauce, Spicy Mustard, Strawberry Jam, Honey, Cinnamon, Almond Butter

5 CANADIAN PRODUCTS

TORTILLA COUNT

58

MOST COMMON FOOD ITEMS

- Tortillas
- Wheat Flat Bread
- Vegetable Quiche
- Breakfast Sausage
- Couscous w/ Nuts
- Mango Salad
- Granola w/ Blueberries
- Almonds
- Cashews
- Barbecued Beef Brisket
- Broccoli au Gratin
- Spicy Green Beans
- Macaroni & Cheese
- Tropical Fruit Salad
- Butternut Squash
- Cauliflower

WHAT WILL SATISFY THE CREW'S SWEET TOOTH?

- pudding
- cobbler
- cookies
- candy-coated almonds
- cake
- chocolate



This screenshot from a NASA live broadcast video shows (L-R) NASA astronaut and Artemis II Mission Specialist Christina Koch, NASA astronaut and Artemis II pilot Victor Glover, Canadian Space Agency astronaut Artemis II Mission Specialist Jeremy Hansen and NASA astronaut and Artemis II Commander Reid Wiseman during a press call as they travel to the Moon in the Orion spacecraft, on April 3, 2026.

And one toilet... which had a problem.

It's the first time astronauts venturing into deep space have had a real toilet onboard: the Apollo missions of the 1960s and 70s provided crew members with waste collection bags that were ultimately left on the lunar surface.

Much to the astronauts' relief, Koch remedied the issue with the toilet aboard Orion — "I'm proud to call myself the space plumber," she said during a Q&A session late on Thursday with US media.

"I like to say that it is probably the most important piece of equipment on board," she said. "So we were all breathing a sigh of relief when it turned out to be just fine."

Sleeping 'like a bat'

The toilet is in a small cubicle that's quite loud; the astronauts need to wear ear protection when they use it.

But it's "the one place that we can go during the mission where we can actually feel like we're alone for a moment," Canadian Jeremy Hansen said during a demonstration video released by the Canadian Space Agency prior to blast-off.

The Artemis astronauts also quickly encountered email trouble: mission commander Reid Wiseman said he was experiencing issues with Microsoft Outlook.

"I also see that I have two Microsoft Outlooks, and neither one of those are working," he said on NASA's livestream.

Members of the Houston-headquartered Mission Control fixed the problem — where would we be without our IT experts?

The astronauts must adhere to a sleep routine to ensure they're rested for the mission that will see them slingshot around the Moon and conduct a battery of test maneuvers, equipment checks and scientific observations.

They have sleeping bags that tether to the wall to keep them from floating around the capsule.

"Christina has been sleeping heads down in the middle of the vehicle, kind of like a bat suspended from our docking tunnel," Wiseman explained, describing their preferred spots for shut-eye.

"It's more comfortable than you would think," he added.

Childlike joy

But there are no rest days for the weightless: the astronauts have 30 minutes of exercise built into their schedules.

They use a "flywheel exercise device", similar to a yo-yo, that can allow for aerobics like rowing as well as provide resistance to perform moves like weighted squats and deadlifts.

It's paramount that astronauts work out: the microgravity environment takes stress off bones and muscles, which can lead to significant loss without precautions.

NASA also recently updated its policy to allow smartphones on its flights: "We are giving our crews the tools to capture special moments for their families and share inspiring images and video with the world," the US space agency's administrator Jared Isaacman wrote on X in February.

And while their mission demands extreme precision, there is still room for childlike levity.

Hansen took questions from media while wedged in horizontally and described the joy of floating: "It just makes me feel like a little kid."

For Victor Glover — the first person of colour to fly around the Moon — a lot of that raw delight arrived at takeoff.

"It was a ride where you're trying to be professional," he said.

"But the kid inside of you wants to break out and just hoot and holler."

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Lahori Paye | Karachi Nihari
Smoked Tawa Qeema
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Sara Khan Connects with Community at “Bunnies & Baskets” Easter Extravaganza



By Amjad Qaimkhani

Community spirit was on full display as Treasurer candidate Sara Khan was spotted engaging with residents during the vibrant “Bunnies & Baskets on the Block Easter Egg Extravaganza,” a lively neighborhood event organized by dedicated



local precinct chairs.

The festive gathering transformed the neighborhood into a hub of joy and togetherness, attracting families, children, and seniors who came out in large numbers to celebrate Easter in an inclusive and

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Houston Hosts Electrifying Eid Milan Qawwali Night with Housefull Crowd



In a spectacular celebration of culture, music, and community spirit, an exclusive Eid Milan Qawwali night in Houston drew a completely packed audience, with not a single seat left empty and hearts filled with joy.

The evening was headlined by renowned media personality Rehan

Siddiqi, who brought together music lovers for an unforgettable night of soulful Sufi performances. Marketed as a “no-frills” event—free from sponsors, political speeches, or fundraising—the gathering focused purely on the essence of Qawwali and spiritual connection.

Held at the beautifully trans-

formed Golden Tree Banquet Hall, the venue was adorned in an elegant black-and-white theme, matching the event’s dress code and adding to the evening’s sophisticated ambiance. Guests experienced over three hours of nonstop live Qawwali by some of the best celebrity Qawwals, creating

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PPP Houston Marks Bhutto’s 47th Death Anniversary with Tribute Ceremony



The 47th death anniversary of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and founder of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), was observed with reverence in Houston, where members of the community gathered for a prayer ceremony

at a local restaurant.

The event was organized by the PPP Houston Chapter and drew a large number of party leaders, workers, and supporters who came together to honor the legacy of the

Continued on page 28

Houston Celebrates Bangladeshi Culture with Pakistani Community Leaders in Attendance

Siraj Narsi, Sara Khan, and Emran Gazi Attend Houston’s Vibrant Bangladeshi Cultural Gala



By Amjad Qaimkhani

Houston: A vibrant celebration of Bangladeshi culture brought together

community leaders, dignitaries, and families from across Houston at a grand gala organized by the

Bangladesh American Association on April 3, 2026.

Continued on page 28

Zeeshan Khan & Iqra Rasheed’s Valima Ceremony Celebrated with Elegance in Houston



Houston, Texas: A beautiful and graceful Valima ceremony was held in honor of Zeeshan Khan and Iqra

Rasheed, bringing together family, friends, and community members for

Continued on page 28

US Tells American Muslims to Be Careful for Hajj 2026

The United States Embassy in Riyadh issued a travel advisory on Tuesday urging American citizens to reconsider participating in this year’s Hajj pilgrimage, pointing to the ongoing security situation across the Middle East and intermittent travel disruptions as the basis for the warning.

“Per the Saudi Arabia Travel Advisory, and due to the ongoing security situation and intermittent travel disruptions, we advise

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Groundbreaking Ceremony of Siraj-ud-Daula Elementary School, a Landmark Educational Initiative by Momina and Duraid Foundation, Dedicated to Syed Javaid Anwar's mother Tara Khatoun

Karachi Pakistan: A groundbreaking educational initiative was launched today by the Momina & Duraid Foundation, with the generous support of Mr. Syed Javaid Anwar, Chief Patron of the Houston Karachi Sister City Association. This project groundbreaking ceremony

was dedicated to Tara Khatoun, the beloved mother of Mr. Syed Javaid Anwar.

The event saw prominent community members, as well as government officials, gather to celebrate this milestone. The Siraj-ud-Daula

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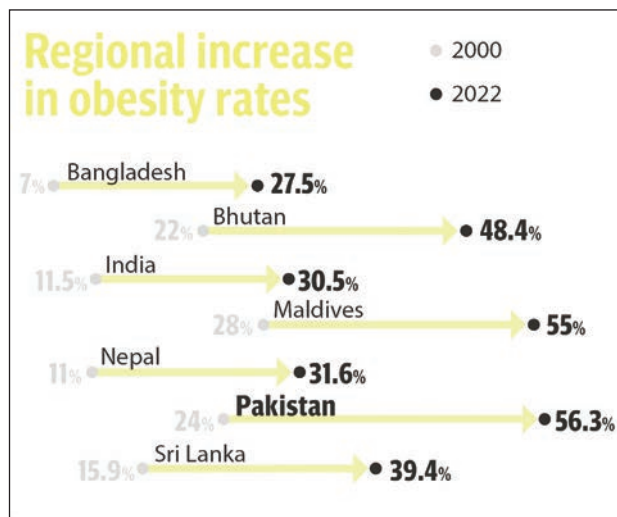
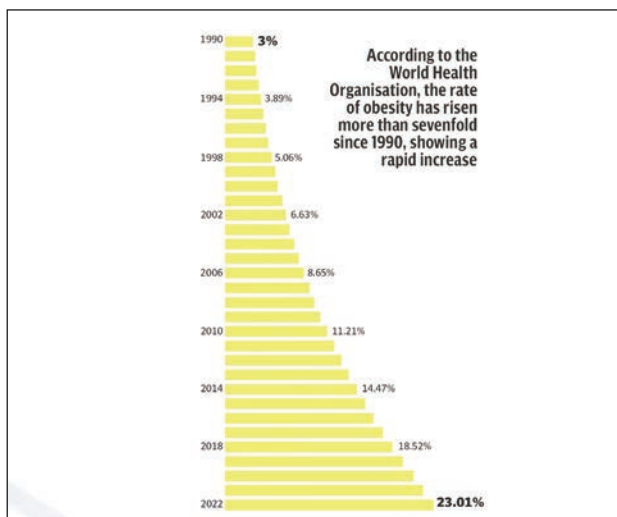
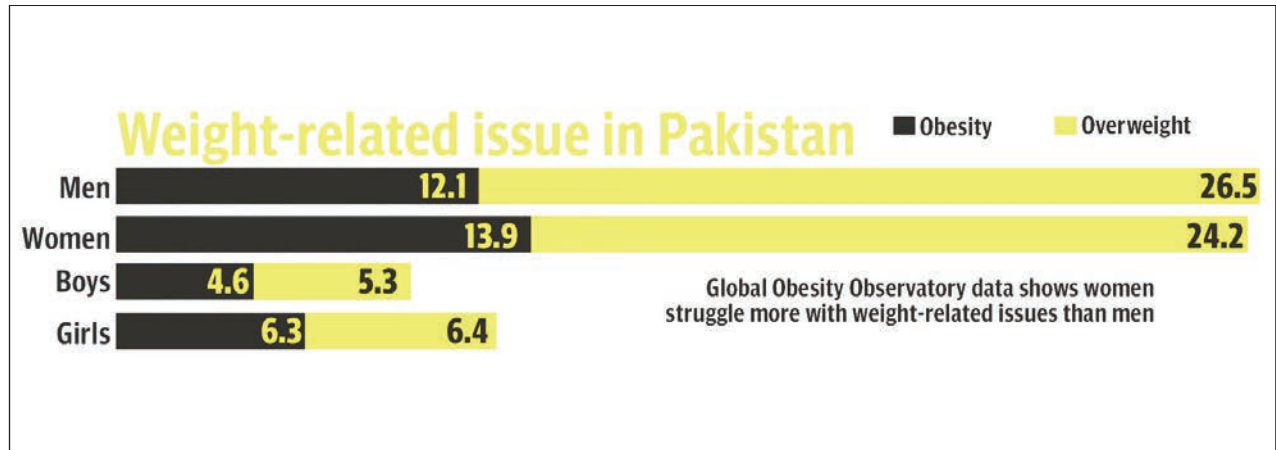
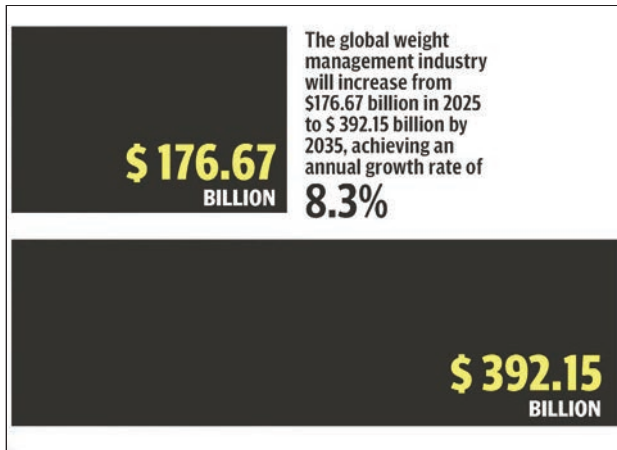
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CHASING THE THINNER SELF

New weight-loss drugs promise a medical revolution, but society's struggle over body size and beauty is centuries old



Overweight vs obesity

The World Health Organisation defines overweight and obesity as excess body fat that poses a health risk. Obesity is linked to conditions such as dyslipidaemia, Type 2 Diabetes, Hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers. It also carries social and psychological effects, including low self-esteem, discrimination in education and work, and reduced quality of life. The global obesity epidemic is increasingly affecting low- and middle-income countries, where rapid changes in diet and lifestyle are driving rising rates.

