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'He's fantastic': Trump says Field Marshal Munir doing 'great job' on Iran talks



US President Donald Trump and Field Marshal Asim Munir (right) pose for a photo at the White House in Washington, on September 25, 2025. (File Photo)

Showering praise on Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir once again, US President Donald Trump on Tuesday called him a "fantastic" military officer.

In an interview with the New York Post, the US president said: "He [the field marshal] is fantastic, and therefore it's more likely that we go back there [Pakistan]."

The US president said that the next round of Iran talks could resume in Pakistan over the next two days.

Islamabad emerged as a key mediator in the US-Iran

Continued on page 12


PM Shehbaz meets Saudi crown prince in Jeddah



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif holds a meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman after reaching Jeddah on April 15.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman

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Subcontinent might see subdued monsoon as 'super El Niño' expected this year: weather expert

KARACHI: The subcontinent might witness a subdued monsoon this summer as the warming El Niño weather phenomenon is expected to form later this year, according to a weather expert.

"We are expecting El Niño in the coming summer and it is expected

Continued on page 12

Gulf Airlines Likely to Resume US-Pakistan Flights from April 18 After War Disruptions

Houston: Flights operated by major Gulf carriers between the United States and Pakistan are expected to resume normal operations from April 18, following a month-long suspension caused by the recent US-Iran conflict.

Operations of Emirates and Qatar

Continued on page 13

What is Trump-backed SAVE America Act and what could it mean for US vote?

Washington, DC – United States President Donald Trump has been unambiguous about his desire for Congress to pass the SAVE America Act, a sweeping voting law that supporters say will boost election security and that detractors say risks disenfranchising millions of voters.

The push has gained new urgency, with the US Senate continu-

ing debate on the law following a two-week recess.

The president has said the bill, which at its core would create higher documentation standards for proving citizenship when registering to vote and casting a ballot, is his top priority ahead of the midterm elections in November, which will determine

Continued on page 13

IMF advises Pakistan to phase out fuel subsidies, broaden tax base for medium-term sustainability

ISLAMABAD: Projecting Pakistan's fiscal deficit at around 3.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and a slightly declining primary surplus from 2.5pc, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has advised phasing out fiscally

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The Strait of Hormuz: Power, Fear, and the New Chess of the World Order

Imagine a scene. It is the dead of night. The sea, from above, appears perfectly still. But beneath its surface, fear and power, commerce and war and politics, are all moving together. The Strait of Hormuz is the name of that stillness — quiet, but lethal. On a map, it is merely a narrow channel between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman. In reality, it is the jugular vein of the world. The ships that pass through it carry more than oil. They carry the liquidity of the global economy, the confidence of markets, the domestic politics of nations, and the credibility of great powers. If one must know the conclusion now, it is this: the world has neither entered a complete war nor returned to a complete peace. The real crisis is that a passage whose openness has been a foundational principle of American strategy has become, today, a proving ground — tested between American power and Iranian patience, European hesitation and Russian opportunism, Chinese interest and the fear of the global market.

This is not the first time the Strait has reminded the world of its true importance. The events of April 1988 are still studied in American naval and military history as a decisive example. The USS Samuel B. Roberts struck an Iranian mine. That moment was not merely a maritime accident. It was a warning — one that showed Washington that the balance of power at sea is not maintained by aircraft carriers, missiles, and declarations alone. America responded with Operation Praying Mantis, targeting Iranian naval installations, platforms, and military assets, delivering the message that challenging American power in the waters of the Gulf is not a simple undertaking. But 1988 gave another lesson — perhaps a deeper one: that a mine is not merely a piece of steel and explosives. It is an instrument of fear, capable of paralyzing global commerce at the psychological level. Whether there is one mine in the water or ten, whether there is only a rumor of mines — ships change course, insurance premiums rise, markets shudder, and the confidence of the world fractures. The question worth asking now is whether Washington, having once learned that lesson, has walked back into the same trap.

Since the Carter Doctrine, American policy has held that keeping the Strait of Hormuz open is a non-negotiable component of American national interest. The reason is not merely that oil passes through it. It is that the power which controls the opening or closing of that passage holds its hand upon the nerve endings of the global economy. This is why the question of the Strait is not simply naval or military — it is an entire strategic philosophy. But today the question must be asked: if this principle was the foundational pillar of American strategy, why did America so readily enter a state of tension — or something close to war — whose first and most obvious consequence was to make that very passage unsafe, choked with fear and obstruction? Was the full picture of the outcome considered at the moment the first step was taken? Had Washington thought through what the next move would be if Iran turned its geography into a weapon? Or was force applied first, with strategy to be determined afterward?

The gravity of the present crisis lies precisely here — not only in the military dimension but as a profound strategic revelation. The American Navy is today preparing to contend with the threat of mines in this very region, but at a moment when it has drawn down its proven Avenger-class mine countermeasures capability and shifted reliance to the relatively newer and less battle-tested Littoral Combat Ship. On paper, this was called modernization. Unmanned systems, remote sensors, drones, modular packages — all of it sounds impressive, even elegant. But the sea does not open itself to PowerPoint presentations. The question that must be asked is whether being modern is always the same thing as being more effective.



By Raja Zahid Akhtar
Khanzada

Whether, in large-scale combat situations, it is the theoretically beautiful systems that succeed — or those that have passed through years of experience, continuous training, operational endurance, and proven performance. This is precisely the point on which American experts have warned for years: mine warfare is not a domain where technology alone is sufficient. It demands patience. It demands trust. It demands sustained large-scale operations. It demands a capacity that can eliminate not just the mine — but the fear of the mine.

In this context, the statements and operational signals coming from CENTCOM carry extraordinary weight. American military command has always projected the image that it possesses the capacity to take whatever steps are necessary to defend freedom of navigation and regional stability. But the distance between that claim and ground reality becomes visible when the problem is not merely stopping a single attack — but restoring confidence across an entire maritime environment. If CENTCOM says the passage can be made safe, the question is: to what extent, for how long, and at what cost? Can a few warships, a limited corridor, a handful of mine-clearing operations dissolve the psychological crisis that has already taken up residence in the minds of ship owners, insurance companies, purchasing states, and global markets? If the answer is no, then the Strait may be open on paper while remaining closed in reality.

This is precisely why the reference to 1988 is not merely a historical memory but a key to understanding the present crisis. Even then, America demonstrated military superiority — and yet eliminating the fear at sea proved a far more complex undertaking than any military response. Today the situation is still more precarious, because the world's energy markets are far more deeply interconnected, insurance far more sensitive, supply chains far more fragile, and fear travels far more quickly into global prices than it did before. When the head of the International Energy Agency warns that the present crisis could prove more severe than the energy shocks of 1973, 1979, and 2022 combined, that is not an ordinary statement. It means that this time the problem is not merely a supply shock — it is the uncertainty of the passage itself. The question is no longer where the oil will come from. The question is whether it can pass through safely at all.

America's position is its own, and it is completely clear. Washington says Iran is holding global commerce hostage, refusing flexibility on the nuclear question, and converting the Strait of Hormuz into a weapon. In the American view, naval blockades, mine clearance, demonstrations of force, and firm responses are necessary precisely so that freedom of navigation is preserved and a regional power cannot hold the global economy as ransom. But Iran's position is equally unequivocal. From Tehran's perspective, it is defending its

geography, its sovereignty, and its strategic interests. Iran argues that America uses the language of negotiations to impose its own conditions, shifts the framework at will, and then seeks to extract results through military pressure. The truth stands between these two narratives — on one side, America, which considers itself the guardian of the global order; on the other, Iran, which has converted its geography into its greatest bargaining power.

And this is precisely where the real complexity begins — because a war fought on water is never only a naval war. The mine here is not merely a military weapon. It is a psychological instrument. A single mine's detonation damages one ship, but its news travels through the world's markets, insurance rates, shipping routes, and governmental decisions like an electric current. So when America says it will open the passage, the real question is not whether it can push a few ships through. The real question is whether it can convince every ship owner, every insurance company, every purchasing state that next week, next month, or tomorrow night, no new mine, no new threat, no new warning will surface. If it cannot, then the victory will be partial, not complete.

This is why many analysts are raising the question of whether America looked at this conflict from the point of entry rather than the point of outcome. Airstrikes, blockades, naval power — all of these can generate pressure, but did they reckon with the foundational reality that Iran's most effective response is perhaps not its air force or its missiles, but its geography? Iran has the Strait. It has time. It has endurance. And now, as the balance of power among great powers shifts, it may find itself with even more political room to maneuver. America has power — but does it have the same patience? Does it have the same diplomatic flexibility? Does it have the kind of alliance-building that, in situations like this, leaves a more enduring impression than military force alone?

Here the role of Britain and Europe becomes critically important. The British Prime Minister's current posture has become a kind of emblem of this entire crisis. He is neither aligning fully with America nor maintaining complete distance from it. The apparent effort to convene forty nations, or to move toward a broader diplomatic framework, signals that Europe does not wish to leave this crisis entirely to American or Iranian logic. This is why the question being raised again and again among global analysts is whether this represents a coordinated strategy — America applying pressure while Europe extends olive branches — or whether a genuine fracture has opened within the Western alliance. Some circles read it as a good cop, bad cop arrangement. Others call it real disagreement. And a third view — perhaps the most realistic — is that the crisis is being managed at just enough of a distance that a way back remains possible.

Russia's role is no less significant. Moscow has neither opposed American action in terms that would constitute direct confrontation, nor offered support that would place it in America's column. Most global analysts read this as an opportunistic posture. In their view, Moscow wants America further entangled in the Middle East — under pressure on both the energy and security fronts — while Russia consolidates relatively stronger positions in its other strategic theaters. China's situation is still more sensitive. For Beijing, the Strait of Hormuz is not merely a regional dispute but the passage through which its energy, its industry, and the future momentum of its economy must flow. If Beijing senses that Washington intends to establish long-term dominance over this chokepoint, it will not remain silent. This is why the crisis is no longer being read merely as American-Iranian tension, but as a broader global chess match in which every power maintains its own separate account.

The scene along the southern Lebanese border

adds another bitter truth to this entire picture. The doors of empty houses swing in the wind. Streets are deserted. Villages have fallen silent. Nearly a million people have been displaced from their homes. International condemnation followed. Concern was expressed. Human rights organizations spoke. But the ground reality did not change. This reminds us that modern crises never unfold on a single front. When the world's gaze is fixed on Hormuz, on oil, on the great game of power — at that very moment, on the ground, human geography is being quietly, irrevocably altered. Where populations cease to exist, control shifts of its own accord. This is the silent strategy that the world sees but rarely manages to stop in time.

If one must give this entire crisis a single defining description, it is a struggle unfolding on three levels. On the first level, America and Iran face each other directly. On the second, Russia, China, and the other great powers are calculating their own interests. On the third, Europe and other middle actors are attempting to keep the fire from becoming a full-scale war. And at the center of it all, the most powerful element of all is fear. Fear in the sea. Fear in the market. Fear in the voter. Fear in leadership itself.

For America, the political cost at home may also be rising. Gasoline prices climb, inflation bears down, the voter grows restless, and every foreign crisis eventually enters domestic politics. This is the precise moment at which the real definition of power reveals itself. Real success is not measured in how much damage you have inflicted on your adversary. It is measured in whether you have opened the passage, restored confidence, contained the threat, and left your credibility intact and believable. If the Strait is still gripped by fear — if Iran still holds its fundamental bargaining power — if China is still present in the picture — if the allies are not unified — if oil remains expensive — if the navy is mired in the slow and complex challenge of mine warfare — then what remains of the definition of victory?

The realistic scenario for the future is not that the Strait of Hormuz will be completely sealed shut, nor that it will return immediately to normal. The more probable outcome is that it becomes an expensive, limited, fearful corridor that opens intermittently. Ships will pass, but at greater cost. Insurance will rise. Security will be heightened. Political risk will be embedded in every transaction. If America holds to its current hard line, the danger of limited naval conflict may increase. If diplomacy is revived, a transitional accommodation is possible — but it will not come through the force of arms alone. It will require trust, mediation, and a genuinely multilateral framework in which Europe, the Gulf states, perhaps Oman, perhaps Pakistan, and possibly other behind-the-scenes actors each contribute their part.

This is the essence of the entire story. The Strait of Hormuz is no longer merely a waterway. It has become a mirror — reflecting American strategic calculation, Iranian endurance, European arithmetic, Russian opportunism, Chinese interest, naval power, the psychological weight of mines, the fragility of global commerce, and a crisis of political credibility. The question now is not only how many mines are there. The question is how much fear is there. How much diplomacy remains. How much leadership remains. And perhaps the largest question of all: does America still believe that every crisis can be opened with military force — or is it entering a moment in which it must acknowledge that some wars become a strategic trap at the very instant they begin?