KARACHI: For most of human history, losing weight was never a goal. Survival was. Across centuries of famine, food scarcity, and physically demanding lives, the human body evolved to store energy whenever it could. Fat was insurance against hunger, not something to be feared. In many cultures, including the subcontinent, a fuller body even signalled prosperity, fertility, and health.

Then came abundance. It changed our perceptions, practices and goals. The 20th century saw mass food production making calories cheap and plenty, while increasingly sedentary lifestyles became common. At the same time, thinness was elevated into a cultural ideal by fashion, film, advertising, and now social media. What was once a natural response to scarcity came to be seen as a personal failing, fuelling a billion-dollar dieting industry built on discipline, denial, and repeated cycles of hope and relapse.

A new era

But now, a new weight-loss chapter is unfolding. While fat liberationists are still working to de-stigmatise fatness and work towards a more equitable society for people of all body types, in quest of ideal thinness, the global weight management market is experiencing rapid growth, valued at approximately 150–160 billion US dollars in 2023–2024 and projected to exceed 300 billion dollars by 2030–2032. Growth is driven by rising obesity rates—affecting 2.5 billion adults in 2022—and the surge in demand for GLP-1 medications, which could create a 150 billion dollar market alone. The global anti-obesity market is projected to grow from approximately 160.15 billion dollars in 2024 to 328.24 billion dollars by 2032, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of 8.3% to 9.94%. This growth is being driven by the

high prevalence of obesity—affecting 16% of adults worldwide in 2022—and the rapid rise of anti-obesity medications such as Ozempic and Zepbound.

But beneath the excitement lies a more complicated question. Is this truly a revolution in health — or simply the latest turn in a long history of trying to control the body? And perhaps the most pressing question of all is: who is this revolution really for? But first, let's take a peek into weight-loss history.

The beginning

For centuries, dieting existed in Ancient Greece, but only as a holistic approach to physical and mental health. It wasn't until the 19th century that the concept of dieting as primarily a way to lose weight or change one's body first appeared.

The modern Western obsession with dieting and weight loss can be traced back to 1863, when William Banting, a man frustrated by his own struggle with weight began documenting his personal efforts to shed the extra weight — unconsciously launching one of the earliest diet trends in the Western world. At 64, he stood at 5'5" and weighed 202 pounds.

When he started to lose his hearing, Banting turned to surgeon William Harvey who, researching how sugar, fats, and starches influenced the body, recommended that Banting cut out bread, butter, milk, sugar, beer and potatoes and to live on mainly animal protein, fruit and non-starchy vegetables. About nine months later, Banting had lost 35 pounds and his quality of life had significantly improved. He then self-published A Letter on Corpulence detailing his journey and gave copies away for free.

Banting's ideas appealed to men with sedentary desk jobs, courtesy industrialisation, who feared that their bodies were becoming too soft and feminine, and weight loss became a way

to reclaim their masculinity.

Women in the 1830s were perceived as emotional and lacking self-control, and therefore not built for the rigours of dieting. In this patriarchal society, beauty did not prioritise thinness and plumpness was associated with wealth, motherhood, and fertility.

The beauty standards around the female body slowly shifted in the 1890s when diet advice began appearing in American women's magazines, and a scientific racism emerged to prove the superiority of the white race. Black women were characterised by their "presumed inability to control" their consumption, while white women were encouraged to diet, as a way to differentiate themselves from stereotypes of Black women.

By the 1920s, following World War I, social activities that were once supervised at home (such as the Bridgerton-type dating) became public. Western culture rapidly changed as knee-length skirts were replaced by shorter ones or trousers. People went out to the movies and jazz clubs, and the flapper appeared, so that women sported a thin, youthful body type with short hair, exposing skin and smoking in public. Thinness was hot, and plumpness was not.

As the demand for weight loss increased, people began to develop strategies to achieve this. Did you know that calorie counting originated as a food rationing technique during World War I? Dr Lulu Hunt Peters, an American physician, in 1918 popularised the concept of calorie counting for weight loss in her book, Diet & Health: With Key to the Calories. She believed that in wartime, it was criminal to hoard food in your anatomy. The fact is that Dr Peters' work led to fat people being characterised as unpatriotic threats to the US, much as it sounds Trumpesque!

After World War II, food and advertising advanced and ideal standards of citizenship, femininity and the nuclear family developed.

This was perhaps the first time that amphetamines previously used by soldiers to combat stress were marketed to American women as diet pills. Later fad diets, like the grapefruit diet, cabbage soup diet, etc became popular.

One of the most famous diet programmes in the US, Weight Watchers began in 1962 and the term lifestyle change was introduced. During the 1960s in the US, a wave of social and political upheaval—from the Civil Rights Movement and Second Wave Feminism to anti-Vietnam War protests—challenged the status quo. Fat acceptance and fat liberation movements emerged, confronting the social, political, and economic systems that marginalise fat people and protesting discrimination.

Despite the growing fat acceptance movements, dieting pressures grew in the 1970s and 80s.

Exercise classes became increasingly popular for individuals hoping to slim down. American actress Jane Fonda's at-home workout videos sold 17 million copies between 1982 and 1985, Lean Cuisine and Diet Coke offered low-fat, low-sugar, and low-calorie options.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the "waif" aesthetics, popularised by British model Kate Moss, encouraged an androgynous and emaciated body as the beauty ideal. As Paris Hilton and Britney Spears opened up conversations about the size of these women's bodies, pressures to conform to a thin body type, awareness about eating disorders also increased.

As people began to feel pressured to diet and lose weight, the ideas of body positivity and body neutrality came to light. It was realised that anti-fatness as a system of oppression negatively impacts one's physical, mental, and social well-being.

In our culture, food has played a central role in celebrations and festivities. Sweets are frequently distributed as gifts and eating out has become common for many occasions. "In some families, a heavier body weight—especially in children—is sometimes perceived as a sign of good health and prosperity, which can delay recognition of obesity as a health concern."

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CHASING THE THINNER SELF

Continued From Page 19

observes Dr Asma Ahmed, Consultant Endocrinology at The Aga Khan University Hospital. “This perception is not limited to the general public. Obesity is still not widely recognised as a chronic disease even among healthcare professionals in our country.”

“However, as these children reach adolescence and puberty, they frequently face bullying and social stigma,” she adds. “The stigma is particularly greater for women, who often feel pressured to meet certain body size expectations. Weight stigma is present in many parts of society—within healthcare systems, schools, workplaces, communities, and particularly in the media. Hurtful language and unsolicited advice can increase feelings of guilt and shame, preventing individuals from seeking appropriate medical care.”

The weight of shame

According to Dr Chooni Lal, Professor and Head of Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences at JPMC, Karachi, weight stigma can deeply affect how a person feels about themselves. “When someone is repeatedly judged, bullied or stereotyped because of their body size, it can slowly change the way they see their own worth,” he shares. “Over time, many people begin to feel embarrassed in their own bodies or start believing that their value as a person is somehow directly linked to their weight. That can slowly but surely erode away their confidence and self worth and leave someone feeling lonely, anxious, or emotionally exhausted. For some, it can also contribute to depression.”

Dr Lal explained that it’s often overlooked that shame rarely motivates people to become healthier. “In fact, it often has the opposite effect. Feeling constantly judged can create stress and emotional pain rather than encouragement,” he says. “Some people may turn to food for comfort, while others avoid gyms, public spaces or even social situations because they’re worried about being stared at or criticised.”

Even going to the doctor and seeking help can feel stressful if someone expects their concerns to be dismissed as “just about weight”. People usually make healthier and more lasting changes when they feel safe, respected, and supported. “When someone feels understood rather than judged, it becomes much easier to engage with their health and take small, meaningful steps forward,” he adds.

For many people, body weight is closely tied to how they see themselves, emphasises Dr Lal. “When medication leads to rapid weight loss, it can bring relief, happiness, or a boost in confidence, especially for those who have struggled with their weight for years. At the same time, such a quick and visible change in the body can feel unfamiliar, and it may take time for someone to adjust to what they see in the mirror.”

He further explains, “People who have lived in a larger body for a long time often carry memories of being judged, excluded, or treated differently. Losing weight doesn’t automatically erase those experiences, and a person’s inner sense of self may not immediately match their new appearance. When others suddenly respond more positively after weight loss, it can also bring mixed feelings. Some people may feel pleased, while others may question why acceptance seemed to depend so much on body size.”

Because of these emotional adjustments, rapid weight loss can sometimes feel psychologically complex as well as physically noticeable. “For this reason, it’s important that such treatments are approached with realistic expectations and, when needed, psychological support to help individuals process the changes and adjust to their new sense of self,” stresses Dr Lal.

Medications can make weight loss more achievable for many people, but they can also bring new kinds of pressure. “After losing weight, some individuals may feel an unspoken expectation from themselves or from others to maintain a certain body size,” he says. “That pressure to ‘stay that way’ can sometimes feel difficult to live up to. There can also be worry about what happens next. Some people feel anxious about regaining weight if they stop the medication, which can create stress or a sense of relying on the treatment to keep things stable. Rapid weight loss can also bring more attention from others’ comments, compliments, or questions which doesn’t always feel comfortable and may make someone more aware of their body than before.”

Dr Lal maintains that while these medications can ease some of the challenges people face around weight, they don’t necessarily remove the social and emotional pressures tied to body image. “Over time, it helps to keep the focus on overall health, self-acceptance, and feeling comfortable in one’s own body, rather than feeling defined by a number on the scale,” he explains.

Repeated cycles of dieting and regaining weight, often

About

2.5 billion people worldwide are overweight

including **One** billion with obesity among them **350** million children

With obesity now recognised as a disease, medication is increasingly seen as a logical treatment

Obesity is a major public health issue in our country, with studies estimating 9% to over 40% of adults affected. Many estimates suggest around 30% or more adults are overweight or obese, with higher rates among women and urban population

Research shows Pakistan faces a “double burden” of malnutrition — both obesity and undernutrition exist at the same time

called weight cycling, can take a real emotional toll over time. “Diets usually begin with hope and determination, but when the weight returns, people often feel disappointed or frustrated,” Dr Lal reveals. “Many start to blame themselves or feel as though they have failed, even though weight regain is a very common biological response. Over time, this pattern can slowly chip away at confidence and self-esteem.”

It can also lead to an unhealthy relationship with food and body image. People may become overly focused on calories, body size, or the number on the scale, and eating can start to feel tied to guilt or strict rules rather than nourishment.

Because of this, there is growing recognition that the conversation needs to shift away from weight alone and toward overall wellbeing. Supporting sustainable habits such as balanced eating, enjoyable physical activity, good sleep, and looking after mental health tends to be far more helpful in the long run. When wellbeing is viewed more broadly, people are more likely to develop a kinder and more sustainable relationship with their bodies.”

The story of the modern weight-loss revolution begins with an unlikely creature: the Gila monster. This venomous desert dweller’s saliva contains compounds that mimic GLP-1, a glucagon-like peptide hormone your intestines naturally produce. This discovery led to medications that represent the largest shift in weight management since the 1990s.

For decades, the weight-loss formula seemed simple: eat less, move more. Push harder. In 2022, when medicines came in, obesity was officially reclassified as a complex chronic disease.

Deep in the human brain, the hypothalamus controls appetite and fat storage. A disruption of this system creates a cruel feedback loop — the more weight you gain, the hungrier you feel, instead of being the other way round. This is what makes losing weight so difficult.

“Our body is smart and responds to weight loss by producing hormones such as ghrelin, which increases hunger, and lowers hormones like leptin, which normally help us feel full,” says Dr Ahmed. “This hormonal response increases hunger after weight loss and makes it challenging to maintain the reduced weight. The weight gain that often occurs after weight loss is due to this biological response. Understanding this can help individuals make changes that support keeping the weight off.”

This hormonal conspiracy against the body slows down our metabolism. Doctors have discovered astounding new connections between metabolism, addiction, behaviour, and chronic disease, and describe it as trying to climb out of a hole while someone keeps making it deeper.

“The relationship between weight loss, metabolism, addiction and chronic disease is increasingly recognised in medical and public health,” says Dr Ahmed. “These factors are interconnected through brain reward system, behaviour patterns and metabolic health. Our brain’s reward system along with environmental influences, is closely linked to the food choices we make and can contribute to addictive eating behaviors. Weight loss leads to substantial improvements in overall metabolic health, which can help improve chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, and fatty liver disease, cardiovascular disease, and sleep apnea.”

Statistics show that 2.5 billion people worldwide are overweight, with one billion classified as obese. That includes 350 million children. Now that obesity is considered a disease, meds are the logical solution.

A plot twist

Medicines for diabetes reveal astounding metabolic and brain connections. The weight loss revolution, centred on GLP-1 agonists like Wegovy, Mounjaro, and Ozempic, is designed for individuals with obesity or overweight, particularly those struggling with related chronic conditions. These treatments aim to address the complex biological drivers of weight gain rather than relying solely on willpower. It is not about self-control, it is about the pill fixing it for you.

The quick fix

People with low body weight or those looking to lose only a few pounds for cosmetic reasons (as their wedding comes closer) are using these drugs.

Promoted and projected as “lifestyle enhancers”, the soft image leads to increased demand, misuse and abuse, along with creating shortages for real patients who actually need them.

While everyone has seen photos of an emaciated-looking Demi Moore, a frail-looking Karan Johar and a starved Oprah Winfrey, has the Ozempic trend caught up with us locally?

“This trend has become increasingly common and has both advantages and disadvantages,” says Dr Ahmed. “The availability of these drugs in cosmetic clinics has also reinforced the perception that these treatments are for aesthetic purposes, which is a misconception.”

According to Dr Ahmed, the availability of these medications has improved significantly in recent years. “Both imported and locally produced biosimilar options are now available, and the choice often depends on affordability,” she notes. “The increased availability has also placed greater responsibility on physicians to ensure that these medications are prescribed to patients with appropriate indications.”

What happens when you stop GLP-1 meds

In a new review published in the journal *eClinicalMedicine*, 48 studies analysed and predicted the outcomes of people who either had diabetes or were overweight or obese and took popular GLP-1 medications. When they stopped taking GLP-1 weight-loss medications, they regained about 60% of the weight they lost within a year. Although doctors believe that some people will gain more weight than others as it varies with each individual.

Some people can come off of them and maintain the weight loss, others will need to wean off, while some may have to stay on the same dose of medicines forever.

Although GLP-1 medications have been successfully shown to help people lose some weight overall, doctors believe that it is best to adopt a healthy lifestyle, with exercise so as to avoid going back to GLP-1 meds or at least try to be dependent on them only in minimal doses.

Body image politics

The so-called “Ozempic era” inevitably collides with body image politics.

“The popularity of these medicines has intensified the ideal body image that equates thinness with beauty, success and self-discipline,” explains Dr Ahmed. “Moreover, rapid weight loss among celebrities and influencers has also created significant hype around these treatments. At the same time, social media videos and discussions about side effects have created fear and hesitation among people who may truly need these treatments. The best way to address this is to encourage individuals to seek advice from doctors with expertise in this area who can provide accurate information and answer their concerns.”

The drugs may be new, but the struggle between biology, beauty, and control is anything but.

Karachi's future drowns in a sea of excuses

As the leadership offers only unproductive excuses, the city ranks among the world's least liveable cities



KARACHI: Karachi is officially the fourth least liveable city in the world. Grouped with conflict-torn regions like Syria and Libya in global liveability rankings, Pakistan's commercial hub now stands as a troubling anomaly. A city undone not by war, but by years of heedless mismanagement and a plethora of endless excuses.

The Global Liveability Index, compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit, ranks cities based on five key factors: stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, and infrastructure. Together, these indicators assess the overall quality of life, from access to healthcare and schools to transport systems, housing, and environmental conditions, producing a comparative measure of how comfortable and sustainable a city is to live in. Unfortunately, Karachi consistently fares terribly across all spheres.

Ranking fourth from the bottom in the Global Liveability Index 2025, Karachi stands as a stark symbol of urban decline. Placed 170th out of 173 cities—just above Dhaka, Tripoli, and Damascus—the city has shown continued deterioration over time, slipping from 169th in 2024 and remaining among the bottom five since at least 2023. This consistency at the lower end of global rankings is not a temporary setback but a pattern of stagnation.

Once envisioned as a thriving coastal hub, the port city now struggles under the weight of failing infrastructure, unchecked population growth, and deepening climate vulnerability. From chronic water shortages and unrelenting heat to recurring urban floods and collapsing civic services, Karachi's challenges appear so entrenched and unchanging that many of those formally employed in the city hope to build their long-term residences somewhere in Punjab.

For the leadership, however, the crisis appears to be something to explain, contextualise, and deflect, rather than confront with urgency and resolve. Unbothered by the regrettable global reputation and miserable lived reality of the city of lights, politicians have chosen to address Karachi's endemic woes through a series of justifications about jurisdiction, past failures, and structural constraints instead of a clear, time-bound plan of action.

City under strain

While speaking to the Express Tribune, Karachi's Mayor Murtaza Wahab recently suggested stricter enforcement and fines to curb littering. Coming from the city's mayor, the comment sounded less like a decisive policy intervention and more like a familiar complaint any frustrated resident of the city might voice.

"Safai is nisf-e-imaan [cleanliness is half of faith]," he added. Yet Karachi continues to suffocate under its own waste, with garbage piling up in streets, drains clogged with plastic, and civic neglect normalised to the point of invisibility. The deeper contradiction is that the city's leadership often appears to describe Karachi's crises rather than resolve them, speaking about dysfunction as observers of it rather than as those entrusted with the authority to change it.

While education and healthcare remain national challenges, Karachi's endemic woes rotate around stability, infrastructure and environment. Rising sea levels threaten large swathes of the southern coastline, particularly areas built on reclaimed land such as the DHA phases near Gizri and Korangi Creek. These zones were once natural buffers—creeks and wetlands that absorbed tidal pressure. Their replacement with concrete has left the city exposed, a factor that directly weakens Karachi's environmental and infrastructure performance in liveability assessments, where exposure to climate risk and lack of resilience infrastructure are key scoring components.

At the same time, monsoon patterns have shifted. Rainfall is now more intense and concentrated, overwhelming a drainage



system that has not kept pace with population growth. In liveability terms, this feeds directly into Karachi's poor infrastructure score, which reflects inadequate drainage, transport disruption, and weak urban maintenance. Flooding in Karachi is often framed as a natural disaster, but in reality, it is largely man-made. Encroachments on natural waterways, unregulated construction, and clogged drains ensure that even moderate rainfall can paralyse the city.

The heat crisis further compounds these challenges. Karachi's urban landscape—dominated by concrete, traffic, and industry—has created a severe urban heat island effect, worsening its environmental rating in the index, which factors in climate, green space availability, and overall ecological quality. Green spaces are scarce, and whatever parks exist are insufficient for a city of this scale. Without significant investment in urban forests and climate-sensitive planning, the city risks further deterioration in livability conditions during peak summers.

Water scarcity is perhaps the most glaring example of structural failure. Karachi depends on distant water sources, an arrangement that weakens its infrastructure and utility reliability scores in the index, which assess access to clean water, sanitation, and consistent public services. Industrial consumption continues to take priority over residential needs, while major supply projects remain delayed. The gap between demand and supply widens each year, with no clear timeline for resolution—reinforcing the systemic deficiencies reflected in its low liveability ranking.

Administration of excuses?

Faced with these overlapping crises, one would expect urgency, clarity, and a sense of direction from the city's leading party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), which has been in power for over 17 years. Instead, what emerges is a recurring pattern of deflection, where Karachi's worsening conditions are acknowledged but rarely met with decisive or time-bound action.

In his interview, Mayor Murtaza Wahab frequently attributes the city's dysfunction to its fragmented governance structure. The division of authority between municipal bodies, town administrations, provincial departments, and federal agencies is indeed complex, and coordination across these layers is often weak and inconsistent. However, complexity, in itself, does not absolve responsibility—it heightens the need for stronger leadership capable of aligning these overlapping institutions toward shared outcomes.

The contradiction becomes sharper when the mayor himself acknowledges that the provincial government holds significant authority to direct and influence local bodies, yet simultaneously suggests that such legal powers can be effectively "circumvented." This produces a circular logic: governance fails because authority is constrained, but authority is also ineffective because it is not enforced. In practice, this results in paralysis framed as structural inevitability.

Even on specific governance issues—such as encroachments along riverbeds identified as major contributors to urban flooding—the lack of clarity and consistency is striking. When asked about the recommendation in a UNDP backed report to clear encroachments along the riverbeds to tackle urban flooding, the Mayor claimed permanent encroachments were not an issue at all.

This was perhaps the most amusing statement from the Mayor. During the 2025 urban flooding in Karachi, the Chief Minister of Sindh, Murad Ali Shah, himself blamed encroachments along the Malir and Lyari riverbeds for being a significant source of the intense flooding during the emergency. The Mayor's statement seems to be in direct contradiction to that claim.



Speaking on the immutable water issue, the Mayor's comments turned administrative neglect into a story of geographical misfortune. "I think, to be very candid, this is going to be a long exercise. Long exercise, why? Because, again, Lahore has no water issue since their water source is underground. Karachi is perhaps the only city of Pakistan where the water source is 125 kilometers away."

While the logistical challenges of Karachi's water supply are undeniable, framing them as an almost fixed natural disadvantage risks obscuring decades of policy delay, infrastructure mismanagement, and uneven prioritisation. Later, Wahab mentioned the Gutter Baghicha treatment plant, which he says will add "10 lakh" gallons per day of recycled water, which brings the 150 million gallon per day consumption to 151 million gallons.

However, for a city already facing a staggering daily water shortfall of around 680 million gallons, the addition of just one million gallons of treated water is not a solution but a mocking gesture. A reminder that even something as basic as water is being rationed into scarcity, treated less as a right and more as an uncertain luxury.

Large-scale infrastructure projects like K-IV continue to be described as long-term undertakings, despite years—if not decades—of delay. In the absence of clear benchmarks or delivery timelines, such initiatives risk becoming permanent items of administrative discussion rather than completed solutions.

The cumulative result is a governance style that prioritises explanation over execution, and process over outcomes. Problems are consistently identified, contextualised, and debated, yet the translation of policy into visible change remains limited and slow.

Future at stake

Despite the backdrop of compounding challenges, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a political culture marked by deflection, Karachi's potential remains vast—and it is a reality that cannot be ignored.

Many young people today, through archival footage and social media, encounter glimpses of Karachi in the 1960s, when its beaches attracted foreign visitors and the city was often compared to coastal leisure hubs, evoking a sense of openness and vibrancy that has since faded. In that era, concerns of terrorism and insecurity were far less associated with the city than they are today.

Karachi's coastline stretches uninterrupted from the Kutch region along the Gujarat border to the edges of Balochistan, offering an extensive and largely underutilised maritime frontier. In a different trajectory of development, this could have supported a world-class coastal economy—comparable to Indonesia, Malaysia, or Gulf-style resort cities—while retaining a cultural depth and historical layering absent in many artificially constructed urban destinations. Unlike parts of the Gulf that often resemble curated commercial landscapes, Karachi holds the potential to be a living, evolving metropolis shaped by diversity, migration, and cultural exchange.

In addition to this, the entirety of the city's water issues could be solved through the construction of desalination plants. Yet potential alone is no longer enough. Karachi's present trajectory shows that geography and economic importance cannot compensate indefinitely for governance failure and environmental neglect. Realising this potential requires deliberate, coordinated, and sustained intervention across multiple fronts.

Because at this stage, continued inaction is no longer a matter of inefficiency or delay—it is a slow, compounding form of negligence with consequences the city can no longer afford to absorb.

All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

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By Hosting U.S.-Iran Talks, Pakistan Eyes an Unlikely Rebrand as Peace Broker

Continued from front page

On Friday, top representatives from Washington and Tehran are set to sit down in Islamabad's lush, tree-lined environs to negotiate a permanent end to the Iran War, which has cost at least 3,800 lives across ten nations while cascading economic hardships across the planet.