If one last question could be put to any honest analyst today, it would perhaps be this: will it truly be naval power that opens the Strait of Hormuz — or will what is ultimately required to open it be the very thing America has called its greatest strength for decades? That is to say: credibility.

It Is Now Time to Restructure the United Nations

As failed Iran-US talks expose structural imbalances, growing calls demand an end to veto power and a shift toward majority-based global decision-making

The 21-hour-long negotiations between Iran and the United States, with Pakistan's mediation, have concluded without any outcome.

We extend our best wishes that any future progress leads to peace, stability, and the welfare of humanity in the Middle East.

History depicts that most states and nations tend to follow the rules set by the powerful.

However, independent nations do not compromise on their identity and existence. From a realistic perspective, competition always occurs between equals. In the world of sports, it is a well-established principle that a "lightweight" boxer does not compete against a "heavyweight." In terms of military and economic might, there is a clear disparity between Iran and the United States.

Nevertheless, in recent conflicts, Iran has surprised the world with its resistance against a superpower and its allies. Realism and pragmatism demand that we acknowledge the fact that negotiations between the powerful and the weak are never conducted on equal footing. When a "heavy-



**BY MQM Founder:
Altaf Hussain**

weight" party pressures the other to accept its terms and compels it to abandon its demands, negotiations become nothing more than one-sided dictation.

A similar situation appeared to dominate the Iran-US talks. The United Nations was established in 1945 precisely to eliminate such imbalances of power.

The global community pledged that a state, irrespective of its size and status, would have its sovereignty protected, and justice would be ensured in cases of aggression. It was agreed that the majority decision in the General Assembly would prevail. Unfortunately, by granting veto power to the five permanent members of the Security Council, this entire democratic process was effectively taken hostage.

Whenever the General Assembly passes a resolution against injustice, it can be vetoed by a single powerful country for its own interests. Does this not mean that the current structure of the Security Council weakens nations and makes them subordinate to a few powerful states?

From the Second World War to the present day, the United Nations has failed to deliver justice in major conflicts. An institution that cannot provide justice becomes nothing more than a lifeless structure.

The bitter reality today is that, in its current form, the United Nations lacks the capacity to provide relief to oppressed nations. Therefore, the time has come to restructure the United Nations, abolish the

unjust privilege of veto power, and transfer decision-making authority to a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly.

Just as a country's judiciary becomes meaningless if it fails to deliver justice, similarly, if the international community does not establish a system where both the powerful and the weak are treated equally, global peace will remain a dream. Human nature harbors an immense greed for power and wealth.

If this greed is not restrained by rules, regulations, and moral education, it turns into a destructive force that crushes all laws and pursues its interests by disregarding international norms and principles — a cost that everyone ultimately pays.

Therefore, all democratic and humanity-loving nations that respect human rights must unite against such forces. Today, there is a need for people across the world — regardless of religion, belief, or region — to rise above boundaries and unite for equal justice and equality. We must become a global voice against forces that act arbitrarily, a voice that believes solely in respect for humanity and equality. Altaf Hussain

A Shift No One Expected

Every so often, geopolitics strips away its usual noise and shows something simpler, almost uncomfortable in its clarity.

This is one of those moments.

A fragile ceasefire holds—uneasily—between Iran, the United States, and Israel. It could last. It could collapse tomorrow. Much depends on how each side reads the other, and how quickly miscalculation creeps in.

Into this uncertain pause, Pakistan has stepped forward as a possible mediator. Not embraced, not entirely trusted—but accepted enough to be part of the conversation.

India, meanwhile, finds itself at a distance. It is larger, louder on the global stage, and more economically powerful. Yet in this moment, it is not central.

It is a reminder that in diplomacy, influence does not always follow size. It follows position.

Pakistan: Staying in the Room

Pakistan's role is not built on power. It is built on access. It maintains ties with Iran. It continues to engage the United States. It remains close to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. And it deepens its long-term partnership with China.

None of these fits neatly into a single camp. That is precisely the point.

Pakistan is not choosing sides so much as it is staying connected to all of them.



By Hasnain Walji, Ph.D.

This kind of balancing act is less about principle and more about survival. It reflects a world where countries do not have the luxury of clean alignments.

What emerges is a kind of working neutrality. Not pure. Not perfect. But sufficient.

As Jacob Bercovitch argued, mediators are rarely fully neutral. They are simply acceptable enough to all sides to keep the conversation going.

Right now, Pakistan seems to fit that role.

It does not control the outcome. But it can speak to everyone without being shut out. That alone gives it relevance.

If it can sustain this, the payoff could be long-term: a reputation for being able to operate across divides when others cannot.

But the margin for error is thin. One perceived shift, one misread signal, and that access could disappear quickly.

India: Strength, with Limits

India's position is different. Its ties with the United States are deepening. Its relationship with Israel is visible and growing. These are strategic choices, and they come with real benefits—economic, technological, and military.

But they also shape how India is seen.

In a moment that calls for balance, India is viewed as aligned. And in mediation, perception matters more than intention.

India remains a global player. Its rise is real. Its influence, in many arenas, is expanding. But influence is not a single, transferable asset. It does not apply equally in every situation.

Here, India is present, but not pivotal. It is watching closely. Commenting. Reacting. But not shaping the space where negotiation might happen.

When Position Beats Power

There is a quiet irony in all of this. India

has the larger economy. The broader reach. The stronger global standing.

Pakistan has fewer advantages. More constraints. Less room to maneuver. And yet, in this moment, Pakistan's flexibility matters more than India's strength.

Because geopolitics does not always reward the most powerful actor. It rewards the one best placed to act.

Pakistan's ambiguity becomes an advantage. India's clarity becomes a constraint.

A Narrow Window

It is too early to say whether this moment will last. Pakistan's role could fade as quickly as it emerged. Or it could grow into something more enduring—a habit of being present when others cannot be.

That will depend on discipline, restraint, and a bit of luck.

For India, the question is longer-term. As it continues to expand its global influence, it will have to decide how much flexibility it is willing to trade for alignment.

For now, the ceasefire holds.

That is not peace. It is something smaller. More fragile. But in a world where conflicts escalate easily and de-escalate rarely, even the ability to keep a conversation alive counts for something.

Not much. But not nothing either.

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‘WHEN DIALOGUE BEGINS, HOPE FOLLOWS’ Pakistan’s Role in Bridging Global Divides.

SYED FERAZ AHMED

Qur’an; Surah Al-Hujurat (49:9)
reminds us:فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ
يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ“Make peace between them with
justice, and be fair. Indeed, Allah
loves those who are just.”

In a world often shaped by conflict and competing interests, moments of dialogue and reconciliation stand out as powerful signs of hope. The recent diplomatic engagement in Islamabad, where Pakistan facilitated talks between the United States and Iran, represents one such moment.

These discussions were historic. For the first time in decades, both nations came face-to-face for direct negotiations, hosted and mediated by Pakistan. Despite long hours of dia-

logue, no final agreement was reached.

However, the absence of an immediate breakthrough does not diminish the importance of the effort itself.

Bringing together two nations with deep mistrust and long standing conflict is never simple. It requires patience, neutrality, and a sincere intention to reduce tensions. Pakistan, under the leadership of Shehbaz Sharif, along with his diplomatic and security team, played a central role in creating an environment where dialogue could take place. Their efforts also contributed to initiating a fragile ceasefire and opening the door for further negotiations.

Some voices, however, have

been quick to criticize the outcome, questioning the effectiveness of the talks or Pakistan’s role as a facilitator. It is important to understand that peace processes do not yield instant results; they are gradual journeys. When two opposing sides with complex differences come together after years of conflict, even that first step represents meaningful progress.

Instead of placing blame on the facilitator, critics should recognize the courage and importance of initiating dialogue. The role of leadership, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and his team, is not to guarantee immediate success but to make peace possible. Constructive engagement, patience, and sustained effort are what ultimately lead to lasting solutions.

Looking at the broader picture, one must ask; should such efforts be measured only in terms of economic or political gain? The answer is no. Peace is not a transaction but it is a responsibility. When a nation chooses to bring others together for dialogue, it reflects moral leadership and a commitment to humanity beyond self-interest.

In today’s world, economic strength alone cannot ensure stability or harmony.

True and lasting progress depends on trust, justice, and cooperation. Pakistan’s role in these negotiations sends a strong and positive message to the world; even in times of division, dialogue is always possible.

The outcome of one meeting

does not define the future. What truly matters is that communication has begun, doors have opened, and a path, however challenging, has been created toward peace.

Pakistan’s intentions, as demonstrated through these efforts, reflect a desire to promote understanding rather than conflict. This approach builds credibility and highlights the importance of mediation in resolving global challenges.

In the end, success should not be measured only by signed agreements, but by the willingness to keep talking. Every step toward dialogue is a step away from war.

May peace, justice, and wisdom guide all nations, and may such efforts lead to a more stable and harmonious world.

Back to the table?

Some media reports suggest that there is a strong possibility of a second round of meetings.

Zahid Hussain

PRESIDENT Donald Trump’s move to blockade all Iranian shipments in and out of the Strait of Hormuz poses a serious threat to the fragile ceasefire and may jeopardise any potential for further negotiations between Washington and Tehran. This decision was made just hours after high-level talks in Islamabad that, although not resulting in any formal agreement, had left the door open for continued discussions. Through the blockade, Trump wants to force Iran to accept the terms presented by American Vice-President J.D. Vance during last weekend’s talks in Islamabad.

However, this escalatory action to restrict access to the critical waterway may not achieve what the US six-week military campaign failed to accomplish. Iran has threatened to resume attacks on American military assets in the Gulf if the naval embargo is not lifted, rendering the situation more volatile. The US threat to cut off Iran’s oil exports could draw other countries, both from the region and beyond, into the conflict.

This development is seen as a setback to the efforts made by Pakistan and other regional nations to prevent the derailment of the fragile dialogue process. Trump’s gunboat diplomacy once again put the world on edge. There is, however, still some hope that he will walk back from the brink and return to the negotiating table in the face of increasing international and domestic pressure. Indeed, he hinted as much yesterday, saying that “something could be happening over the next two days, and we’re more inclined to go there [Pakistan]”.

It was indeed a historic moment last week when American and Iranian officials met in Islamabad at practically the highest level for the first time since 1979. Despite the talks taking place under the shadow of war and a persistent trust deficit, the 21-hour marathon discussions did break the ice, although no agreement was reached. These were the most substantive talks the two sides had held in the past 47 years, and reportedly covered a wide range of issues, but some sticking points left the negotiations inconclusive.

It was certainly unrealistic to expect the two warring sides to

reach a comprehensive peace deal in one sitting at the first meeting. However, there was hope that they would at least agree to extend the ceasefire and establish a framework for further negotiations. Unfortunately, this did not happen, creating an air of uncertainty.

According to reports by the international media, two major sticking points have caused a deadlock in negotiations: Iran’s nuclear programme and control over the Strait of Hormuz. The US reportedly insisted on a suspension of all nuclear activities, including a ban on enrichment by Iran for at least 20 years.

Tehran has long denied seeking a nuclear weapon, but is unwilling to relinquish its rights to enrichment below weapons-grade level under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, of which it is a signatory. This issue has been a long-standing point of dispute, even as Iran has shown some flexibility. Moreover, the US has demanded that Iran surrender all its enriched uranium. Iran has also expressed reservations about America’s insistence on shipping its stockpile of fuel out of the country, which remains a central point of contention.

Interestingly, President Trump had earlier claimed that the American and Israeli bombings last June had completely destroyed Iran’s nuclear facilities, asserting that the enriched uranium was buried beneath the debris of these destroyed sites. The talks in Islamabad stalled due to the US position of ‘take it or leave it’.

It was apparent that Iran had demonstrated considerable flexibility. Iran reiterated its long-standing position on the nuclear issue, but this was seemingly insufficient for the Trump administration. Iranian officials attributed the deadlock to the hard-line stance of the US and the deep trust deficit. However, Tehran says it remains open to further negotiations regarding the nuclear issue.

The restoration of free passage in the Strait of Hormuz was another contentious issue that prevented an agreement. Iran is unwilling to relinquish control over these waterways, a position unacceptable not only to the US but also to regional and other countries which demand open passage. These were issues that

needed to be resolved through negotiations to end the war.

Yet, no one anticipated that the American president, despite his unpredictability, would take such a drastic step, which is a declaration of war under international law. The naval blockade goes against the interests of the international community as it affects all maritime traffic entering and exiting Iranian ports. Among the countries that would be most affected by the blockade is China, which is the biggest importer of oil from Iran. Interestingly, last month, Trump eased sanctions on Iran’s oil exports to stabilise international oil prices. His recent reversal has contributed to rising oil prices.

China has strongly condemned the US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, labelling it “irresponsible and dangerous”. In a separate statement, President Xi Jinping expressed deep concern over the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, stating, “We cannot allow the world to revert to the law of the jungle.” It, however, remains to be seen how China and other oil-importing countries will respond to any interception of their shipments by the American navy. Any use of force by the latter in the region could trigger a wider conflict.

Trump’s actions have also drawn criticism from US allies, increasing America’s isolation, with only Israel supporting the blockade. Meanwhile, France and Britain have called a summit of around 40 nations this week to discuss efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, coinciding with the US blockade announcement.

Amid escalating tensions, some media reports suggest that there is a strong possibility of a second round of meetings between Iran and the US next week. American officials have indicated that discussions are underway to resume talks, with Pakistan continuing its role as mediator. Last weekend’s talks in Islamabad elevated the country’s diplomatic profile as a peacemaker. However, it’s unclear whether Islamabad will host the second round of discussions. Yet, Pakistan’s role as an honest broker is likely to continue. It’s a high point in the country’s peace diplomacy.

The writer is an author and journalist.

Return of the rising curve

Pakistan tops the Global Terrorism Index 2026, but the ranking tells a deeper story than numbers alone

By Manzar Zaidi

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI), published annually by the Institute for Economics & Peace, has over time established itself as one of the most widely referenced composite measures of terrorism worldwide. It does not simply count incidents; it synthesises multiple indicators—number of attacks, fatalities, injuries, and hostage-taking—into a single score that reflects both the scale and the impact of terrorism within a country. By aggregating longitudinal data and applying a weighted methodology, the GTI offers a structured way of understanding not just where terrorism occurs, but how it evolves, concentrates, and transforms across different contexts.

The Index is not designed to capture intent, ideology, or political narratives. It is an impact-based instrument. Its rankings, therefore, should be read less as judgments and more as analytical markers indicating where the cumulative effects of terrorism are most pronounced at a given point in time. It is within this framework that Pakistan's position at number one in the Global Terrorism Index 2026 must be understood.

For the first time since the Index's inception, Pakistan records the highest global score—8.574—placing it as the most terrorism-impacted country in the world. This position follows a gradual upward movement in recent years, with Pakistan ranked second in 2024 and showing a consistent presence among the top 10 countries since the Index began. The current ranking is therefore not an isolated outcome; it reflects a trajectory that has been building over time.

The underlying data provides important context. In 2025, Pakistan recorded 1,139 deaths linked to terrorism, representing an increase of approximately six percent from the previous year. The total number of incidents stood at 1,045, slightly lower than the 1,098 recorded in 2024. At the same time, hostage-taking rose sharply to 655 cases, compared to just 101 in the previous year. This divergence between incident frequency and outcome severity is one of the most analytically significant features of the current dataset.

A purely quantitative reading might suggest relative stability in the number of attacks. However, a closer examination reveals that attacks are becoming more lethal and more strategically structured. The increase in fatalities, coupled with the dramatic rise in hostage-taking, indicates a shift toward operations that are designed to maximise impact rather than volume. This reflects a broader pattern in contemporary terrorism, where the effectiveness of an attack is increasingly measured by its strategic consequences rather than its numerical frequency.

Pakistan's trajectory within the GTI reinforces this interpretation. Historically, the country experienced a period of intense violence between 2007 and 2013, during which it consistently ranked among the most affected globally. This was followed by a notable decline between 2014 and 2019, driven by sustained counterterrorism operations and institutional coordination. However, the period since 2020 shows a reversal of that trend. By 2025, Pakistan was experiencing six times as many terrorist incidents as it did in 2020, and deaths had reached their highest level since 2013.

Over a longer time horizon, the cumulative impact is equally instructive. Since 2007, Pakistan has recorded 17,668 deaths



from terrorism, with the most recent years showing a consistent upward trend following the earlier decline. This pattern suggests that while reductions in violence have been achieved in the past, maintaining those reductions within a changing operational and regional environment remains a complex challenge.

The geographic distribution of terrorism within Pakistan adds another layer of analytical clarity. Violence is highly concentrated in the western border provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which together account for over 74 percent of attacks and approximately 67 percent of deaths. These figures point to a structurally defined pattern rather than a diffuse national spread. The concentration aligns closely with the Pakistan–Afghanistan border, a region characterised by difficult terrain, porous crossings, and Afghanistan now known to be a sanctuary for terrorist groups operating against Pakistan.

The GTI's broader analysis of borderlands further reinforces this point. Globally, 41 percent of terrorist attacks occur within 50 km of an international border, and 64 percent within 100 km. The Pakistan–Afghanistan frontier exemplifies this dynamic, functioning as a space where terrorist groups are able to exploit both geography and political complexity to maintain operational mobility.

Within this environment, Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerges as the dominant actor. The group is responsible for 56 percent of all terrorism-related deaths in Pakistan in 2025, making it the single most significant contributor to the country's GTI score. The TTP carried out 595 attacks in 2025, resulting in 637 deaths—the highest level of activity attributed to the group in over a decade.

Equally important is the nature of these operations. Armed attacks account for approximately 50 percent of TTP activity, followed by bombings at 32 percent, with smaller but notable proportions involving assassinations and hostage-taking. The group has also introduced new tactics, including the use of drone technology for targeted attacks, indicating an evolution in tactics, though not necessarily in capability. At the same time, its targeting patterns have shifted. Security forces—both military and police—now represent the primary targets, accounting for a substantial proportion of fatalities. This reflects a strategic focus on institutional disruption rather than indiscriminate violence.

Parallel to the TTP's dominance is the role of the Balochistan Liberation Army

(BLA), which, while less active in terms of frequency, has demonstrated the capacity for high-impact operations. The Jaffar Express incident, involving the seizure of a passenger train and the taking of 442 hostages, stands as one of the most significant terrorist events in Pakistan in recent years. The BLA's focus on infrastructure, particularly projects linked to international investment, introduces an additional dimension to the threat environment, connecting internal security dynamics with broader economic and geopolitical considerations.

The regional context, particularly developments in Afghanistan, is central to understanding these patterns. The return of the Taliban to power in 2021 has been identified as a key structural driver of increased militant activity in Pakistan. The shift in governance has altered the operational landscape, providing militant groups with expanded space and facilitating cross-border movement. Efforts at diplomatic engagement have not yet produced a stable framework for cooperation, and tensions between the two countries continue to shape the security environment.

At the same time, developments along Pakistan's eastern border have added further complexity. The escalation of tensions with India in 2025 has created a multi-layered security context in which resources and strategic focus must be distributed across multiple fronts. This convergence of internal and external pressures underscores the interconnected nature of Pakistan's current security challenges.

Pakistan's response to these dynamics has included sustained military operations, border management initiatives, and national-level counterterrorism strategies such as Operation Azm-e-Istehkam. These measures reflect a continued commitment to addressing immediate threats. The GTI assessment notes that they have had an impact, but more needs to be done. This observation points not to a lack of effort, but to the broader scope of factors that influence terrorism outcomes.

The index identifies several structural drivers globally which shape the environment in which terrorist groups operate, influencing both their capacity and their resilience. These include governance limitations in peripheral regions, economic variability, political continuity, and the condition of regional relationships. However, it is equally important to recognise the methodological boundaries of the Global Terrorism Index itself. As an impact-based tool, the GTI does not make value judgments or attribute causation in explicit political terms.

It measures outcomes rather than assigning responsibility. Within this framework, one of the most prominent contextual factors—namely the availability of cross-border terrorist sanctuary in Afghanistan—does not appear as a quantified variable in the Index, yet its influence is difficult to overlook when examining the data in totality.

Since 2021, following the change in governance in Afghanistan, there has been a marked expansion in the operational space available to groups such as the TTP. The GTI itself notes that the Taliban's return to power provided terrorist groups with safe haven, resources, and enhanced operational reach, contributing to the observed increase in cross-border activity and the resurgence of attacks within Pakistan. While the index does not explicitly characterise Afghanistan as a terrorist sanctuary—consistent with its analytical design—the correlation between these developments and the subsequent escalation in terrorist activity is clearly evidenced in the data trends, including the six-fold rise in incidents since 2020 and the sustained increase in fatalities.

This dynamic has also contributed to a visible escalation in tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, particularly on the question of cross-border terrorism. Pakistan has repeatedly raised concerns regarding the presence of TTP elements operating from Afghan territory, while the Afghan authorities have publicly rejected these assertions. The GTI documents this pattern of accusation and denial, alongside the failure of multiple rounds of engagement aimed at resolving the issue. The result has been a progressively strained bilateral relationship, with cross-border incidents, security responses, and diplomatic friction reinforcing each other. In analytical terms, this represents not only a security challenge but a regional coordination deficit where the absence of a shared framework for managing terrorist movement continues to shape the operating environment in which these groups sustain and expand their activities.

In interpreting Pakistan's position on the Global Terrorism Index, it is, therefore, important to maintain analytical precision. The ranking reflects a specific configuration of variables at a particular point in time. It does not define permanence, nor does it negate the progress achieved in earlier periods. Rather, it highlights the evolving nature of the challenge and the need for responses that are aligned with that evolution.

Pakistan's experience over the past decade demonstrates that reductions in terrorism are achievable through coordinated and sustained effort. The current phase suggests that maintaining those reductions requires an equally sustained alignment of strategies—operational, institutional, economic, and diplomatic. The GTI, in this sense, serves not only as a measure of impact, but as a framework for understanding the conditions under which that impact can be reduced.

Ultimately, the significance of the Global Terrorism Index lies in its ability to translate complex patterns into a form that can inform policy and analysis. Pakistan's position within that Index is a reflection of both challenge and capacity. It is an indication of where pressures have converged, but also of where responses can be refined. The trajectory it captures is not fixed. It remains, as it has always been, subject to the decisions and dynamics that shape the broader security environment.

The writer is a security analyst.

Pakistan growth seen at 4.5% in FY2027: ADB

Flags recovery but warns inflation may rise to 6.5% by FY2027 amid global uncertainty, Middle East tensions

Pakistan's economy is expected to grow by 3.5% in fiscal year 2026 and 4.5% in FY2027, as a recovery in manufacturing and rising investment sustain momentum following stabilisation in FY2025, the Asian Development Bank said.

In its Asian Development Outlook, April 2026, the bank said economic growth had already strengthened to 3.1% in FY2025, supported by tight macroeconomic policies and progress on reforms.

"Pakistan's economy has stabilised and begun to show stronger momentum, supported by progress in implementing key economic reforms amid a challenging global environ-



ment," said ADB Country Director Emma Fan.

"Growth is expected to continue in 2026 and 2027, but downside risks are significant. Sustained reform efforts are critical to preserve the growth momentum and bolster fiscal and external buffers against global shocks."

The report warned, however, that inflation is projected to rise to 6.4% in FY2026 and 6.5% in FY2027, driven by higher global oil prices and trade disruptions linked to tensions in the Middle East. Oil and gas imports form a significant portion of Pakistan's import bill, making the economy vulnerable to external shocks.

A prolonged Middle East conflict could further strain the outlook by increasing energy and fertiliser costs, weakening agricultural and industrial output, reducing remittances and widening the current account deficit, it noted.

The ADB said growth in FY2026 would be supported by a rebound in private-sector invest-

ment, aided by reform progress and a stable foreign exchange market.

Economic activity in industry and services is also expected to benefit from cautious monetary easing, while construction will be supported by fiscal incentives in the FY2026 budget and post-flood reconstruction efforts.

Despite recent gains, the bank cautioned that Pakistan's economic outlook remains exposed to global uncertainty, with risks of renewed inflationary, fiscal and external pressures. It stressed that prudent macroeconomic management and sustained structural reforms would be key to ensuring durable and inclusive growth.

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For Fort Bend County Treasurer



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For Fort Bend County Treasurer



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- Master's Degree in Criminal Justice
- Graduate of the University of Houston.

- BUSINESS EXPERTISE -

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

- Oversaw financial management, budgeting, payroll and Human Resources.
- Supported court and jury administration to ensure responsible, transparent government operations.