Yet on Thursday, it was still unclear whether that meeting will go ahead, given Iran's reclosure of the Strait of Hormuz in response to Israel's escalating bombardment of Lebanon threatens the fragile two-week ceasefire agreed earlier. But were negotiations to materialize, it would be extraordinary both for the stakes—global energy, trade, and food security hang in the balance—as well as historical precedent.

The proposed talks between U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker and a former Revolutionary Guards commander, would be the highest-level meeting between these adversaries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. (Vance is expected to be accompanied by U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and President Donald Trump's influential son-in-law Jared Kushner.)

But it is also remarkable for the pivotal role Pakistan has played in getting these ideological nemeses to the negotiating table—not least as the nation of 250 million is better known as a spoiler rather than broker of peace. After all, despite being ostensibly a U.S. ally and receiving \$33 billion in American aid since 2001, Pakistan secretly invested heavily in the Taliban, and Osama bin Laden's discovery at a fortified compound in Abbottabad—20 minutes' drive from the Pakistan Military Academy, its equivalent of West Point—raises uncomfortable questions about officials harboring the Al Qaeda chief.

Certainly, Pakistan was especially well-placed to act as a mediator given its unique network across rival blocs. Other than good relations with practically all the Middle East, Islamabad maintains close diplomatic and military ties with the U.S., most recently helping to evacuate American personnel following the chaotic drawdown from Afghanistan in 2021.

Islamabad also has a deep relationship with Saudi Arabia and is cozy with Iran, which was the first country to recognize Pakistan following independence in 1947, with the two neighbors sharing a 560-mile border and deep historical, cultural, and religious ties. It also boasts strong links with Beijing, where Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar traveled on March 31 to discuss brokering a truce in the Gulf. "Pakistan and China were in a position to persuade Iran to behave itself and give the U.S. some way out of the conflict," says Fawad Chaudhry, a former Pakistani Information Minister.

Of course, Pakistan's mediation makes sense given it is highly exposed to spillover from the war. Its economy remains fragile, with falling incomes and sharply rising inflation, making relief from the extra shock of

high energy prices especially urgent. In addition, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a mutual defense pact in September that risks drawing Islamabad into a full-blown conflict against its western neighbor.

Given that Pakistan is home to over 20 million Shia Muslims—the second largest cohort in the world after Iran—open warfare with the only nation with more would be schismatic internally. Already, Israeli strikes near Iran's eastern frontier are fomenting instability in Pakistan's restive province of Balochistan. "The Iranians put trust in Pakistan because they know it has skin in the game," says Samina Yasmeen, director of the Centre for Muslim States and Societies at the University of Western Australia.

But it's not just about damage control. A U.S. resolution with Tehran that involves sanctions relief could bring major economic benefits for Pakistan, especially via energy projects like a planned pipeline to Iranian gas fields. And given that some 5 million Pakistani migrant workers currently toil in the Gulf, securing peace both safeguards them as well as some of the vital \$38.3 billion sent home in remittances each year. In addition, the government of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif could leverage any success on the international stage to push back at India's attempts to diplomatically isolate and sideline Islamabad, while also soothing internal political tensions, especially regarding jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Khan was close to Trump during the U.S. President's first term but has now spent over two-and-a-half years in jail on dubious corruption charges. The cricket idol's supporters hoped that Trump might put pressure on Islamabad to set him free, though the elevation of Sharif and Army Chief Asim Munir to key interlocutors for the White House looks like bad news for Khan. "What's happened in U.S.-Pakistan relations over the last year really makes Khan supporters' hopes about Trump look really silly and naïve," says Michael Kugelman, resident senior fellow for South Asia at the Atlantic Council.

That is not least because Trump has found a new bosom buddy in Munir, who enjoyed a rare one-on-one lunch while hosted at the White House in June, and was described as "my favorite field marshal" by the U.S. commander-in-chief during the Gaza ceasefire summit in October. In addition to strong ties to the mercurial U.S. President, Axios reports that Munir has developed a "rapport" with Vance, while he is also close to China, traveling to Beijing in July and receiving Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Islamabad the following month. "Munir is clearly the key guy," says Cameron Munter, the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan from 2010-12.

The big question is whether Pakistan can lock down a vital peace in the Gulf that both secures its interests and boosts its international profile. Headwinds are legion. Nobody seems quite sure which of three ten-point ceasefire agreements currently circulating has been agreed upon. Questions are already being asked of Sharif's impartiality after an X post he sent appeared to have been drafted by

an outside agency, most possibly the U.S. At time of writing, Iran has reneged on reopening the Strait of Hormuz owing to Israeli strikes on Lebanon, where at least 254 people were killed on Wednesday, according to Lebanon's Civil Defence, marking the deadliest day of the entire conflict.

Since Pakistan does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, "there are also limits on its mediation efforts," says Chietigj Bajpae, a senior research fellow for South Asia at Chatham House. "So it has a somewhat awkward position in the Middle East."

Indeed, while Pakistan has a history of serving as mediator—helping facilitate the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and Nixon's rapprochement between Beijing and Washington—that was decades ago and recent experience is scant. Compounding matters, this lack of expertise is mirrored in both visiting negotiation teams: Trump has fired the vast majority of his Middle Eastern experts, while dozens of Iran's top officials have been slain in the conflict. Munter expects both sides to come to negotiations with maximal demands, meaning it will fall to the Pakistanis to referee and guide both sides towards an acceptable middle ground.

"It's going to be very public. It's going to be probably very belligerent, and both sides are going to be making very large claims that make coming to a real, workable, long-term deal very hard," says Munter. "The Iranians may be very satisfied to string this out for a very long time. The longer the world economy suffers, or is at least uncertain about the outcome, the more it plays into their hands. Whereas Trump would likely want an immediate deal."

ICE's Private Bounty Hunters Use AI to Track Immigrants

The federal government's hunt for immigrants is ramping up. Each month, private contractors receive tens of thousands of names from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and are asked to locate those individuals as quickly as possible so that ICE can conduct targeted enforcement operations to arrest and detain those individuals. What makes this system new is not just its scale — contractors may receive up to 50,000 names per month, with the program potentially targeting more than 1 million people — but how it is achieved. Contractors are using a mix of data tools, online research, and, increasingly, artificial intelligence to locate people — allowing for a faster and much larger sweep than before.

This is called skip tracing: finding someone using public records, databases, online information, and, sometimes, physical surveillance. Skip tracing has long been used by debt collectors, bail bondsmen, and private investigators. Now it is being used by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to find individuals for immigration enforcement. While skip tracing has traditionally been used by private entities, its use in government immigration enforcement raises new legal questions about privacy, due process, and the role of private actors

in government surveillance.

ICE skip tracing involves using government data, online research, and in-person verification — such as taking photos of a person's home or workplace — to confirm their whereabouts. Zoom out, and it reveals a massive AI-assisted surveillance system targeting more than 1 million immigrants in the United States.

Reporting by Scripps News found that ICE awarded contracts to 13 private companies to provide "skip tracing services nationwide." These open-ended contracts were issued in December 2025 and could total \$1.2 billion over two years. The Intercept estimated that up to 1.5 million immigrants could be targeted using a mix of digital tools and in-person surveillance.

So how does this system work?

ICE is building a nationwide network of private, plainclothes contractors who are asked to:

- Locate individuals
- Verify addresses
- Take time-stamped photos of homes and workplaces

Contractors are given personal data, including names, dates of birth, addresses, and contact information. Each company may receive up to 50,000 cases per month and is instructed to first use all technology available, as reported by The Washington Post, to locate individuals. If that fails, contractors can move to physical, in-person surveillance. The program relies on a combination of government records, commercial data sources, and online information, although details about which specific databases are being used, how the accuracy of the data is being verified, and how any errors are corrected have not been made public.

For attorneys, this means that client location data may be collected, verified, and shared with ICE through third-party contractors — potentially before ICE ever contacts the individual directly. According to ICE documents shared with The Washington Post, the information gathered by contractors "may lead to raids" or other enforcement actions, including arrests or removal proceedings.

Some of the companies contracted by ICE have backgrounds in military or intelligence work, such as Bluehawk LLC, SOS International, and Gravitass, and have used artificial intelligence and large language models as part of their work. These are firms that have traditionally supported national security, military defense, or private investigations — not routine civil immigration enforcement.

Bluehawk, for example, has held contracts with the Pentagon and U.S. intelligence agencies for over a decade, focusing on intelligence collection and analysis.

Gravitass Investigations, which could earn more than \$32 million from the contract, describes its services as "comprehensive surveillance operations" — the kind of work often used in fraud investigations and corporate cases — combining online research with real-world tracking.

Another contractor is BI Incorporated, a subsidiary of the for-profit prison company GEO Group. GEO Group already operates immigration detention centers across the country. Now, through skip tracing, the company can also profit from locating immigrants that it will later

detain. Its skip-tracing contract alone could generate up to \$121 million, separate from its detention operations, meaning the company stands to benefit from multiple stages of the enforcement process.

The federal government's expanded private contracts and use of skip tracing raise troubling concerns on many levels.

The far reach of AI

Certain companies advertise AI agents and large language models that can identify individuals and map out their networks of family and associates. These systems can pull together data from both public and private sources.

Even when AI is not the only tool, it is increasingly used to justify and scale these efforts — allowing contractors to process more cases faster and across wider geographic areas. But scaling surveillance in this way also increases the risk of error: recent cases show how AI tools, including facial recognition systems like Clearview AI, have misidentified individuals, leading to wrongful arrests and months of detention for people who had no connection to the alleged activity.

The incentive structure

Under the ICE contracts, businesses are rewarded for speed, receiving bonuses if they can verify a person's location within 7 or 14 days. This incentive structure — paying more for faster results — risks compromising due process, accuracy, and the ethics of the information and how it is gathered, verified, and reported. As Sharon Bradford Franklin, former chair of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, told Scripps News, the companies are essentially acting as ICE bounty hunters, "It's the same kind of incentive situation."

Lack of oversight and accountability

Many of the contracts have not been made public, and the rules governing their activities remain unclear. Questions also remain about how closely parent companies oversee their subsidiaries. In one case, the contractor, Paris-based Capgemini, launched an internal review after French government officials raised concerns about its involvement in the program and called for greater transparency.

The ever-expanding surveillance system

From a broader perspective, skip tracing reflects larger trends in data-driven immigration enforcement. Enforcement is no longer carried out solely by federal agents but is increasingly distributed across a network of private companies, data brokers, and state and local agencies. At the same time, surveillance of specific populations is becoming more normalized.

Skip tracing is not just about finding people. It is about building a system — a surveillance supply chain in which artificial intelligence amplifies existing legal and ethical concerns. By making it easier to collect, analyze, and act on large amounts of data, AI allows enforcement agencies to operate at a previously unimaginable scale. As this system expands, it risks eroding privacy, increasing errors, and shifting critical decisions about people's lives further away from transparency and accountability.



Globally Renowned Organizer Rehan Siddiqui Brings Magical Qawwali Night to Houston

Known for curating world-class desi events, Rehan Siddiqui transformed Golden Tree Banquet Hall into a hub of music and spirituality with a completely sold-out Eid Milan Qawwali night.



The Best Time to Exercise for Better Focus

Today, more people than ever are struggling with focus—thanks to incessant phone notifications, daily stress and never-ending to-do lists. As a result, many are searching for ways to improve concentration without constant interruption.

While practical advice like removing distractions and task-management strategies can help, exercise is an overlooked strategy that's often missing from this advice. "Research shows that both aerobic and resistance exercise can improve cognitive function," says Tara Phaff, D.P.T. She adds that physical activities that require attention, reaction time and executive control are linked with better focus, attention, working memory and cognitive flexibility—the ability to switch between tasks without losing focus.

The best part? Exercise benefits your brain regardless of the type. Whether you enjoy running, walking, swimming, strength training, yoga or any activity, regular exercise can support brain health and cognitive function.² But does the time of day you choose to work out make a difference? We spoke with experts to find out.

Is There a Best Time to Exercise?

If you're looking for an extra edge in focus, shifting your workouts earlier in the day may help. "Morning exercise can help increase alertness and set a productive tone for the rest of the day," says Paloma Vega, M.S., RDN, LD.

Some research in adolescents supports this idea, showing that morning exercise can improve cognitive function, attention and readiness to learn.

In fact, one study found that morning exercise along with eating breakfast led to higher test scores.