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- Prepared to lead with private and public sector experience.
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South Asian Fans Turn Out in Force for Asim Azhar at Rehan Siddiqui's Houston Event

The internationally acclaimed promoter brought together fans and media for a vibrant concert and meet-and-greet, marking the start of a six-week, 20-show U.S. tour.



NITROUS OXIDE

found effective as major depression treatment

Researchers at the University of Birmingham in England reported Sunday that nitrous oxide may prove an effective treatment for people with major depressive disorder, and for whom other treatment options have failed.

Results of a new study show that patients with major depressive disorder who have not been helped by antidepressants could benefit from short-term use of nitrous oxide, researchers announced Sunday.

The study, conducted by the University of Birmingham and published in the journal *eBioMedicine* "has assessed the best available clinical information to show how clinically administered nitrous oxide can offer fast-acting depressive symptom relief for adults with major depressive and treatment-resistant depression," a press release said.

Researchers found in three trials that a single treatment of inhaled clinical nitrous oxide with a 50% concentration rate produced a rapid and significant drop in depressive symptoms within 24 hours, though the results did not sustain for a week, the press release said.

However, repeated treatments over several weeks showed longer lasting effectiveness, which suggested that multiple, ongoing treatments may be required to achieve clinical effectiveness and long-term relief from depressive symptoms, researchers said.

Nitrous oxide is thought to target the brain's glutamate receptors in the same way that the fast-acting drug ketamine does. Ketamine, which is administered clinically, is also used to treat depression by temporarily altering brain chemistry.

A limited number of existing trials in the study caused variability in how depressive symptoms were measured and reported, doctors acknowledged. They stressed the need for more research and additional clinical trials.

Researchers are preparing the first trial in England's National Health Service to determine whether the treatment will be a viable, long-term option for people with major depressive disorder.

"The findings will help determine how nitrous oxide could be integrated into NHS care and may expand the range of innovative options available for patients who have not benefited from standard approaches," the release said.

The team also studied the potential side effects of nitrous oxide treatment, and found their likelihood increased at concentrations above 50%.



Toss Your Milk Immediately If You Notice This

They're both full of antioxidants, but is one better than the other?

That same study found that—thanks in part to its anti-inflammatory benefits—lycopene can help prevent cancer, heart disease and other inflammatory diseases. Another study found that tomato intake significantly lowered levels of one inflammatory marker, TNF-alpha, but had no meaningful effect on two others.⁵ So, tomatoes can certainly help reduce inflammation, but there's more to be learned about how much.

How Beets Affect Inflammation

Nothing beats beets, right? Turns out, that saying is pretty appropriate when you're talking about inflammation. "This tasty root vegetable is full of the anti-inflammatory agents called betalains, the pigment that gives beets their deep, rich and beautiful color," says Jamie Baham, M.S., RDN, LD. These are potent antioxidants that stave off inflammation, according to a plethora of research.

Beets are also rich in dietary nitrates, which increase blood nitric oxide levels and can help to reduce inflammation, lower blood pressure and improve vascular function, says Gaw. More and more research is actually exploring how beets may help improve athletes' performance through their anti-inflammatory effects. "According to a recent study, two weeks of beetroot supplementation helped to reduce exercise-induced inflammation in athletes," says Gaw.

Tomatoes vs. Beets: Which Is Better for Inflammation?

As antioxidant-rich foods, tomatoes and beets are both worth eating in an anti-inflammatory diet. "Beets and tomatoes provide different antioxidants and benefits," says Gaw. Beets fight inflammation through betalains and nitrates—antioxidants that lower inflammation and support heart health. If you have high blood pressure, beets are probably your best bet. Their nitrates are especially helpful at dilating blood vessels to bring down your blood pressure.⁷ That said, tomatoes are rich in lycopene, a different—yet still powerful—antioxidant for lowering inflammation.

"A diet with variety is best for optimal nutrition," says Gaw. Baham agrees, saying, "Both tomatoes and beets are excellent additions to a healthy diet." So don't get tunnel vision on either one of these foods. Add both beets and tomatoes to your diet for a variety of inflammation-fighting nutrients.

Other Tips for Reducing Inflammation

If you're looking for other ways to make your diet more anti-inflammatory, try these dietitian-approved tips:

Limit added sugar. "Foods containing excess refined sugar typically increase inflammation," says Baham. In the U.S., most of our added sugar intake comes from sugar-sweetened beverages, desserts and sweet snacks.¹⁰ So, eat these foods in moderation and lean more heavily on natural sugars when you're craving something sweet. Beets, for example, have natural sugars, making them an excellent way to enjoy a little sweetness without added sugars.

Eat balanced meals. To help reduce your added sugar intake, Baham suggests focusing on eating regular, balanced meals. "When a meal is missed, it's hard to be mindful of refined sugar portion sizes," she says. Aim to include a combo of whole grains, lean protein, healthy fat, fruits and veggies. Each of these food groups provides different nutrients to keep your body healthy and inflammation in check.

Add flavor with herbs and spices. Herbs and spices aren't just for adding flavor—they also add anti-inflammatory compounds to your food.¹² More flavor from herbs and spices may also mean you need less salt. Excess sodium intake is linked with greater levels of inflammation, so replacing salt with herbs and spices is a double win.

Embrace plant proteins. Eating too much red and processed meat, in particular, is linked with higher levels of inflammation. On the other hand, plant proteins like legumes, nuts, seeds and soy products are central to anti-inflammatory diets. They're full of antioxidants and other plant compounds shown to lower levels of inflammatory markers in the body.

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Eating your fruits and veggies is some of the oldest nutrition advice in the book for a reason. These foods are packed with antioxidants and other plant compounds that help stave off inflammation. For the most benefits, aim for bright-colored fruits and vegetables that span the whole rainbow.



Subcontinent might see subdued monsoon as 'super El Niño' expected this year: weather expert

Continued from front page

to become 'super El Niño' by the end of August to September," Pakistan Meteorological Department's (PMD) spokesperson Anjum Nazir Zaigham told Dawn.

He noted that El Niño suppresses the summer monsoon in the subcontinent.

"If super El Niño forms, then 2027 might be the warmest year in records," Zaigham added.

El Niño and its cooler sister La Niña are climate patterns in the Pacific Ocean that can affect weather worldwide.

El Niño and La Niña events occur every two to seven years, on average, but they do not occur on a regular schedule, according to the United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

In a report published yesterday, The Guardian noted, "A strong El Niño would put 2027 in the running to break global heat records, and could produce a series of devastating effects, ranging from supercharged rainstorms to drought, depending on the region of the world."

Last month, NOAA noted there was a 50- to 60-per cent chance of El Niño developing during the July-September period and beyond.

El Niño's impact would be higher in 2027 than in 2026 if it develops in the second half of this year, according to Tido Semmler, a climate scientist at Ireland's National Meteorological Service. "It takes time for the global atmosphere to react to the El Niño," he said earlier.

Meanwhile, in a weather forecast issued on Wednesday, the PMD said "hot and dry weather was likely to prevail over most parts" of Sindh.

It forecasted "warm" weather today and tomorrow in Karachi, with the maximum temperature reaching 36 degrees Celsius today.

Humidity levels in the morning were expected to remain 80 per cent, before dropping to 40-50pc in the evening.

For Friday, the PMD predicted hot weather in the metropolis, with mercury surging to 37°C during the day and remaining between 24-26°C at night.

What is El Niño?

El Niño typically results in drier conditions across southeast Asia, Australia, southern Africa, and northern Brazil, and wetter conditions in the Horn of Africa, the southern United States, Peru and Ecuador.

The last El Niño occurred in 2023-2024, contributing to making 2023 the second-highest year on record and 2024 the all-time high.

El Niño can weaken consistent trade winds that blow east to west across the tropical Pacific. "Warm water is pushed back east, toward the west coast of the Americas," NOAA notes.

This weakening warms the usually cooler central and eastern sides of the ocean, altering rainfall over the equatorial Pacific and wind patterns around the world.

The extra heat at the surface of the Pacific releases energy into the atmosphere that can temporarily drive up global temperatures, which is why El Niño years are often among the warmest on record.

PM Shehbaz meets Saudi crown prince in Jeddah

Continued from front page

he reached Jeddah on Wednesday alongside a high-level delegation on an official visit to the kingdom, the PM Office's (PMO) said in a statement.

The statement added that Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was also present at the meeting.

Dar separately posted on X that the meeting was "marked by warmth, brotherhood, and a shared vision for a stronger Pakistan-Saudi Arabia partnership".

"The prime minister reaffirmed our deep-rooted ties, built on faith, trust, and mutual respect, and explored avenues to further enhance cooperation across all sectors," he added.

Dar further stated, "Saudi Arabia holds a special place in the hearts of Pakistanis, and we remain committed to strengthening this historic and fraternal relationship for generations to come."

Earlier, a post on the PMO's X account said the premier was received by the Deputy Governor of the Makkah Region, Prince Saud bin Mashaal bin Abdulaziz, Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Pakistan, Nawaf bin Saeed Al-Malki and Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Ahmad Farooq upon his arrival in the kingdom.

It added that while in Jeddah, PM Shehbaz would meet with the kingdom's top leadership.

"The meeting will involve discussions on further strengthening bilateral relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and an exchange of views on the regional situation," the PMO said.

According to the PMO, apart from DPM Dar, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) Tariq Fatemi, as well as other senior officials, are also part of the delegation.

Earlier, the Foreign Office (FO) said the prime minister, accompanied by a high-level delegation, would be undertaking official visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Türkiye from April 15 to 18.

In its statement, the FO said the visits to Saudi Arabia and Qatar were "in the bilateral context". It added that the premier would meet the leadership there to "discuss ongoing bilateral cooperation as well as regional peace and security".

In Türkiye, he will participate in the fifth Antalya Diplomacy Forum and present Pakistan's position in the Leaders' Panel along with other world leaders, the FO added.

"Pakistan's participation in the forum reflects its continued commitment to constructive diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and meaningful engagement with the international community on issues of global importance," the FO statement said.

On the sidelines of the forum, PM

Shehbaz was "expected to hold bilateral meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other key world leaders".

Gulf countries — including Saudi Arabia — were facing Iranian attacks, which Tehran says were aimed at US and Israeli sites in response to the latter's deadly large-scale strikes. Pakistan intensified efforts to act as a mediator between the United States and Iran to end the war that had engulfed the Middle East, leading to a fragile, temporary ceasefire and a first round of talks in Islamabad.

Last month, PM Shehbaz hailed Saudi Arabia for showing "remarkable restraint" during the ongoing hostilities and stressed the need for urgent de-escalation.

On March 9, PM Shehbaz held a "restricted meeting" with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, according to a statement by the PM's spokesperson.

During the meeting, the prime minister expressed Pakistan's "full solidarity and support for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in these challenging times", and both leaders agreed to work together for regional peace and stability.

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have long shared a multifaceted relationship rooted in strategic military cooperation, mutual economic interests, and shared Islamic heritage. These ties have encompassed economic assistance and energy supplies, with Riyadh being a significant source of financial aid and oil for Islamabad.

Earlier today, the finance ministry announced that Saudi Arabia has pledged an additional \$3 billion in deposits for Pakistan and has extended its existing \$5bn facility for a further three years.

The ministry further stated that the existing \$5bn Saudi deposit would no longer be subject to the previous annual rollover arrangement and would instead be extended for a longer term.

On April 11, the Saudi defence ministry confirmed that Pakistan has sent a military force and fighter jets to Saudi Arabia to boost security under a joint defence cooperation agreement between the two countries.

In September of last year, PM Shehbaz and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed a "Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement" in Riyadh, pledging that any attack on either nation would be treated as an act of aggression against both.

'He's fantastic': Trump says Field Marshal Munir doing 'great job' on Iran talks

Continued from front page

war after Prime Minister Shehbaz mediated a two-week ceasefire between the two sides on April 8. Delegations from Washington and Tehran arrived in Islamabad and held negotiations for over 20 hours at his invitation over the last weekend. However, the negotiations could not result in an agreement.

In his latest interview, the US president said the field marshal was doing a "great job" on the Iran talks.

This is not the first time that the US president has praised Field Marshal Munir and PM Shehbaz. On Sunday, he lauded Pakistan for hosting talks between Washington and Tehran in Islamabad, commending the "kind and very competent leadership" of the army chief and the prime minister.

"They [PM Shehbaz and the field marshal] are very extraordinary men, and continuously thank me for saving 30 to 50 million lives in what would have been a horrendous war with India," he had added.

Pakistan's push to get Iran and the United States to the negotiating table for their highest-level face-to-face talks in decades to end weeks of war has garnered international praise — and some surprise.

In Islamabad, Field Marshal Munir was at the centre of the action — greeting both delegations on their arrival and displaying remarkable bonhomie with Vance.

Trump frequently refers to CDF Munir as his "favourite field marshal", after a rapport built during US efforts to defuse a short but intense armed conflict between Pakistan and rival India last year.

Pakistan heaped praise on Trump in the wake of that conflict, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Last weekend's marathon talks ended with Vance announcing he was leaving without a deal, but Pakistan said it would continue to facilitate dialogue.

"Field Marshal Munir through tireless effort, played a key and historic role in extinguishing the flames of war and in bringing both parties to the negotiating table," PM Shehbaz said in a televised address a few hours before the talks began.

Trump says US-Iran talks could resume over the next two days, 'we're more inclined' to go to Pakistan

US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that talks between Washington and Tehran could resume over the next two days and that "we're more inclined to go" to Pakistan, reported The New York Post.

"You should stay there, really, because something could be happening over the next two days, and we're more inclined to go there," Trump said.

"It's more likely, you know why? Because the Field Marshal is doing a great job. He's fantastic, and therefore it's more likely that we go back there," he told The NY Post. "Why should we go to some country that has nothing to do with it?"

This was after he earlier told the US media outlet that discussions were "happening, but, you know, a little bit slow", before indicating that a second round of direct negotiations would likely happen somewhere in Europe.

According to The NY Post, he contacted them half an hour later and told their reporter to stay in Islamabad "because something could be happening over the next two days, and we're more inclined to go there".

He also confirmed that he would not take part in the negotiations.

Trump's statement follows reports

that negotiating teams from the US and Iran could return to Islamabad later this week, after engaging in dialogue in Pakistan's capital over the weekend.

Pakistan hosted direct Iran-US talks in Islamabad on Saturday and Sunday, marking the highest engagement between the two sides since 1979. Both delegations departed the capital on Sunday after the talks ended without an agreement, but also without a breakdown.

Earlier, two Pakistani sources with knowledge of the talks told Reuters that Islamabad was communicating with the two sides about the timing of the next round and the meeting would likely take place on the weekend.

"We have reached out to Iran and we got a positive response that they will be open to a second round of talks," a senior Pakistani government official was quoted as saying by Reuters.

On Monday, officials familiar with the back-channel exchanges told Dawn that intermediaries were working to bring Tehran and Washington back to the negotiating table, with Pakistan at the centre of the efforts, backed by Turks and Egyptians.

The immediate priority, they said, was to extend the ceasefire.

On Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif told a meeting of the federal cabinet that "full efforts" were ongoing to resolve the conflict.

Noting that the truce was still holding, he said, "As I am talking to you, matters that are not resolved, full efforts are underway to resolve them."

Today, he called on President Asif Ali Zardari, briefed him on his upcoming visits to Saudi Arabia and Türkiye "for further engagement to promote peace efforts" and took him into confidence on "all aspects of the dialogue" between Iran and the United States, a statement issued by the President's Secretariat said.

The ceasefire between the US and Iran, brokered on April 8 after weeks of conflict, is set to expire on April 22. While technically intact, it is increasingly precarious.

The US has moved toward enforcing a naval blockade of Iranian ports, prompting a warning from Tehran that such a move would be a violation of the ceasefire.

Push for talks

Pakistan, after the end of the talks in Islamabad, moved swiftly to consolidate international support.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has recently held a series of calls with his counterparts, including Britain's Yvette Cooper, China's Wang Yi, Türkiye's Hakan Fidan, Saudi Arabia's Prince Faisal bin Farhan and Egypt's Badr Abdelatty.

Across these engagements, Pakistan conveyed a consistent message that all parties to the conflict must uphold the ceasefire and that dialogue remains the only viable path forward. International partners responded positively.

Diplomatic sources said these engagements helped build a broad, if informal, coalition aimed at sustaining the process and buying time before the April 22 deadline. The objective was to secure either an extension of the ceasefire or a return to technical-level engagement that could prepare the ground for a second political round.

Since the Islamabad talks, the intermediaries have helped exchange messages between the US and Iran on the outstanding issues, hoping to convince both sides to extend the truce by at least 45 days.

Gulf Airlines Likely to Resume US-Pakistan Flights from April 18 After War Disruptions

Continued from front page

Airways had remained suspended due to security concerns arising from the conflict. The disruption left thousands of passengers traveling between the US, Pakistan, and Gulf countries facing significant difficulties.

Travel industry sources said the suspension created a sharp imbalance in supply and demand, forcing passengers to purchase tickets at highly inflated and uncertain prices. During this period, Turkish Airlines was the only carrier continuing operations on the route.

Due to increased demand and limited options, economy class fares on Turkish Airlines from Houston to Pakistan surged to as high as \$3,500. However, travel agents believe that once Emirates and Qatar Airways resume their services, ticket prices are expected to stabilize.

Under normal conditions, economy class fares typically range around \$1,200, while peak summer travel season prices can go up to \$1,600.

Industry insiders also suggest that both Emirates and Qatar Airways may introduce additional flights from major US cities to accommodate the backlog of passengers and meet increased demand following the resumption of operations.

What is Trump-backed SAVE America Act and what could it mean for US vote?

Continued from front page

which party controls the Senate and the US House of Representatives.

The bill has near-total support from Republicans, with Democrats remaining largely unified in opposition. It passed in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives in February along party lines.

The measure has since remained stalled in Congress, where Republicans control 53 out of 100 seats, short of the 60 votes it will likely need to pass.

That is, unless party leaders move to change the chamber's longstanding rules, a transformative approach considered a "nuclear" option that will reverberate for years to come.

Here's what to know.

What would the SAVE America Act do?

The version of the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility (SAVE) America Act passed by the House in February would require voters to provide proof of citizenship – a birth certificate or passport – when registering to vote. It would also implement stricter voter identification requirements for individuals casting ballots, whether by mail or in person.

Under the US Constitution, states administer elections, and currently have different processes for registering voters and confirming citizenship. Voting by noncitizens is already illegal, and all people registering to vote

attest they are US citizens under threat of perjury.

The bill does not provide any funding for the new verification processes, which would be effective immediately upon the bill being signed into law.

The legislation would also require all states to run their voter rolls through a US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) "Alien Verification Eligibility" system to identify potential noncitizens already enrolled.

It would include criminal penalties for election officials who register voters without the required documentation.

What has Trump said about the SAVE Act?

The US president has long maintained that elections in the country are marred by widespread fraud, including noncitizen voting, despite there being no evidence to support these claims.

Even the conservative Heritage Foundation, which has influenced many of Trump's policies, has found only exceedingly rare instances of voter fraud over decades of US elections.

Trump's focus on election administration dates back to his 2020 loss to former US President Joe Biden, which he continues to maintain was the result of the vote being "stolen". Again, no evidence has emerged to back those claims.

The president has called the SAVE America Act "one of the most IMPORTANT & CONSEQUENTIAL pieces of legislation in the history of Congress, and America itself".

In March, he vowed not to sign any other bills into law until the legislation was passed. He has further vowed not to endorse any Republicans who do not support the legislation.

Trump also told members of his party in March that passing the bill would "guarantee" their success not only in the midterm elections but in the years to come.

Several top Republicans have embraced Trump's messaging, with US House Speaker Mike Johnson saying opponents of the legislation "want illegal aliens to vote in our elections".

What have critics said about the SAVE Act?

Critics have said the bill would be tantamount to widespread voter disenfranchisement, creating onerous barriers to address what several studies show to be the fleetingly rare problem of noncitizens registering to vote.

Several studies have shown that about 11 percent of eligible voters do not have access to birth certificates, while 52 percent do not have valid passports. All told, a recent study by several election-monitoring groups found that about nine percent of eligible voters in the US do not have easy access to documents proving citizenship, accounting for about 21.3 million people.

Several groups, including the Bipartisan Policy Center, have argued the legislation risks doing more damage than good. Data from a USCIS voter verification system, which some states already use to identify noncitizens in their voter rolls, found that only 0.04 percent of reviewed cases were flagged as potential noncitizens.

But as noted by the Bipartisan Policy Center, evidence indicates that the rate may be considerably lower, pointing to a review by Travis County, Texas that found that a quarter of the voters flagged by USCIS had actually provided proof of citizenship.

In another example, a review of all registered voters in Utah from 2025 to 2026 found only a single instance of a noncitizen registered to vote out of more than two million voters. There were no confirmed instances of a noncitizen actually voting.

Top Democrats have echoed those criticisms, while charging that Trump is seeking to influence the outcome of the midterms as part of what they call a years-long effort to politicize voting administration.

"The only thing Republicans are trying to save with this legislation is their own skin in the next election," Chuck Schumer, the top Democrat in the Senate, said earlier this week.

Could it affect women and name changes?

A main point of contention for opponents of the legislation is the additional barriers it could create for individuals, primarily women, who changed their last names after marriage or for other reasons.

An estimated 69 million women in the US lack easy access to documentation linking their current legal names to those at birth, according to the League of Women Voters, which has been a leading opponent of the bill.

The requirement for extra documentation for some married women creates inherent inequality in the system, the organization has argued.

The law would further create extra barriers for individuals who move regularly, including members of the military, and those who have been afflicted by disruptive life changes, including natural disasters, opponents have argued.

How does this relate to the filibuster?

The so-called "filibuster" is a procedural rule in the Senate that can be used to require 60 votes to pass most bills, as opposed to a simple majority of 51 votes in the 100-seat chamber.

Parties in the minority have long used the rule to temper the party in the majority, with Republicans and Democrats rarely holding a filibuster-proof 60 seats.

Being a rule of the Senate's own making, it could be easily scrapped by the party in power. However, doing so has long been seen as a "nuclear" option. While it would offer short-term benefits to the majority party, it would undermine the same party if it becomes the minority in future elections.

Nevertheless, Trump has heaped pressure on Republican leaders in the Senate to scrap the rule, writing on Truth Social in March, they need to "Kill the Filibuster".

What happens next?

Debate remains ongoing in the Senate over the legislation, but major shifts in support are seen as extremely unlikely.

Republicans are unlikely to bring the legislation to a vote if they do not have the support for it to pass.

Currently, there is no plan to hold a vote to do away with the filibuster, which would require only a simple

majority.

Lawmakers have also not yet pursued other, more incremental procedural manoeuvres to pass the bill without 60 votes.

IMF advises Pakistan to phase out fuel subsidies, broaden tax base for medium-term sustainability

Continued from front page

draining fuel subsidies, addressing contingent liabilities and broadening the tax base for credible medium-term sustainability.

In its twice-a-year Fiscal Monitor 2026, the IMF projected Pakistan's revenue to have already peaked with a downward but stable outlook in the medium-term ending 2031. This would thus lower public debt, yet was significantly higher than required under the Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act (FRDLA) 2005, the IMF indicated as it anticipated government expenditures to remain stubborn.

The Fund projected Pakistan's fiscal deficit at 3.2pc of GDP during the current fiscal year and next year — down from 5.4pc in FY2025 — and then declining to 3pc and 2.8pc for FY2028 and FY2029, respectively. It forecast the fiscal deficit rising again to 3.6pc in FY2030 and even higher at 4.6pc of GDP in FY2031.

The fiscal monitor expected Pakistan's primary balance — the gap between total revenues and expenditures minus interest payments — to peak at 2.5pc during the current year against 2.4pc of GDP last year. The primary fiscal surplus would be declining to 2pc next year and stay stable for the following two fiscal years, before falling drastically to 1pc of GDP in FY2030 and almost negligible 0.1pc in FY2031.

The Fund estimated that the government revenue would remain unchanged at 15.8pc of GDP this year and fall to 15.3pc next year. It anticipated that general government revenues would stay stable at 15.5pc of GDP throughout the subsequent four fiscal years. Chiefly due to lower debt servicing cost following a fall in interest rates from a record 22pc to less than half, the IMF projected Pakistan's general government expenditure falling more than two percentage points to 19pc during the current fiscal year and further rationalising to 18.5pc over the following two fiscal years. It also projected the expenditure rising to 20pc of GDP by 2031. The fiscal monitor also put the country's gross government debt at 70.1pc of GDP for the current fiscal year, down from 72.8pc last year. Going forward, it projected gross government debt to steadily decline from 67.1pc in FY2027 to 64pc in FY2028, 60.8pc in FY2029, 59pc in FY2030 and 58.2pc by FY2031. Likewise, net government debt was estimated at 64.4pc during the current year, down from 66.5pc last year. The IMF said net government debt would also maintain its declining trend over the subsequent four years from 62.1pc in FY2027 to 55pc by FY2031.