However, findings in adults are less consistent. Overall, research suggests that exercise benefits cognitive function regardless of the time of day—which is good news for those who can't get in a morning workout.

"Since cognitive performance naturally varies throughout the day due to circadian rhythms, there isn't a universally 'best' time to exercise for focus," says Phaff. "'Morning people' may perform better earlier in the day, while 'night owls' tend to feel more alert and focused later on."

Does the Type of Exercise Matter?

All exercise is good for your brain, but in different ways. "Moderate-intensity aerobic exercise is effective for enhancing attention, reaction time and cognitive control, while resistance training has also been shown to improve executive function, especially the ability to focus and filter distractions," says Phaff.

"Aerobic activities like walking, jogging, cycling or swimming are particularly well studied for improving cognitive function because they increase circulation, oxygen delivery to the brain and neural plasticity," adds Vega.

That said, anaerobic exercise—like strength training—also plays an important role in brain health and mental well-being.¹ The combination of both aerobic exercise and strength training supports whole-body health by improving cardiovascular function while also maintaining muscle mass and bone density.

"Even short bouts of movement broken up throughout the day can be beneficial to improving memory, attention and

focus," says Phaff. "Incorporating activity throughout the day—such as walking, strength training, mobility work or simply taking a movement break—can help improve focus and working memory, especially when breaking up long periods of sitting."

Most importantly, remember that all movement is good movement. "The key is simply to move regularly rather than waiting for the 'perfect' time," Phaff adds.

Getting Started

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to fitness. Barriers like busy schedules, competing priorities and limited access to equipment or space can make it harder to stay active. To help, our experts shared these simple, realistic tips.

Do Exercises You Enjoy

For exercise to become a consistent part of your daily routine, you need to enjoy it on some level. This may mean exploring different activities to find what works best for you. "To make exercise feel fun and worth the commitment, focus on finding a modality you enjoy," says Marita Radloff, M.S., RDN, LD, a sports dietitian. "Don't force yourself into a certain type of exercise because you feel like you 'should' be doing it."

Find a Community

Staying active can be more enjoyable and sustainable when you have the support of others. "Consider enlisting a friend to keep you accountable and commiserate with if the workout gets hard," says Radloff. Research shows that working out with a partner or group can help you stay consistent.

Set Realistic Expectations

"If you are looking to begin incorporating exercise into your daily routine, start slow and make it realistic," says Theresa DeLorenzo, Ph.D., RD, a sports dietitian. "If you start with too much too quickly it will be daunting and you will be less likely to start or to continue."

Everyone's starting point is different, so focus on what fits your current fitness level, schedule and access—not what works for someone else.

Everything Counts

"Many people think exercise has to mean long gym sessions, but even a 10- to 15-minute walk is a great place to start," says Vega. This means exercise "snacks" count and offer a benefit. An exercise snack is any form of extra movement (even as little as one minute) throughout the day.

"Studies show that breaking up prolonged sitting with light activity can further enhance working memory and executive function, while extended periods of inactivity may lead to a decline in cognitive performance," says Phaff.¹⁰ "Some of the greatest improvements in cognitive function come from regular movement throughout the day."

Our Expert Take

Improving your focus can positively support your personal and professional life, making it easier to manage daily tasks and stay engaged. Exercise plays an important role in improving focus, but the exact timing may not matter as much as you think.

What matters most is consistency and avoiding long periods of sedentary time. Fortunately, you also don't need to exercise for hours on end. "Short bouts of movement can improve both physical and cognitive health, so the focus should be on consistency rather than perfection," says Phaff.

An ideal exercise program is one that you enjoy and can stick with over time. Because when it comes to brain health, all movement counts.



Poetry can save us!

In these turbulent times, poetry can be both a soothing balm and a powerful force inspiring global anti-war movements.



By Furqan Ali

We live in nasty times. From east to west, north to south, every country lingers on a geopolitical chessboard, where each position stands either in support of or in defiance of another piece. While international relations experts can perform the arithmetic — calculating the profit and loss of being an ally or a foe, and determining which alignment yields what economic or geostrategic benefits — such calculations are often made, against the backdrop of imperial prerogatives, and on the back of slaughtered human beings, who become the weight and counterweight in service of desired positions in neoliberalism's competition-centric world.

This is not the first time that we have found ourselves in such an outlandish plight. Humanity has been subjected to the horrors of nuclear weapons and countless colonial misadventures; from the Qissa Khwani massacre to the Army Public School, megalomaniac zeal has claimed the lives of many, including children. We have fought multiple wars with our neighbour—our sibling produced from the same land from which our “moth-eaten” homeland was carved out. Fueling the fire, on the western side, we experienced the Afghan war, along with its devastating consequences, which continue to haunt us even today.

And now we are going through another nefarious mass-killing with Afghanistan, simultaneously, with another potential world war breaking out in the Middle East. There has been a significant mental toll from all of this; these murders have somehow morphed into mere numbers — dehumanising mortals subjected to atrocities — reduced to stories read on news outlet sites and printed in newspapers. Unfortunately, this is the very nature of war: it is not a solution to problems, but rather another problem in itself, with its tentacles besieging both lives and the psychology of the whole country.

What does poetry do?

In these times of blanket inanity, poetry may be our most fitting companion — both as a balm to soften pain and as a catalyst against warmongering, nourishing the flourishing of global anti-war movements. Someone may contend that this proposition is fanciful. After all, what can poetry do to stop this juggernaut devouring men's flesh? Let us ask, then: what exactly does poetry do?

Historically, Plato banished poets from participating in his ideal state on the grounds that they are distant from the truth — irrational, insubstantial, and merely ornamental, ultimately flimsy. From a strictly truth-centric perspective, this view has force. Yet this expectation is parochial in many ways; it demands from poetry what it never claimed to offer: a singular truth. Poetry, rather, is ambiguous: the more meaning a poet can generate, the more virtuous they are, especially in our Sabk-i-Hindi tradition, brimmed with convoluted metaphorical ploys. After all, as IA Richards, and so too Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, the renowned literary critic, suggest, the poet is a maker of fiction. Or, as WH Auden writes in his famous elegy *In Memory of WB Yeats*: “For poetry makes nothing happen.” And yet poetry does make something happen, though not through the lens of Homo economicus or Homo politicus.

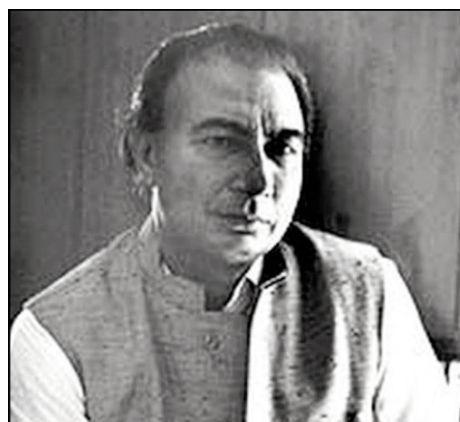
On one hand, poetry holds up reflections of our-



selves, helping us see with vividness what we value, what matters to us, and how we perceive the world. It incorporates experiential weight and consequence, along with an investigative curiosity about the shape of our inner experience. That's why Edward Hirsch calls reading poetry “an act of the most immense intimacy, of intimate immensity”. This means it allows us to experience poetic imagery at a deeply personal level—not as a mere representation of being, but as an event of being—as Bachelard suggests, an image born in one consciousness can be received by another without explanation. It crosses the boundary between subjects not by argument but by resonance, moving toward a shared, public consciousness. Poetry, then, as the German philosopher Georg Hamann observed, is the mother tongue of the human race. It translates the music flowing through human existence—music deeply connected to memory—and weaves that memory into verse, rendering it enduring. For instance, we still turn to Saadi Shirazi or Ghalib when articulating wisdom. In this way, poetry transforms the rhythms of human existence and the cosmos into words, and thereby stands as humanity's quiet triumph against ordinary forgetfulness. This makes us, as creators of poetry, fundamentally similar despite geographical, religious, national, and cultural differences—differences that aggressors intentionally inflame in order to otherise the supposed enemy.

On the other hand, its fictionality grants it a hypothetical power: it enables us to imagine the unimaginable. In the words of Anjum Altaf, echoing Wittgenstein, “The reason poetry has this ability to cast a spell in the age of science is because its ocean contains these incredible intuitions that are beyond the grasp of rationality.” It urges us to reflect beyond the departmental stalemate of the chessboard. The transboundary, tradition-rooted nature of poetry—its inner-experience-centric realm, its expression and adornment of language, and, with it, the preservation of memory—safeguards the experiences that our imagination draws upon, while also providing a vista of the impossible realised through poetic imagery, its metamorphosis, and imbibement. Upon these, we exercise our intelligence and critical thinking, transforming pathos into words that endure for coming generations. For instance, Iqbal's poem, in *Bang-e-Dara*, ‘A Cow and a Goat’ was inspired by the third-century BCE Sanskrit animal tales of *The Panchatantra*, as noted by Dr Nomanul Haq.

Poetry, ergo, can protect us from the extinction of a mythical, historical, magical, and inclusive legacy; from compromising pure creativity; from racial and ethnic prejudices; from manipulation by sinister power-thirsty populism; from hate and otherising of other humans; and from many other forms of cultural and intellectual impoverishment. This, then, leads us to an empathising and liberating stance against hegemonic, counter-revolutionary forces that are hell-bent—much like colonial projects—on injecting state-favoured, formulated spectacle ideologies masquerading as history. These narratives favour a few: the top one percent owns more than twice the wealth of the remaining seven billion people; men own about 50 percent more wealth than women; and meanwhile, nearly 10,000 people die every day due to a lack of access to adequate healthcare, even as the world is



home to more than 2,000 billionaires. In the words of Bertolt Brecht: “Those who take the meat from the table / Teach contentment. / Those for whom the contribution is destined / Demand sacrifice.”

Such realities produce both a scarcity of resources and deep inequalities of wealth, nationally and globally, often leading to wars driven by jingoistic, neoliberal competitive *Weltanschauung* and *realpolitik* (national security upmanship). The result is a renewed alienation on the one hand and an artificial, superficial hostility toward our supposed “foes,” both within and outside the country, which may ultimately lead us into unfortunate times, much like the one we are living in. Notwithstanding, let's also not overstate it: poetry cannot cure this dismay, in itself, like a divine physician. What we ultimately need is a revamping of our worldview, which requires thinking outside the box. This is where poetry can help—by expanding what can be imagined, stretching the limits of language, overlapping the concrete with the unreal (*prima facie* implausible), and thereby fomenting a collective anti-war protest.

Some poets

In the past, poetry served as an outlet for the frustrations of troubled times. Wilfred Owen is one such example. Born in 1893 in England, he became one of the greatest war poets in English literature. During the First World War, he experienced mud-filled trenches, poison gas attacks, extreme cold, etc. These traumatic experiences led him to develop what we now recognize as PTSD (then called shell shock), which translated into in his great poem ‘*Dulce et Decorum Est*’, where he powerfully depicted the horrific realities soldiers endured during the world war: “My friend, you would not tell with such high zest / To children ardent for some desperate glory, / The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est / Pro patria mori.*” (The Latin phrase is from the Roman poet Horace: “It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.”)

Owen met Siegfried Sassoon at the hospital, who encouraged him and helped him find his poetic voice. Sassoon himself was a prominent war poet of the same period, criticising the fact that soldiers were dying horribly at places like Bapaume while people at home made jokes, he wrote the poem ‘*Blighters*’: “I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls, / Lurching to rag-time tunes, or “Home, sweet Home,” / And there'd be no more jokes in Music-halls / To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.”

Further, our own Sahir Ludhianvi, against the backdrop of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, declared in his famous poem “*ai sharif insano*” (O noble human beings): *bartari ke subut ki khaatir / khoon bahana he kya zaruri hai / ghar ki taareekiyan mitaane ko / ghar jalana he kya zaruri hai* (Just to prove superiority / Is it really necessary to shed blood? / To remove the darkness within a home, / Is it necessary to burn the house down?) Another poet from Peshawar, Farid Gul Momand, penned: “They ruined my schools / Raped my dolls / Orphaned my children / Widowed my sisters / And we kept silent — like stones or tombs.” For all of them: war is pathetic, hatred toward other humans is irrational, and is a corruption of our beautiful souls and sublime nature.