Talking about the global financial stability, the IMF warned that risks were elevated as the global financial system was confronting the ongoing war in the Middle East, potential inflationary pressures, rising risks of further tightening in financial conditions, and several channels through which market turmoil could escalate into financial instability.

Markets have corrected in an orderly manner so far, but risks are asymmetric, it said, noting that "the longer the conflict continues, the greater the risk that global financial conditions — which had been very accommodative before the war — could tighten further and more abruptly".

Since February, global equity prices have declined by 8pc, after being boosted by strong corporate profits in the months before. The war in the Middle East threatens to reinforce adverse financial and commodity price dynamics — through higher global interest rates, dollar appreciation, and energy price surges — exacerbating macroeconomic pressures in emerging market and developing economies.

The IMF also said the fiscal outlook had deteriorated further since the April 2025 Fiscal Monitor.

"Global debt-at-risk three years ahead now stands near 117pc of GDP, with a gap of roughly 20 percentage points between the median projection and the right tail, underscoring heightened downside risks. Several reinforcing forces could weigh on the fiscal outlook," it said.

The conflict in the Middle East could further strain government finances through higher food and fuel prices, tighter financial conditions, lower activity, and rising defense outlays. In a scenario of prolonged conflict, global debt-at-risk could increase by an additional 4 percentage points. Separately, a correction in artificial intelligence-related asset valuations, in which US stocks fall by 20pc with spillovers to global financial conditions, could raise global debt-at-risk by a further 2.4 percentage points, the Fund said.

Protectionist pressures and geoeconomic fragmentation continued to push governments toward industrial subsidies and trade-related support that have uncertain payoffs in terms of productivity, raising the risk that primary balances will fall short of debt-stabilising levels if growth underperforms. Domestic instability further heightens fiscal pressures, it added.

Within countries, social unrest has increased across income groups, and surges in such unrest are associated with lower growth and wider primary deficits. At the same time, pressures on the independence of central banks, whether overt or implicit, can lift inflation expectations and risk premiums even for highly rated economies, eroding the credibility that keeps borrowing costs contained, it warned. The IMF said the window for orderly fiscal adjustment was narrowing, with advanced economies with large debt loads needing concrete, well-sequenced consolidation measures, not aspirational medium-term targets. "For the United States, the arithmetic is inescapable: Stabilising the country's debt path will require action on both revenue and expenditure, including spending on the major entitlement programmes," it said.

Overall, the Fund advised that given already depleted fiscal buffers, policy responses to higher energy costs should be tightly calibrated, targeted to vulnerable households and viable firms, and consistent with monetary policy efforts to contain inflation.

"Broad-based price subsidies should be avoided where they carry large fiscal costs, are difficult to unwind, or suppress domestic price signals in ways that spill over to global commodity markets," the IMF advised, adding that "domestic fuel and gas prices should continue to reflect international price movements and support demand adjustment, even when temporary targeted support is in place".

Houston Emerges as a Hub for Pakistani and Indian Cuisine

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

A Strong Pakistani Culinary Presence

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

diners from across the metropolitan area.

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

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

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

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

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

Fine Dining and Modern Fusion

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

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

A Reflection of Community Growth

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

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

Here is the list:

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

. Phone: (832) 786-8000

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

, plus classics like biryani and mango lassi.

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

. Phone: (832) 999-4490

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

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

. Phone: (832) 593-0110

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

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

. Phone: (832) 915-0898

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

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

. Phone: (281) 800-5880

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 477-7897

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

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

. Phone: (346) 594-2097

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

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

. Phone: (281) 240-0786

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

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Javed Nihari – 14631 Beechnut St, Houston, TX 77083

. Phone: (346) 330-4240

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

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

. Phone: (713) 587-9300

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

Chai Shai – 6632 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (832) 939-8112

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

. Halal meats and sweets.

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

. Phone: (281) 741-2571

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

Himalaya Restaurant – 6652 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 532-2837

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

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

. Phone: (713) 952-0606

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (832) 500-4618

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

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7398

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

Shalamar Restaurant – 15142 Highway 3, Webster, TX 77598

. Phone: (281) 488-4151

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 496-3232

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

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

Maharaja Bhog – 8338 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 771-2464

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

Shiv Sagar – 6662 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 977-0150

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

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

. Phone: (346) 266-1626

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

inspired thali buffet and a variety of healthy veggie dishes.

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7806

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

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

. Phone: (713) 864-6667

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

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

. Phone: (713) 960-8472

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 955-9878

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

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

. Phone: (713) 522-2022

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

. Uses local ingredients and has bakery items.

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

. Phone: (713) 242-8087

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

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

. Phone: (832) 886-4291

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

. Creative cocktails and vegetarian options also featured.

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

. Phone: (713) 334-5555

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

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

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Altaf Hussain Calls for Peace, Questions Global Double Standards Amid US-Iran Tensions



London — The founder and leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Altaf Hussain, has urged world powers to resolve escalating tensions between the United States

and Iran through dialogue, warning that modern warfare continues to claim innocent lives despite technological advancements.

In a statement issued from London, Hussain emphasized that wars are no longer fought like in the past, highlighting the devastating impact of advanced weapons such as drones and precision-guided missiles. He noted that while such technologies can target specific individuals, they cannot prevent collateral damage, leading to the deaths of innocent

Continued on page 28

From Pakistan to Houston: Adil Malik Leads a Cultural Wave with Young Stunners' Historic U.S. Debut



of Pakistan's modern music and live entertainment landscape.

Known for his strategic vision, creative excellence, and unmatched

ability to connect artists with audiences across borders, Adil Malik has now taken a bold step onto the international stage by expanding his legacy into the United States through the launch of Elixir Events & Productions a platform dedicated to elevating South Asian entertainment to global standards and creating structured opportunities for artists in North America.

In collaboration with U.S.-based partner Mohammad Farhan Shaikh, Adil Malik and Mohammad Farhan Shaikh has already demonstrated

Continued on page 28

South Asian Fans Flock to See Asim Azhar at Rehan Siddiqui's Houston Show



The U.S. tour of Pakistani pop sensation Asim Azhar began on a high note in Houston with an electrifying concert followed by a grand meet-and-greet, hosted by interna-

tionally acclaimed event organizer Rehan Siddiqui. The high-energy event drew a massive turnout, including a large number of South Asian fans, along with strong media pres-

ence, creating a vibrant atmosphere as Azhar engaged with attendees and answered questions in an interactive session.

Pakistani pop sensation Asim Azhar, who rose to widespread fame with the title track of the popular drama "Meri Zindagi Hai Tu," is receiving an overwhelming response across the United States. During his six-week tour, the singer is set to perform at 20 musical concerts, marking a significant milestone for a Pakistani artist.

Speaking to the media,

Continued on page 28

Arif Kapatia Laid to Rest as Community Holds Emotional Memorial on His Birthday



(L-R) Late Arif Kapatia pictured with friends Azam Akhtar, Ghulam Mohiuddin, and Aftab Silat during a birthday cake-cutting — a cherished and memorable moment. (File Photo)

The community bid a tearful farewell to their beloved friend, Arif Kapatia, who passed away due to a cardiac arrest. His Namaz-e-Janaza

was held on Monday after Zuhr prayers at Al-noor Masjid, where a large number of relatives, friends,

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UPDATE: Suspect Surrenders in Killing of Nephew of Aafia Siddiqui, Claims Self-Defense

Houston — The tragic killing of 18-year-old Ammad (Emad) Siddiqui, nephew of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, has taken a new turn as the suspect in the case has surrendered to authorities while claiming self-defense.

According to the Alvin Police Department, the incident occurred on April 2, 2026, at 10:29 PM in Alvin.

Officers responded to a 9-1-1 call reporting a shooting involving a moving vehicle along State Highway 35. Upon arrival in the 3100 block, they found Siddiqui in the back seat with a gunshot wound. He was transported to a hospital, where he was later pronounced dead.

Investigators determined that

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Governor threatens to pull \$110M in public safety funds over Houston's new immigration policy

HOUSTON -- The City of Houston is being warned to change or repeal its new immigration policy or risk losing \$110 million in public safety funding.

That warning comes in a letter sent on Monday from Gov. Greg Abbott's office, escalating tensions between state and local leaders just days after Houston City Council

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Pakistani American Community in Houston Benefits from AI Innovation Symposium

The Annual AI Innovation Symposium and Expo recently concluded in Houston with strong participation from professionals, students, and entrepreneurs, including a significant turnout from the Pakistani American community. The one-day

event, hosted by Houston Community College, brought together more than 300 attendees to explore how artificial intelligence is reshaping industries and everyday life.

For many Pakistani Americans

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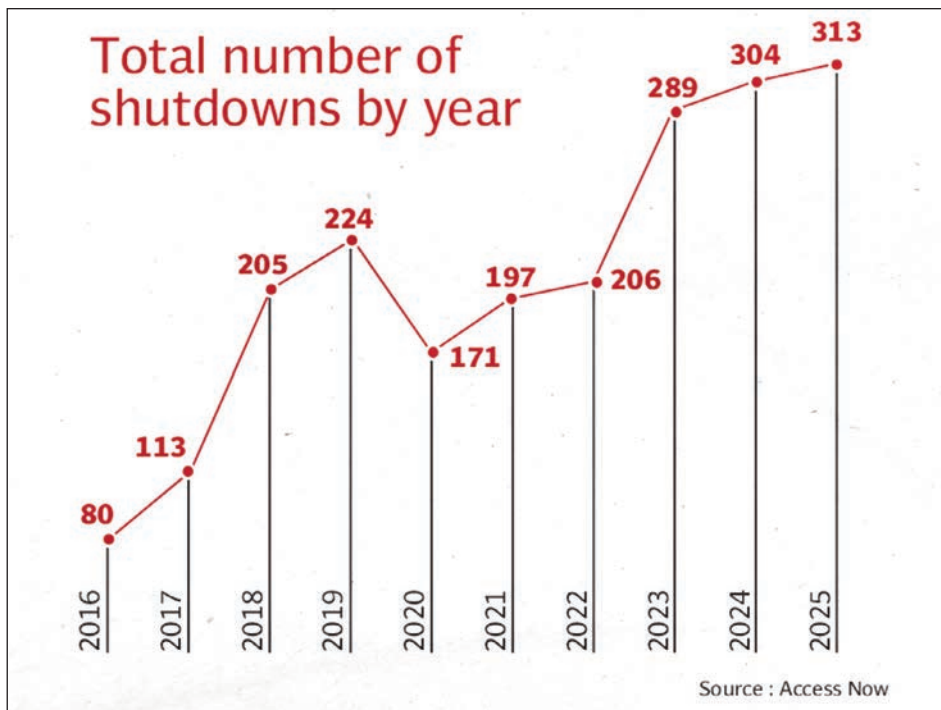
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The weaponisation of the Internet

Attempts to restrict online access have increased across the world, making 2025 the highest on record for such curbs



Democracy is not merely about holding elections but about protecting the conditions that make democratic participation possible, including free access to information



By HAMDAD SARFRAZ
KARACHI:

For millions of people around the world, the internet was supposed to be the great equalizer, a highway with no speed limits, a boundless space for connection, information, and democratic participation. But in 2025, that promise, once again, turned into a nightmare as governments and armed groups transformed connectivity into a weapon of control, cutting off entire populations with a frequency never seen before.

According to the annual #KeepItOn report published by Access Now, not a single day passed last year without at least one internet shutdown somewhere in the world. With 313 documented shutdowns across 52 countries, the numbers tell a clear but troubling story. That figure surpasses the previous records of 304 shutdowns in 2024 and 289 in 2023, making 2025 the worst year for internet freedom since tracking began nearly a decade ago. Seven new countries joined the offender list, bringing the total number of nations that have intentionally severed their citizens from the global digital fabric to an even 100 since tracking began in 2016. Perhaps most alarming of all, 75 shutdowns in 33 countries continued from 2025 into 2026, suggesting that perpetrators are no longer satisfied with temporary blackouts but are instead experimenting with permanent digital darkness.

As Access Now, the New York-based advocacy group focused on the intersection of human rights and technology, makes clear in its report, this is not a story about technical glitches, undersea cable cuts, or routine maintenance failures, these are deliberate, calculated acts of repression. According to Access Now, authorities have learned that by pulling the plug, they can hide war crimes, crush dissent, manipulate elections, and inflict collective punishment with terrifying efficiency. That said, by 2025, the internet was no longer just a tool for communication, it had turned into a battlefield, with ordinary people as the casualties.