A counter narrative

It can be argued that this is a rosy and cherry-



picked poetic rendition. There is just as much “pro-war” poetry as there is “anti-war” poetry. Iqbal's *Tarana-e-Milli*, for instance, urges for the domination of Muslims over the whole globe. One, therefore, cannot speak of poetry as a monolith. If there is pro-war poetry, how can one expect poetry, as such, to stop war? An easy way out would be to argue that literature works on the moral imagination, as suggested in the writings of Edward Said. According to this view, literature is an exercise in empathy; therefore, literature that perpetuates essentialist, colonial, racist, sexist, or otherwise dehumanising depictions fails not only on a social-justice scorecard but also as literature. And so pro-war poetry is not poetry. I do not agree with this view.

As argued earlier, poetry is a kind of fiction: a distortion of reality that creates multiplicity of meanings, stretches the borders of language, and says what was never considered possible while still working within linguistic limits. In the words of Nobel Laureate Wisława Szymborska, poetry is a support whose uncertainty itself gives us the meaning: “Poetry — / but what is poetry anyway? / More than one rickety answer / has tumbled since that question first was raised. / But I just keep on not knowing, and I cling to that / like a redemptive handrail.”

In this sense, the message qua message is less relevant than how it is said. The primacy, therefore, is not what Wilfred Owen experienced during World War I, but how he described it. “For poems are not, as people think, simply emotions (one has emotions early enough)—they are experiences,” Rilke wrote, in a famous passage from *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. Then, to abstract from this poetic reality the learnings that are beneficial for us is the job of the reader. The function of poetry is not to stop war; it never can. What it can do, however, is fertilise the ground for egalitarian, inclusive, and reflective minds—minds less likely to wage wars and more inclined toward collaboration, collective prosperity, and critical thinking.

Coda

Countless people have perished in between preemptive and preventive wars; the enemy may change with shifting international balances and power brinkmanship, but the brunt remains the same: human beings, despite all their humanity, intelligence, and emotional depth, continue to die ruthlessly. Let us not glorify war, bloodshed, or our most animalistic impulses. Rather, let us turn to poetry—where the imageries of the well-trenched public memory, shapes our consciousness, and makes us more humane by turning toward sublimity and moving away from savagery—which can help us resist this sinister current by humanising the cost of war through the vivid depiction of human suffering rather than mere statistics; cutting through the illusions and exposing the lies of the powerful; providing a collective voice that transcends cultural and racial barriers, foregrounding a shared moral stance; inviting readers to imagine alternatives to violence; and offering a poetic sensibility at the societal level—shedding the burden of received truths, enabling us to see things afresh, and, above all, encouraging creative thought.

Let's burn the barbaric playbook of deterrence, retaliation and escalation. Poetry can save us!

Zeeshan Khan & Iqra Rasheed's Valima Ceremony Celebrated with Elegance in Houston

Continued from page 17

an evening filled with joy, prayer, and celebration.

Hosted by Grooms Parents Mr. and Mrs. Rehan, the event took place on April 5, 2026, at the prestigious Embassy Suites by Hilton on Katy Freeway, Houston. The venue was adorned with elegant décor, creating a warm and festive ambiance that perfectly complemented the joyous occasion.

The bride and groom, Zeeshan Khan and Iqra Rasheed, looked radiant as they welcomed guests and shared their happiness. The gathering reflected a blend of cultural tradition and modern celebration, with attendees offering heartfelt congratulations and prayers for the couple's prosperous and happy married life.

The event was attended by a large number of well-wishers, including close friends and relatives, making it a memorable night. Among those acknowledged were Rehan Ahmed, Amjad Syed, and USAID Alam, who were listed as awaiting the honored presence of guests.

The evening featured delightful hospitality, delicious cuisine, and a spirit of togetherness, leaving guests with cherished memories of a truly special celebration.

The Valima marked the beginning of a new journey for the couple, with prayers for love, success, and lifelong happiness.

Houston Celebrates Bangladeshi Culture with Pakistani Community Leaders in Attendance

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The evening was marked by strong representation from prominent organizations, with special recognition given to Siraj Narsi, President of the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston (PAGH), and Sara Khan, Vice President of PAGH, who attended as invited guests. Their presence underscored the spirit of unity and collaboration among South Asian communities in the region.

Also in attendance was Emran Gazi, President of the Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH), along with the President of the Indian Muslim Association, reflecting the diverse and inclusive nature of the gathering.

The event drew a large and enthusiastic audience, showcasing the richness of Bangladeshi heritage through an array of cultural performances, including traditional music and artistic presentations. Guests were also treated to authentic Bangladeshi cuisine, creating a festive and immersive cultural experience.

A key highlight of the evening was the announcement and discussion surrounding the proposed Bangladesh American Center. Community members described the initiative as a visionary step toward strengthening cultural identity, fostering unity, and

investing in future generations.

During the ceremony, the chief guest presented a certificate of appreciation to the organizers in recognition of their outstanding contributions to community service. The honor was met with warm applause from attendees.

Speaking on the occasion, community leaders including Siraj Narsi, Sara Khan, and Emran Gazi emphasized the importance of inter-community collaboration, cultural preservation, and continued engagement in civic and social initiatives.

The event concluded with organizers expressing heartfelt gratitude to participants and reaffirming their commitment to promoting cultural heritage and community welfare through future programs.

The gala stood as a testament to Houston's multicultural fabric and the shared values that continue to unite its diverse communities.

Sara Khan Connects with Community at "Bunnies & Baskets" Easter Extravaganza

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welcoming environment. The event featured a variety of Easter-themed activities, creating memorable experiences for attendees while fostering stronger community bonds.

Sara Khan, who is actively campaigning for the position of County Treasurer, took the opportunity to connect with constituents, listen to their concerns, and share her vision for community-focused leadership. Her presence added a meaningful touch to the event, highlighting her commitment to grassroots engagement and public service.

Organizers emphasized that the primary goal of the event was to bring neighbors together, encourage interaction, and promote unity. Through laughter, shared experiences, and festive celebrations, the event successfully created a positive and harmonious atmosphere.

At the conclusion, organizers expressed heartfelt gratitude to volunteers and participants for their enthusiastic involvement. They also reaffirmed their commitment to hosting similar initiatives in the future, aiming to strengthen community ties and civic participation.

Sara Khan's participation underscored the importance of community connection in local leadership, as she continues her campaign with a focus on inclusivity, engagement, and service.

US Tells American Muslims to Be Careful for Hajj 2026

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reconsidering participation in Hajj this year," the embassy said in its statement.

The advisory comes amid heightened tensions across the Middle East following the US and Israel's war against Iran, which began on February 28, 2026. Iranian missile and drone attacks have kept the entire region on alert, prompting the US to issue a broader travel advisory cautioning its citizens against visiting

Saudi Arabia. The Hajj advisory is a direct extension of that wider warning.

A two-week ceasefire brokered by Pakistan was agreed on April 9, with both sides currently in negotiations in Islamabad. However, the security situation remains fluid and the embassy's warning reflects that uncertainty.

The embassy also highlighted a key entry restriction taking effect from April 18, 2026. Anyone attempting to enter Makkah from that date will be required to show one of the following:

- A valid Hajj permit
- A residency ID issued from Makkah
- A valid Makkah work permit

All other visa holders must depart Makkah before April 18. This aligns with the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah's previously announced deadline marking the transition from Umrah to Hajj season.

Hajj 2026 is expected to begin around May 25, with the Day of Arafah falling on May 26 and Eid al-Adha on May 27. Hajj rituals are expected to conclude around May 29 to 30, pending the moon sighting. Millions of Muslims from across the world are still expected to make the journey to Makkah despite the advisory.

Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam — a once-in-a-lifetime obligation for every Muslim who is physically and financially able to perform it. The US embassy's advisory does not prohibit American Muslims from travelling but strongly encourages them to weigh the current security environment before making their decision.

Groundbreaking Ceremony of Siraj-ud-Daula Elementary School, a Landmark Educational Initiative by Momina and Duraid Foundation, Dedicated to Syed Javaid Anwar's mother Tara Khatoon

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Girls and Boys Elementary School has been adopted under the Momina & Duraid Foundation's program.

A state-of-the-art school will replace the current structure, which presently hosts only 50 students in poor conditions. With this project, the student capacity will exceed over 700 in the coming years. The entire project is scheduled for completion by this year.

Momina & Duraid Foundation, is dedicated to fostering educational growth and community development in underserved areas.

The Houston Karachi Sister City Association coordinated all efforts with the Foundation. The project was supported by Sultana Siddiqui, Chair of Hum Network, who praised the critical need for such educational systems in Pakistan.

Mr. Duraid Qureshi, the lead project architect, presented a comprehensive PowerPoint detailing the construction plan.

Mr. Muhammad Saeed Sheikh,

President of the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association, also spoke, commending Mr. Syed Javaid Anwar's recent \$300,000 donation towards this initiative. He further acknowledged the significant role of Momina & Duraid Foundation and Sultana Siddiqui's support. He emphasized that a nation's strength is rooted in its youth, and by providing quality education, we build a stronger, more prosperous Pakistan.

The Deputy Commissioner of the area, along with other city council members, also addressed the gathering. Their presence underscored the community's commitment to this transformative educational project.

Fifteen people died in US immigration custody this year, ICE says

WASHINGTON - At least 15 immigrants have died in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement custody from January 2026 through early April, according to ICE. That follows 31 deaths last year, a two-decade high.

Tuan Van Bui

Died: April 1 at the Miami Correctional Facility in Bunker Hill, Indiana Nationality: Vietnamese Age: 55

Bui was found unresponsive and declared dead at the scene, ICE said. The cause of death remains under investigation. Jose Guadalupe Ramos

Jose Guadalupe Ramos

Died: March 25 at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center in Los Angeles Nationality: Mexican

Ramos was found unconscious and unresponsive in his bunk by security staff, ICE said. The staff called on-site medical personnel and he was transferred to an area hospital where he was declared dead, ICE said.

Royer Perez Jimenez

Died: March 16 at the Glades County Detention Center in Moore Haven, Florida

Nationality: Mexican

Age: 19

Perez Jimenez's death was a presumed suicide, ICE said, while the official cause of death was under investigation after he was found unresponsive in the early hours. The detention center's staff unsuccessfully tried to resuscitate him for nearly 10 minutes after he was found, according to ICE.

Mohammad Nazeer Paktyawal

Died: March 14 at the Parkland Hospital in Dallas, Texas

Nationality: Afghan

Age: 41

Paktyawal, an Afghan immigrant who previously worked with the U.S. military in Afghanistan and later sought asylum in the U.S., died in ICE custody less than 24 hours after being detained in Texas, a U.S. veteran-led advocacy group said.

In a statement, ICE said Paktyawal was eating breakfast when medical staff noted that his tongue had become swollen, prompting a medical response. He was declared dead only after multiple attempts at resuscitation, the agency said.

Emanuel Cleeford Damas

Died: March 2 at a hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona

Nationality: Haitian

ICE took Damas into custody after he was arrested on assault and battery charges in September 2025 in Boston, ICE said. Damas was transferred to the Florence Detention Center in Florence,

Arizona. ICE said he reported shortness of breath on February 19 and was sent to a local hospital and then transferred to a Phoenix hospital and placed in an intensive care unit.

He was intubated on a ventilator the following day and died on March 2, with the cause unknown, ICE said. In an interview with the Associated Press, his brother said he had died due to an untreated toothache and related infection.

In response to a request for comment, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security referred to ICE's public statement, which did not mention any dental issue.

Pejman Karshenas Najafabadi

Died: March 1 at a hospital in Natchez, Mississippi

Nationality: Iranian

Age: 59

ICE took Karshenas into custody in April 2025 after he was convicted of fentanyl possession, the agency said. He had several chronic health conditions but remained detained and was transferred in October 2025 to the Louisiana ICE Processing Center, a facility opened under the Trump administration, according to ICE.

Houston Hosts Electrifying Eid...

Continued from page 17

an atmosphere filled with devotion and musical magic.

Adding to the hospitality, complimentary chai and paan were served throughout the night, enhancing the traditional desi cultural experience.

This invitation-only event sparked significant excitement across the community, with organizers encouraging guests to tag their names for a chance to win entry, as no tickets were made available for sale.

Described as a "simple Eid Milan Qawwali," the night proved that simplicity, when paired with authentic cultural expression, can create an extraordinary and memorable experience for all.

PPP Houston Marks Bhutto's 47th ...