When asked whether denying connectivity

could be interpreted as a form of collective punishment, Zach Rosson, the Global Data and Research Lead at Access Now, answered that internet shutdowns can indeed function as collective punishment. He pointed to their use in the midst of the genocide in Gaza, throughout the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan, and over many years across a wide variety of protests and elections worldwide where authorities have sought to punish populations for speaking out against injustice and corruption. Rosson emphasized that these shutdowns are not abstract violations of digital rights—they have direct, measurable consequences. “They undermine media freedom, disrupt the delivery of healthcare, and inflict isolation and psychological trauma on millions of people who find themselves suddenly and violently cut off from the world.”

The top three offenders

While 52 countries engaged in some form of internet shutdown in 2025, three nations stood out not only for the frequency of their disruptions but for the cynicism with which they deployed them. Each represents a different face of digital authoritarianism, yet together they share a common thread -- the willingness to sacrifice fundamental human rights for the sake of control.

For the second consecutive year, Myanmar has overtaken India as the world's leading perpetrator of internet shutdowns, with at least 95 documented incidents in 2025. Since the military junta seized power in 2021, internet blackouts have become a core tool of repression, imposed across all 14 states and administrative regions and primarily targeting villages and townships engulfed in active conflict. The military junta itself imposed the majority of these shutdowns—76 in total—while another eight perpetrators, including resistance forces, accounted for the remaining 19.

In March 2025, as the strongest earthquake in the country's history struck Myanmar, ongoing internet shutdowns severely hampered emergency and lifesaving rescue efforts. At least 67 townships were affected, more than

2,000 people lost their lives, and countless others who might have been saved perished because information could not flow and help could not be coordinated. One particularly haunting case documented in the report describes Tamu township in the Sagging Division, where local junta forces cut internet services and phone lines in late January 2025 while conducting airstrikes and killing civilians in nearby towns. A humanitarian aid worker on the ground explained the terrifying pattern that residents had learned to recognize: “Everyone is on high alert, constantly watching the sky with fright and exhaustion. We also keep our eyes on our mobile phone connections—the moment the signal drops, we immediately take cover in underground shelters. We’ve come to understand that a loss of communication signals an impending airstrike.”

What makes Myanmar's case especially disturbing is the proliferation of perpetrators. It is not merely the military regime imposing shutdowns, resistance forces have also adopted the tactic, reportedly doing so “out of necessity for security” in an attempt to stop information leaks regarding the junta's airstrikes. This tragic cycle means that civilians are caught in a double bind, cut off by both sides of the conflict, with no reliable way to receive warnings, summon help, or even say goodbye to loved ones.

Second on the list of top offenders is India, a country that positions itself as the world's largest democracy. It recorded 65 internet shutdowns in 2025. While this figure represents the lowest annual total for the country since 2017, it remains alarmingly high for any state that claims to uphold democratic values. The shutdowns affected 12 states and territories and were deployed during protests, communal violence, religious holidays, and periods of conflict.

Unlike most countries where authorities can shut down connectivity without any public acknowledgment, Indian law technically requires that shutdown orders be published. Yet in 2025, as in previous years, the vast majority of disruptions occurred with little to no transparency. When authorities did offer explanations, they reached for the same tired justifications: national security, public safety, the prevention of unrest. But the report documents a different reality on the ground. In Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, for instance, officials invoked Section 163 of the Criminal Procedure Code on December 29, 2025, imposing a two-month ban on unauthorized VPN use. Police reportedly penalized around 800 users, including through phone searches for banned applications. For a population already living under one of the most militarized regimes in the world, this represented yet another layer of digital suffocation.

What makes India's case particularly striking is the contrast between its democratic claims and its increasingly authoritarian practices. The country has one of the most vibrant civil societies in the Global South—when the internet is working—but the government has shown repeatedly that it is willing to sacrifice

those freedoms at the first sign of trouble. Protests against agricultural laws, communal violence in Manipur, examinations in Rajasthan—all have triggered shutdowns that punish entire populations for the actions of a few. Last year, that pattern continued unabated, reminding the world that democracy is not merely about holding elections but about protecting the conditions that make democratic participation possible, including free access to information.

Rosson, one of the report's primary authors, offered a sober assessment of how India's legal framework has failed to curb the practice. He pointed out that despite the country having legal requirements for the use of shutdowns—including the publication of shutdown orders—authorities have nevertheless turned internet blackouts into what he described as a ‘knee-jerk and effectively unconstrained response’ to protests, conflict, communal violence, and religious holidays. According to Rosson, this pattern has been carried out primarily by local and state-level authorities across the country for more than a decade. He noted that officials often rely on loose justifications such as curbing violence or addressing security concerns, and as a result, shutdowns have become normalized and even expected by the population. In some cases, Rosson added, authorities impose them on a ‘precautionary’ basis before major events when nothing has yet happened. His conclusion was: “Even when measured against neighboring countries, having some degree of transparency or official explanation is no consolation for populations enduring persistent shutdowns that can last anywhere from months to years.”

Rounding off the top three is Pakistan, with at least 20 internet shutdowns in 2025, a figure only slightly lower than the 22 recorded in 2024. The country has now implemented shutdowns every single year since 2016, but the frequency and scale of disruptions have increased dramatically in the past two years. These blackouts have been imposed in response to protests, security incidents, and politically sensitive periods, including major religious holidays.

In July 2025, for example, authorities suspended mobile and internet services for several hours across multiple cities, citing security and public safety concerns during the Muharram-ul-Haram religious processions. But the disruptions are not limited to such periods or events. Pakistan's approach to internet shutdowns shows a broader regional trend in South Asia, where governments have learned that connectivity is a vulnerability they can exploit. Unlike Myanmar, where shutdowns are often imposed during active military operations, Pakistan tends to use them as a preemptive measure—a way to defuse protests before they can gain momentum. Experts see it as a strategy of control through disconnection, and it appears to have been embedded in the governance toolkit over the years.

When asked whether states were weaponising access to the internet, Rosson explained that more governments around the world join

The weaponisation of the Internet

Internet shutdown triggers in 2025



Source: Access Now

Continued From Page 19

what he called the 'shame list' every year. He noted that seven new countries were added in 2024 and another seven in 2025, bringing the total to one hundred countries where people have experienced shutdowns since 2016. According to Rosson, democracies, closed autocracies, and everything in between have all imposed forms of network shutdowns and platform blocks during protests, elections, conflicts, and exams, as well as part of broader information control or to force platform compliance. "Authorities are imposing internet shutdowns around the world in defiance of international human rights standards while eroding democratic institutions in the process," he cautioned.

The Access Now researcher further argued that an unrestricted, secure, inclusive, and accessible internet is a fundamental enabler of a wide spectrum of human rights, maintaining that connectivity should not be treated as a conditional service or allowed only for the select, powerful few. He pointed out that arbitrary state control over the internet through shutdowns has rightfully been challenged in courts at the national and regional levels around the world for years. Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition, Rosson added, have long argued that shutdowns fail the tests of legality, proportionality, and necessity, making them illegal under international human rights law.

A global epidemic

While Myanmar, India, and Pakistan dominate the headlines, the report makes clear that internet shutdowns are a global concern. Conflict was the leading trigger for the third consecutive year, with 125 conflict-related shutdowns across 14 countries, representing 40 per cent of the global total. From Sudan, where warring parties have deliberately disrupted connectivity amid what is currently the world's worst health and humanitarian crisis, to Palestine, where Israel's ongoing military operations have destroyed at least 74 per cent of Gaza's telecommunications infrastructure, the pattern is predictable and shows that when the bombs fall, the internet dies first.

Over all, protests and political instability triggered 64 shutdowns across 19 countries. In Tanzania, authorities imposed eight shutdowns last year, ranging from widespread blocking of social media platforms to a five-day nationwide blackout that coincided with an electricity cut, a curfew, and what the report describes as the worst crackdown on human rights in the country's history during the October general elections. When the internet finally returned, the evidence of what had happened under the cover of darkness began to emerge: security forces had used unlawful lethal force against protesters, taken away dead bodies, and systematically silenced anyone who tried to document the violence.

Elections, which should be moments of democratic celebration and civic engagement, triggered 12 shutdowns across eight countries. In Belarus, authorities blocked or throttled multiple platforms before and during election day, ensuring that incumbent Aleksandr Lukashenko could extend his three-decade rule without the inconvenience of informed voters. In Venezuela, authorities continued the nationwide blocking of X, originally imposed in response to protests following the disputed 2024 elections, and further restricted access to Telegram, TikTok, and at least 21 VPN services during Nicolas Maduro's inauguration in

January 2025.

Even examinations became an excuse for digital repression as eleven shutdowns in six countries were imposed under the guise of preventing cheating, a practice that Access Now and its partners have been fighting for years through the #NoExamShutdown campaign. In Iraq, authorities imposed six shutdown instances corresponding to exam periods, resulting in a total of 36 nationwide disruptions between May and September. In Syria, the new government continued the damaging tradition of the fallen Assad regime by cutting internet access nationwide during exams. In Kenya, authorities blocked Telegram for the third consecutive year during national secondary school exams.

Cross-border and satellite shutdowns

Perhaps the most disturbing trend documented in the report is the rise of cross-border shutdowns. Eighteen such incidents were recorded, implemented by seven perpetrators and impacting people in seven countries and occupied territories. Through airstrikes on fiber optic cables, bombing of power infrastructure, cyberattacks, and tampering with submarine cable landing stations, perpetrators have learned that they do not need to control a country to silence its people, they simply need to break the infrastructure that connects them to the world.

Israel continued its genocide in Gaza throughout 2025, imposing internet shutdowns during ground operations while armed actors killed scores of civilians at food distribution sites. Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine entered its fourth year, with the Russian military continuing to target Ukrainian energy infrastructure, leading to significant internet disruptions across numerous regions. China cut off mobile internet and phone lines in villages in the border areas of Kachin State, Myanmar, in the midst of fighting between junta and Kachin Independence Army troops. Thailand twice ordered internet service, phone lines, and electricity to be cut off for people living near the border on the Myanmar side, ostensibly to curb cybercrime but in practice punishing entire communities already suffering from ongoing conflict.

At the same time, perpetrators have increasingly targeted Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite internet systems, which had been hailed as a solution for connectivity in repressive environments. There were 14 such shutdowns across seven countries in 2025, a sharp increase from just four in 2024. In Chad, authorities shut down Starlink internet access for the Abu Tanqi and Maji refugee camps for three days by abruptly requiring permit fees that were not previously compulsory, leaving refugees with no way to communicate with the outside world or receive humanitarian aid. In Syria, authorities confiscated Starlink devices and threatened social media users. In Yemen, the government launched field campaigns to seize banned equipment. If anything, the message from authoritarian regimes remained clear -- no matter how you try to connect, we will find a way to cut you off.

Stories from the darkness

Behind every statistic in the report is a human being whose life was upended by the flick of a switch. An Iranian IT manager living in exile in Sweden described the agony of being completely cut off from his family during the June 2025 shutdown that followed the Iran-Israel war. "I didn't

know if they were alive, injured, or safe," he told the researchers at Access Now. "This caused me tremendous anxiety, fear, and emotional stress for several days."

An activist in Myanmar explained how shutdowns affect even the most basic aspects of survival: "When there's an emergency—like an airstrike—being able to communicate can literally decide who survives. Even when someone gets sick, if we don't have internet, we have to send someone from the village on a motorbike to ask for help. The roads are rough, and it's dangerous in conflict areas. By the time help reaches us, it might already be too late. Every minute lost lowers someone's chance of survival."

A parent in Russia, where authorities imposed an unprecedented number of shutdowns in 2025 under the guise of countering drone attacks from Ukraine, described the disruption to her children's education: "My children need the internet to study on a regular basis. The daughter is in 10th grade, the son is in the academy, where some classes are held remotely. It's terrible without the internet. Children have to search for internet connection around their relatives' apartments. The neighbors are doing the same, and are forced to go out somewhere too."

A journalist in Tanzania, whose country imposed a five-day nationwide blackout during the October elections, explained how the shutdown devastated both her professional and personal life: "As someone who works in the field of journalism and communication, my daily routine heavily depends on internet access for research, information gathering, publishing, and maintaining contact with colleagues and sources. When the shutdown occurred, it completely disrupted my ability to perform my duties effectively."