Continued from page 17

late leader. The atmosphere was solemn yet filled with admiration for Bhutto's enduring political contributions.

Among the prominent attendees were PPP Vice President USA Kashif Somro, Chief Organizer Riaz Kakakhel, President Mumtaz Chang, Qazi Sohail, Fahad Junejo, Takhleek Lashari, Easa Bhargari, Taufiq Dandia, Sarwar Khushk, and Director PAGH Zafar Iqbal.

Other attendees included Ghulam Bombaywala, Mehmood Daiheri, Wahid Lala, Salman Razaqi, Lala Gulfaraz, PAGH President Siraj Narsi, Sajid Mehar, Farhan Soomro, Ghulam Memon, Anwar Nizamati, Tahir Mama, Imran Memon, Mian Nazeer, Mumtaz Khan, Ghulam Mohiuddin Chishti, and Azam Akhtar.

Speakers at the event paid glowing tribute to Shaheed Bhutto, highlighting his vision, leadership, and lasting impact on Pakistan's political landscape. Participants offered prayers for the elevation of his ranks and remembered his struggle for democracy and the rights of the people.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, party leaders reaffirmed their commitment to upholding Bhutto's ideology and continuing his mission of serving the public.

The Best Morning Drink for Better Kidney Health, According to Dietitians

Our diet plays a big role in how our kidneys function. "Your kidneys are responsible for getting rid of the waste from everything you eat and drink. So, it isn't surprising that nutrition has the potential to be both incredibly helpful or harmful to kidney health," says Melanie Betz, M.S., RD, CSR. Kidneys are hardworking organs responsible for filtering blood, removing waste and creating urine.

By choosing nutritious food and beverages, you can help your kidneys function at their best. To start your morning off right, dietitians unanimously agree that water is the best wake-up drink to support healthy kidneys. Read on to learn how water supports your renal system by promoting the filtration process, hydration and blood flow.

1. Dilutes Waste

When you wake up in the morning, it's likely been hours since you've had a sip of water. "Water is the best morning drink for your kidneys because it gives your kidneys what they need to start the day doing their job," shares Beverly Garden, RD. "After your body goes hours without fluids, drinking water in the morning dilutes waste products so your kidneys can filter more easily," she adds.

The kidneys are made up of more than a million nephrons, which act as a two-step filter for your blood. The glomerulus filters the blood, and the tubule returns the good stuff back to your blood and removes what your body

doesn't need as waste and water to become urine.¹ Hernandez notes, "Water and fluids are what keep that system running efficiently. When you're well-hydrated, the kidneys can easily filter waste products and excess vitamins and minerals out of the body by flushing them out through urine," explains Jen Hernandez, RDN, CSR, LDN.

Diluted urine, which happens when you drink enough water, helps support your kidneys. Having an output of at least three liters of urine daily has been linked with better kidney function over time, while less than one liter of urine daily is associated with a decline in kidney function.

2. Keeps You Hydrated

Saying water helps keep you hydrated is a little bit like saying water gets you wet, but that doesn't make drinking it any less important. "When you are dehydrated, your kidneys aren't filtering as much as they should, which can damage them over time, or if dehydration is severe enough, it can lead to chronic kidney disease," shares Betz. She adds that "water is cheap, accessible, and is the best way to hydrate for the vast majority of people. We really don't need fancy electrolyte or hydration powders to help with hydration."

The kidneys don't just filter less when you're dehydrated; they also influence hormones that affect blood pressure. To help counteract dehydration and balance fluids, they release renin, an enzyme that starts a cascade of hormonal shifts from your adrenal glands that encourage your body to retain sodium and water when you're dehydrated. The activation of the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system can elevate blood pressure and keep your kidneys working overtime.

Garden adds that staying hydrated helps prevent stress on the kidneys and reduces the risk of kidney stones. Chronic dehydration reduces urine volume and increases the concentration of solutes, such as calcium and oxalates, which can form kidney stones.

3. Improves Blood Flow

Dehydration can lead to a decrease in blood volume, which results in an increased sodium concentration in the blood. When your body detects this change in blood volume and sodium, it constricts blood vessels, which temporarily increases blood pressure to help maintain circulation. Drinking water to rehydrate helps maintain homeostasis.

After diabetes, high blood

pressure is the second biggest reason for kidney failure in the U.S. High blood pressure reduces how much blood flows to the kidneys. Over time, narrowed blood vessels in the kidneys can become damaged and can't filter blood as well.

High blood pressure doesn't just go away by drinking a glass of water, but staying hydrated can help keep blood flowing to your kidneys. That is because most of blood's volume is water, and staying hydrated helps reduce strain on your heart to keep blood flowing.

How To Drink More Water

Starting your day with a glass of water may take a bit of getting used to. Here are some tips to make hydration part of your morning routine.

Habit stack your beverage. Keep a glass of water next to your toothbrush so when you brush your teeth you remember to drink, or put your water bottle by the dog's leash if you always take your pup for a morning walk. Adding drinking water onto something you already do can help make the behavior more automatic.⁸

Pair it with your coffee. Pairing water with your favorite morning beverage can be a seamless way to incorporate it into your routine. Plus, the water in coffee counts toward your hydration goals. "People who drink coffee actually [may have] a lower risk of both kidney disease and kidney stones," Betz shares.^{9,10}

Drink tea. Just like coffee, you can get your water through a cup of tea to support your hydration goals. "Green tea has been shown to protect against kidney damage caused by providing antioxidants and supporting anti-inflammatory mechanisms in the body," adds Hernandez.

Other Tips for Healthy Kidneys

"What we eat and drink [has] a major impact on kidney health. The top two causes of kidney disease are diabetes and high blood pressure, respectively. While there are certain factors out of our control, such as age, genetics, and family history of kidney disease, our diet and lifestyle are two things we do have control over," states Hernandez. Follow these expert tips to help keep your kidneys healthy.

Eat a balanced diet. Both the Mediterranean Diet and DASH diet have been shown to support healthy kidneys.¹² Betz echoes this, explaining that "both of these dietary patterns encourage lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and whole-food plant proteins like beans, nuts, seeds and lentils, along with limiting red/processed meat and added sugar and salt."

Skip sugary beverages. Too many sugar-sweetened beverages can increase your risk of developing diabetes, a risk factor for kidney disease. "A meta-analysis found that consuming more than 7 servings per week of sugar-sweetened beverages significantly increased the risk of chronic kidney disease," notes Hernandez.¹³ In addition to plain water, try unsweetened tea and sparkling water to keep added sugar intake down.

Know your risk factors. Even though 1 in 7 U.S. adults have chronic kidney disease, about 90 percent of people don't know they have it.¹⁴ While there aren't many noticeable symptoms during the beginning stages of kidney disease, early detection and treatment is important. If you have risk factors like a family history of diabetes, heart disease or high blood pressure, obesity, kidney stones, or you're over 60, talk to your doctor. If you're in a higher-risk group, they may recommend tests for more information.

Our Expert Take

Water is a winning beverage for kidney health. Starting your morning by drinking water helps dilute waste, improve hydration and let blood flow more easily. Essentially, drinking water aids your kidneys in doing their job. You can enjoy water on its own, or in a cup of green tea or coffee. In addition to hydrating, eating a healthy diet, limiting sugary beverages and being aware of risk factors can help keep your kidneys healthy.



Young Sherlock – The games's not afoot

This young version of the great fictional detective in a parallel universe suffers from too many ideas



By Omair Alavi

KARACHI: There are two kinds of people in this world – those who love Sherlock Holmes, and those who don't. Guy Ritchie tries to fit into both categories by first appealing to the former with Young Sherlock and then crafting a blend of Indiana Jones and James Bond to keep it relevant. Sadly, he fails to appease Sherlock Holmes lovers; however, those for whom 221B Baker Street means nothing might develop an interest in the character.

Why doesn't this version of Sherlock Holmes manage to become popular despite the presence of Guy Ritchie, who made the two Sherlock Holmes films featuring Robert Downey Jr? Ritchie himself is to blame. Nobody criticised him for the RDJ Sherlock Holmes because the actor was on a roll and audiences wanted a Sherlock Holmes film. Here, however, neither is the lead actor popular, nor does he resemble the character who went on to become the world's first consulting detective.

Also, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation appeared in 56 short stories and just four novels, making the shorter format more successful. However, with four subplots and one central narrative, Young Sherlock tries to play a longer innings and fails. Not only does it fail to honour the character that British actors Jeremy Brett and Benedict Cumberbatch made famous on TV, but it also doesn't even pay tribute to Andrew Lane's eight-book Young Sherlock Holmes series, which became a huge hit in the UK and the US between 2010 and 2015.

From the outside, the Amazon Prime series looks like the perfect introduction for youngsters, with the potential to reinvent a literary icon for a new generation—but instead, it loses itself in excess. The show might have fared better had it adapted one of the Young Sherlock Holmes novels for its OTT debut. Instead, creator Matthew Parkhill and director Guy Ritchie take the character in a direction that feels more indulgent than inspired. The result is a series that struggles to balance its ambitions with coherence.

Although Lane's books—sanctioned by the estate of Arthur Conan Doyle—offered a grounded exploration of Holmes' formative years, their transition into a high-budget series aimed at adults feels uneasy at best. The show asks viewers to juggle multiple underdeveloped plotlines across eight episodes, with storytelling often taking a backseat to flashy action set pieces. Compounding the issue, the relatively inexperienced lead cast fails to elevate the material, resulting in performances that feel more like approximations than fully realised characters.

The plot

Set in a vaguely defined late-19th-century England, the series introduces a 19-year-old Sherlock Holmes (Hero Fiennes Tiffin) as an insolent young man languishing in Newgate Prison. His fortunes change when his older brother Mycroft (Max Irons) secures his release and arranges for him to go to Oxford—not as a student, but as a porter.

Sherlock is portrayed as an impulsive youngster with a troubled family history—his mother (Natascha McElhone) is institutionalised, his father (Joseph Fiennes) is largely absent, and there is the lingering trauma of a deceased sister. Enter James Moriarty (Dónal Finn), who is more inclined towards physical confrontation than Holmes' intellectual sparring. The two young men form a bond—until the arrival of a Chinese princess (Zine Tseng).

Things go sideways once a professor is murdered, an important document is stolen, and Holmes is accused of being behind both. From meeting Inspector Lestrade to escaping prison to clear his



name, Holmes uses his deductive abilities to solve the crimes that come his way—each more horrific than the last. Hovering over this already crowded narrative is the shady past of one of the central characters and the arrival of Sir Bucephalus Hodge (Colin Firth), whose colonial ambitions add yet another layer to the plot.

The good

Since it's a Sherlock Holmes adaptation, it is bound to attract the attention of those who have grown up reading his adventures. Everything from the costumes to the production design has been executed convincingly—so much so that even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle might have approved. The early episodes, particularly those directed by Guy Ritchie, exhibit an energy that keeps viewers engaged.

Some of the interactions with future characters are handled subtly, hinting at Sherlock's future addictions, the beginnings of his rivalry with Moriarty, and his interaction with Inspector Lestrade, who isn't yet part of Scotland Yard.

The pace of each episode is brisk, which is one of the reasons the series doesn't become boring. Questions such as how Sherlock developed his interest in deduction, the reason behind his mother's illness, and how his elder brother entered government service are addressed, albeit briefly.

The bad

What is confusing is that after the first two episodes, both the director and the direction change, and all the promising elements that viewers were waiting for are pushed to the final two episodes. By Sherlock Holmes standards, that is simply too late.

Secondly, a major question arises: what exactly is this series a prequel to? If it is a prequel to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels, then much of it is inaccurate. Moriarty didn't appear until the last story of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, and Holmes' sister was hardly ever mentioned. If it is a prequel to Guy Ritchie's stylised adaptations that should have been clearly stated. Instead, it appears to be a reimagining of sorts—without committing fully to that idea.

Then there is the claim of being 'inspired by Lane's novels', which doesn't hold up. The events in the show do not align with those in the books. Even the lead actor, Hero Fiennes Tiffin, doesn't resemble either Jeremy Brett—the definitive Sherlock Holmes—or Robert Downey Jr, which may confuse viewers familiar with previous portrayals.

The dynamic between Sherlock and Moriarty appears heavily influenced by *Smallville*, where Clark Kent and Lex Luthor begin as allies. However, this reinterpretation lacks the emotional depth required to make such a relationship compelling. Moriarty is written as an exaggerated mirror of Sherlock—louder and brasher, but ultimately less interesting.

It would have been wise to introduce Dr Watson, as was done in *Young Sherlock Holmes* in the 1980s. However, it seems Guy Ritchie isn't particularly fond of the Barry Levinson classic, which explored Sherlock's origins more effectively than this adaptation. Watson provided balance to Holmes in the original stories, and his absence is keenly felt here.

The verdict

Why was Sherlock Holmes so averse to romantic relationships? What made him choose the profession of a consulting detective? Who mentored him into becoming the man that even James Moriarty would later fear? Did he return to Oxford to complete his education and become the man his brother Mycroft expected him to become? Who knew about the conspiracy that drove his mother insane, and what happened to her after the first season?



If you are looking for answers to these questions, you will not find them here. This season of *Young Sherlock Holmes* feels like a Guy Ritchie project made primarily for Guy Ritchie. Had he considered the audience more carefully, he might have refined it further—or even made it into a film rather than a sprawling TV series that portrays the Holmes family as unnecessarily shady.

For Sherlock Holmes fans, anything remotely connected to the detective is bound to spark interest. However, the makers of *Young Sherlock* should not take that as blanket approval as they move towards a second season. Their experiment needs recalibration. The focus should shift back to the character rather than his rivalry with Moriarty. Before Moriarty becomes significant, Holmes himself must evolve into the formidable figure that criminals fear—something this series fails to establish.

It would be advisable to consult Andrew Lane for future seasons, as he represents the closest link to a faithful interpretation of young Sherlock Holmes. His eight novels provide ample material for multiple seasons—but only if adapted with care. Otherwise, continued overindulgence may result in yet another forgettable adaptation, pushing audiences further away from future interpretations of the character.

For now, *Young Sherlock* stands as a curious misfire—ambitious in scope, but uncertain of its own identity.

Ultimately, *Young Sherlock Holmes* suffers from the classic pitfall of trying to please too many audiences at once. In an attempt to capture both longtime fans of the detective and a younger, action-oriented demographic, the series dilutes what makes Sherlock compelling: his intellect, his keen observation, and the quiet intensity that has defined him for more than a century. Instead, what we get is a caricatured version of the detective, caught between being a brooding genius and a swaggering action hero. The series' overemphasis on spectacle and convoluted subplots undermines its own potential, leaving viewers with a fragmented experience that neither excites nor satisfies fully.

Moreover, the tonal inconsistencies across episodes reflect a lack of clear creative direction. With Ritchie at the helm for only a portion of the series, the energy he injects in the early episodes is abruptly replaced by a more conventional, and at times lethargic, style in the later ones. This unevenness disrupts the narrative rhythm, making it difficult for viewers to invest emotionally in Sherlock's journey. The absence of familiar companions, like Dr Watson, and the overcomplicated inclusion of family scandals and romantic subplots further obscures the detective's formative story.

There remains, however, a silver lining: the series demonstrates that the appetite for Sherlock Holmes stories is undiminished. With better alignment between source material, character portrayal, and audience expectations, there is real potential for a revitalised exploration of Holmes' early years. Future seasons could regain focus by centering on Sherlock's development as a detective, his intellectual growth, and the subtle, psychological nuances that Lane's novels so effectively captured.

For now, *Young Sherlock Holmes* stands as a cautionary tale in adaptation: ambition without clarity risks eroding the essence of a beloved character. It is a project that, despite its lavish production and high-profile names, reminds us that fidelity to the core of a character—and respect for the intelligence of the audience—remains the true key to lasting success.

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

A new dawn?

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

AGAINST overwhelming odds, Iran has won a defining battle in what is a long, historical war. Even if Israel's unrelenting bombing of Lebanon scuppers the fragile ceasefire and talks scheduled in Islamabad between US and Iranian delegations break down, Tehran has, at great cost, stared down the biggest military power the world has ever known.

Some are linking the current moment to the heyday of anti-colonial Third World internationalism marked by the Bandung conference, and even the Congress of the Peoples of the East hosted by Lenin in Baku shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution. A new anti-imperialist dawn, then? Upheaval of the post-Cold War order is certainly intensifying. Beijing's role as Tehran's guarantor to the ceasefire confirms that an imperialist war which, beyond the Zionist fantasy of regime change in Iran, was also supposed to reinforce Washington's encirclement of China, backfired spectacularly.

I offer here a few tentative theses on how to interpret what has just transpired and what we might expect next.

The US empire, and its Zionist outpost, will continue to deploy violence when and

where possible. Washington's relative economic decline, including the real prospect that even dollar hegemony is under threat — in the Strait of Hormuz and beyond — can only be masked by resort to more naked coercion. Other than Lebanon, let us not forget that a 'ceasefire' has supposedly been in effect in Gaza since October 2025. Tel Aviv will inevitably push for war with Iran again, Trump may actually follow through on his threats against Cuba, and all manner of proxy conflicts old and new will remain hot. Things will get worse before the prospects of a lasting peace marked by a new hegemonic order take meaningful shape.

Old alliances in South and West Asia as well as North American and Western Europe, among other regions are breaking down, but new alliances are still tentative. Take the UAE, which in some readings is standing completely apart from the rest of the GCC. This view is accentuated in Pakistan by the report that Abu Dhabi has recently demanded the hybrid regime pay back \$3.5 billion in full. One way or the other, it is clear that the 'East' — or the 'Global South' — is far from being an ideologically coherent entity that stands unified vis-à-vis the Western heartlands of

the capitalist world system. Pakistan's ties with its immediate neighbours India and Afghanistan is a case in point about the long and hard work which needs to be done if there is a future in which the peoples of South and West Asia flourish together.

Iran's resistance has galvanised the public.

Shifts in global and regional geopolitics that are coeval with faltering US hegemony represent the possibility of a new dawn, but ultimately the liberation of the 'Peoples of the East' has as much to do with domestic politics as what happens in regional and global arenas. We need look no further than our own country to understand this complex dialectic. By all accounts, Pakistan's militarised ruling class remains committed to the classed, racialised and gendered logics of the colonial capitalist order that subjugate the mass of the people. The current regime can and should claim credit for playing the role of mediator between the US and Iran, but this does not make it less accountable for its excesses within. A repressive apparatus bred on foreign dependency does not become less so because of skillful diplomacy. The Third World internationalist project, to take the

obvious historical parallel, was ultimately undone by both internal and external contradictions, both operating in tandem. If a new era of multipolarity and even anti-imperialist politics and economics is on the horizon, it must take concrete shape both in the international arena and within nation-state boundaries.

Hope is important, demonstrative and sometimes even contagious. Iran's resistance has galvanised a global public in much the same way as the Palestinian cause did in the months after October 2023. The challenge, as ever, is for this growing global voice to take on more concrete form with time, beyond the polarising logics of social media, which can just as soon turn those who otherwise share a desire for an emancipatory future against one another. A concrete anti-imperialism can bask in the glow of Iran's resistance to empire whilst also focus on the hard task of unifying popular resistance within. Given the reactionary nature of most of the world's regimes, one ought not to be naïve about what is to come. But Antonio Gramsci insisted the optimism of the will must not be relinquished.

The writer teaches at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Energy crisis as catalyst

The climate emergency declaration was both an environmental and economic statement.

Ali Tauqeer Sheikh

IN September 2025, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif declared a climate emergency. Most ministries ignored it. The government lurched from one fiscal crisis to the next, eyes fixed on the IMF programme, ignoring the energy transition the country desperately needed. Then came March 2026.

The US-Israeli war on Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, and the consequences for Pakistan were immediate and brutal. Prior to the announcement of the ceasefire, petrol had jumped by about 20 per cent in a week. LNG shipments had collapsed from around 12 a month to a trickle. The government had announced a four-day work week, closed schools, and told cricket fans to stay home. Inflation had spiralled, and political stability frayed. This should not be surprising. This is the price of inaction.

The climate emergency declaration was not merely an environmental statement: it was an economic one. Energy security, macroeconomic stability, inflation and climate resilience are the same problem wearing different faces. Pakistan had six months between the prime minister's announcement and the outbreak of war to begin building structural buffers. It did not. What the government has offered since are ad hoc austerity measures and conservation campaigns — necessary, but narrow and unsustainable. School closures

do not build nations. A four-day work week does not build an economy.

By August 2025, Pakistan had imported nearly 50 GW of solar panels; solar now accounts for around 20 to 25 per cent of total production. Citizens led this revolution, not government. And government responded by slowing solar adoption via taxes to protect grid inefficiencies. The PM declared a climate emergency on one hand and suppressed the climate solution on the other. This is the time to adopt a coherent, four-track strategy.

Accelerate the EV transition: With roughly 80pc of petroleum products consumed by transport, Pakistan's oil dependence is fundamentally a mobility problem. This is not an energy emergency, but a transport emergency wearing an energy mask. Pakistan's New Energy Vehicle Policy 2025-30 set in 2019 a target of 30pc electric vehicle sales by 2030, but it has barely moved. Worse, the government undermined its own policy objective by allowing commercial imports of used petrol cars.

The long-awaited revised NEV policy, under preparation for years, must be released immediately. Every week, it sits on a ministry table, Pakistan bleeds foreign exchange on petrol an electric fleet would not require. The world has changed, and we should now have stronger targets: at least 60pc elec-

tric sales by 2030, and public transport buses fully electrified in our five major cities within three years. China has surplus EV manufacturing capacity and competitive financing; a procurement deal through CPEC frameworks is viable and overdue. The NEV policy's charging station targets must be tripled if electrification is to be viable at scale.

Promote battery-backed solar: From under one gigawatt of solar panel imports in 2018 to over 50 GW by early 2026, Pakistan's energy transition is one of the world's fastest consumer-led transitions. It drove a 40pc drop in oil and gas imports between 2022 and 2024, avoided \$8-12 billion in import costs to date and could save a further \$6.3bn this year alone. Lifetime savings from current installed capacity could exceed \$100-180bn. That is a strategic asset of the first order. We know what the government did with it: it ignored that maintaining the preceding growth rate over five years would have taken installed capacity from around 33 GW to over 60 GW, potentially saving an additional \$30-40bn in import costs by 2030. You do not fix a structurally broken grid by slowing down the solution that is replacing it.

Solar's daytime strength is a liability at night without storage. I am among a growing number of people who have panels and batteries — riding out this crisis on

stored sunlight. Battery imports must reach 8.75 GWh by 2030; that projection must become a policy target, not a market accident. Zero-rate GST on lithium-ion systems, extend investment credits for battery installation, and deploy concessional credit to incentivise transition.

Adopt freight efficiency: Diesel is the backbone of Pakistan's freight economy, and trucking costs are feeding directly into food prices. Pakistan Railways freight handling has dwindled from 73pc to barely 2-3pc. It is not a railway failure but a deliberate, decades-long national logistics policy failure. It has left the country dependent on diesel trucks for every tonne that plies between its cities.

Pakistan's largest cities lie along a single north-south corridor perfectly suited to rail freight. The lingering ML-1 railway upgrade is the single CPEC project with the greatest bearing on freight costs, diesel displacement and carbon emissions. The Planning Commission projects it could boost GDP by 2-3pc and raise freight capacity up to 34m tonnes annually. Accelerate it now, mandate bulk commodity movement to rail, and redirect bilateral capital towards railway electrification. The correction is overdue.

Redirect carbon levy: Pakistan is already collecting a carbon levy and spending virtually none of it on

climate or energy security. Introduced at Rs2.50 per litre in the FY2025-26 budget, it increased to Rs5 the next year. The government collected a climate tax, spent it on general revenue, and then declared a climate emergency. The contradiction is staggering.

Pakistan should ringfence 100pc of carbon levy proceeds, govern it with a transparent oversight board and leverage it exclusively for i) strategic fuel reserves, ii) battery storage, iii) public transport electrification and iv) grid modernisation. That intention must become an earnest obligation, not gimmickry.

After all, Pakistan is not without agency. The solar revolution happened despite government policy, not because of it. Citizens made the rational choice when the state would not. The government's task now is to catch up and formalise, scale and finance what Pakistanis have already begun building for themselves. The PM declared a climate emergency in September. The world handed Pakistan an energy emergency in March. They are the same emergency. The next six months can be different only if the government treats low-carbon development not only as an environmental aspiration but also as an economic and national security imperative.

The writer is a climate change and sustainable development expert.



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