And an activist in Venezuela, where authorities have blocked X, Telegram, Signal, and countless VPN services, described the psychological toll of living under constant threat of disconnection: "As someone always 'connected' due to my work in civil society organizations, nothing prepared me for how anxiety-inducing it would be to expect all communications to be shut down at any time without any warning. I was prepared with data backups, VPNs, external batteries, and even walkie-talkies to talk to my friends living nearby, but the reality is that no one can be fully prepared for these types of scenarios."

A call to action

As the #KeepItOn coalition marks its tenth anniversary next year, the message from the 2025 report is both sobering and urgent. Internet shutdowns are not a niche concern for tech activists or digital rights lawyers. They are a fundamental threat to human dignity, democratic participation, and the right to life itself. When governments learn that they can kill with impunity under the cover of a blackout, when they discover that protests evaporate when organizers cannot communicate, when they realize that elections can be rigged without anyone livestreaming the fraud, the temptation to pull the plug becomes almost impossible to resist.

The report's recommendations urge states to refrain from shutting down the internet and instead strengthen their commitments to universal, free, and open access. Warring parties must fully comply with the laws of armed conflict, including the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. Humanitarian organizations must prioritize emergency connectivity for civilian populations, while donors must provide sustained and flexible support for organizations working to document and prevent shutdowns. Satellite providers, meanwhile, must prioritize crisis-ready infrastructure over profitable markets.

But ultimately, Access Now says, the responsibility lies with all of us—the consumers, users, and citizens—because every time a government cuts the internet, it is betting that the world will not notice, or will not care.

Given the year-on-year increase in internet shutdowns, Rosson of Access Now offered a grim warning in conclusion. He observed that the steady rise in the use of internet shutdowns around the world since 2020 reflects a world descending into more widespread conflict, growing authoritarianism, and weakening democracy—trends that he said spell disaster for human rights. According to Rosson, as more people in all corners of the globe rely on the internet, governments and militaries alike have learned its power — it enables everyday people to assemble in protest, share information, speak truth to power, and access critical information. "They seek to cut off this power so they can assert control, hide abuses, and quash dissent," he cautioned.



Asha Bhosle — a voice that will never

FADE

(1933 - 2026)

Her music transcended borders, touching the hearts of many Pakistanis.

Muhammad Suhayb
It was a sad day when news spread that Asha Bhosle, the singer with an eternal voice, had left for her heavenly abode. To many of us who grew up on Indian films on VHS, and audio cassettes, Bhosle was like family.

No mehndi celebration in the 90s felt complete without 'Zara Dholki Baja Goriyo'. No child drifted off to sleep without 'Chanda Mama Door Ke'. No birthday could be celebrated without 'Tum Jiyo Hazaron Saal'. No lovers' quarrel truly ended without 'Acha Ji Main Haari Chalo'. No journey ever began without 'Hawa Ke Saath, Ghata Ke Sang Sang'. No moment of romance was whole without 'Tumse Milke Aisa Laga' and admit it, no shower felt complete without 'Thande Thande Pani Se'.

Bhosle was part of the lives of many, like me, yet her journey was never a bed of roses. Born in 1933 into a family already defined by the towering legacy of Lata Mangeshkar, she faced the immense challenge of stepping out of her sister's shadow and establishing her own identity in music. She never had the luxury of choosing songs like Lata did and sang whatever came her way. While her younger sister Usha Mangeshkar did not achieve the same level of prominence, Bhosle eventually found her path through perseverance, talent, and the opportunities that came her way.

The collaborators she worked with — be it OP Nayyar, SD Burman, RD Burman, or AR Rahman — reflected how perfectly her timing aligned with changing musical eras, allowing her talent to flourish across generations.

When Nayyar decided not to work with Lata, he relied on Bhosle and they produced songs like 'Maang Ke Saath Tumhara' and 'Urain Jab jab Zulfain Teri' (Naya Daur, 1957), 'Aye Meherbaan' (Howrah Bridge, 1958), 'Bahut Shukriya' and 'Aap Yunhi Agar' (Ek Musafir Ek Haseena, 1962), 'Deewana Hua Baadal' and 'Ishaaro Ishaaro' (Kashmir ki Kali, 1964), 'Jaiye Aap Kahan Jayenge'

and 'Yeh Hai Reshmi Zulfo' (Mere Sanam, 1965) and 'Ao Huzoor Tumko' and 'Kajra Muhabbat Wala' (Keemat, 1968).

A tussle between music director SD Burman and Lata created a rift between the two that lasted from 1958 to 1962, and Bhosle benefited from it. 'Chor Do Aanchal', 'Haal Kaisa Hai Janab Ka', 'Acha Ji Main Haari', 'Ab Ke Baras Bhej Bhaiya Ko Babul', 'Tujhe Mili Roshni Mujhko Andhera', 'Koi Aya Dhadkan Kahti Hai', 'Dhalki Jaye Chunariya Hamari Ho Ram' and 'Raat Akeli Hai' from Jewel Thief were simply outstanding.

Later, the 70s and 80s defined the Asha-RD era, a musician six years younger than her and the son of her guru. Though RD Burman and Bhosle married in 1980, the list of hit songs they produced from 1966 to 1993 is tremendous. Be it Teesri Manzil's peppy 'Aaja Aaja Main Hoon Pyar Tera', the hippy 'Dum Maro Dum', the jazzy 'Jaane Jaan Dhoondta Phir Raha', or the cabaret classic 'Piya Tu Ab To Aaja', the sultry 'Chura Liya Hai Tumne Jo', the playful 'Chori Chori Solah Singar', the melodious 'Do Lafzon Ki Hai', or the deeply reflective 'Mera Kuch Saamaan' — each song showcased a different shade of her brilliance. Even the songs in Rangeela, Taal or Lagaan by the techy AR Rehman were a piece of cake for Bhosle, who had no qualms in changing gears.

She also had a brief contact with Pakistan, though she never actually crossed the border. At the time, Pakistan had a very similarly-named actor, Asha Posley, the heroine of the very first movie produced in Pakistan, Teri Yaad. The movie starred Posley alongside Nasir Khan, Dilip Kumar's brother. At the time, Bhosle was in Bombay and was still known as Asha Mangeshkar.

Posley was born Sabira Begum and was rechristened by the legendary music director Ghulam Haider, who also played a key role in shaping the careers of Lata Mangeshkar. Posley was the daughter

of music director Inayat Ali Nath and came from a musically gifted family — her sister, Kausar Parveen, was also a well-known singer in the 1950s. Although senior to both Lata and Bhosle, Posley had already made her debut as a supporting actor in the Punjabi film Gawandi (1942) long before any of the Mangeshkars entered the picture.

When Asha Mangeshkar eventually married Ganpatrao Bhosle she became Asha Bhosle, a name strikingly similar to Asha Posley, which led to occasional bouts of confusion and brief controversy.

Collaboration with Pakistanis

By the 1990s, only a handful of songs by Bollywood singers were recorded in Pakistan — often as personal favours (like Hemant Kumar for Muslehuddin in Humsafar, 1959) or through last-minute arrangements (such as Talat Mehmood for Fazl Karim Fazli for Chiragh Jalta Rana 1962).

Bhosle became the first major female voice to record multiple songs for a Pakistani film, lending her voice to Adnan Sami Khan's Sargam 1995. Tracks like 'Pyar Bina Jeena Nahin Jeena', 'Barse Baadal Dil Mein Hulchul', 'Pyar Hai Yehi To Pyar Hai', and the evergreen 'Zara Dholki Bajao Goriyo' went on to become anthems for the generation born in the 1990s.

The leading lady of Sargam, Zeba Bakhtiar — who knew Bhosle personally from her Bollywood days and had travelled with her to India for several shows — played a key role in bringing her on board. Speaking to Images, she recalled Bhosle as "lovely, affectionate, and extremely kind". However, she also expressed regret that Bhosle's songs in Sargam were later dubbed by Hadiqa Kiani due to censorship concerns, as India-Pakistan relations in the 1990s were not particularly cordial.

Adnan Sami Khan — the music director and leading man of Sargam who was once married to Bakhtiar — shared close ties with the Burman

family. He later collaborated with Bhosle again for Badaltey Mausam.

The album received a warm response upon its release in Pakistan in 1997, but when it was released in India, it became a massive hit. The song 'Kabhi Tu Nazar Milao' turned into a chartbuster and eventually paved the way for Adnan's move to India, with significant support from Bhosle.

After Sargam, Bhosle collaborated once again with another Pakistani legend, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan who was composing for Aur Pyaar Ho Gaya 1997. The introductory song for Miss World 1994 Aishwarya Rai, 'Thoda Sa Pagla Thoda Deewana', carried an energy that only Bhosle could bring. The duet with Udit Narayan, 'Jaagi Hui Fizayein Hain', was equally impressive.

Bhosle was also part of the soundtrack of Javed Fazil's Mein Ek Din Laut Kay Aaon Ga, where she sang a duet with Jawad Ahmad, also the music director of the film. Ahmad recalled to Images recording the song with her. "I had the privilege of working with her in 2007 on the film Mein Ek Din Laut Kay Aaon Ga, where I recorded a song titled 'Dil Ke Taar Baje' with her in India at Jagjit Singh's studio. She was not only an extraordinary singer but also a gracious, humble, and encouraging personality. Despite her legendary status, she treated everyone with kindness and respect, and even engaged deeply with the creative process, refining her performance with great artistry," he said.

"I still remember how she once sang a line differently to add her signature style, then graciously adjusted it after discussion, reflecting her openness and professionalism. Working with her was an unforgettable experience. She belongs among the greatest voices of South Asian music, alongside legends like Lata Mangeshkar and Noor Jehan. Her voice and legacy will continue to inspire generations, and she will always be remembered with love,

admiration, and prayers across the world."

In 2005, Bhosle released an album as a tribute to legendary ghazal maestros Mehdi Hassan, Ghulam Ali and Farida Khanum. The album featured eight of her favourite ghazals, reinterpreting timeless classics with her own expressive style. It included renditions such as 'Aaj Jaane Ki Zid Na Karo', Ghulam Ali's 'Chupke Chupke', 'Aawargi' and 'Dil Mein Ek Lahar', along with Mehdi Hassan's 'Ranjish Hi Sahi', 'Rafta Rafta', and 'Mujhe Tum Nazar Se'.

She also appeared as a guest on Sur Kshetra, a collaborative musical talent show between India and Pakistan. Aired in 2012, it was a musical battle between teams of two neighbouring countries that brought together a truly iconic judging panel featuring three legendary voices of South Asia: Bhosle, Runa Laila, and Abida Parveen.

Their presence transformed the competition into a celebration of music beyond borders, where classical depth, playback brilliance, and Sufi spirituality met on one stage. Together, they represented the golden era and timeless diversity of South Asian music, making the show not just a contest, but a historic meeting of legends.

Ironically, Bhosle made her debut when India and Pakistan were one, and one of her last famous songs was 'Prem Me Tore' for Begum Jaan in 2017, which depicted Partition.

Bhosle was far more than a legendary playback singer — she was a living bridge across eras, borders, and musical traditions. From the golden age of Indian cinema to cross-border collaborations in Pakistan, her voice evolved with time while never losing its emotional depth, versatility, or freshness. Whether in classic duets, playful cabaret numbers, romantic melodies, or modern experimental tracks, she continuously reinvented herself and expanded the possibilities of what South Asian music could be.

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Skip the banana for a healthier smoothie, study says

According to a study, smoothies are healthier without bananas because the fruits may interfere with absorption of flavonols, which are good for the brain and heart health, from other fruits in the mix

If a healthy slurp is your aim, skip the banana when you whip up a smoothie.

Researchers at the University of California-Davis found that adding banana may interfere with absorption of powerful compounds called flavonols, which are linked to brain and heart health.

"We were really surprised to see how quickly adding a single banana decreased the level of flavonols in the smoothie and the levels of flavanol absorbed in the body," lead author Javier Ottaviani said in a news release.

Ottaviani is an adjunct researcher at UC-Davis and director of the Core Laboratory at Mars Edge, part of Mars Inc.

Flavonols -- which are found in such foods as apples, berries, cocoa and grapes -- are natural compounds that help support memory, reduce inflammation and improve blood flow when consumed regularly.

That is, unless banana or another ingredient get in the way, researchers say.

The problem is an enzyme abundant in bananas called polyphenol oxidase (PPO). In experiments, banana-based smoothies dramatically cut flavanol absorption compared to berry-based ones, researchers reported recently in the journal *Food and Function*.

They wanted to learn whether the same enzyme activity that quickly causes a banana or apple to turn brown when peeled affected how much of these beneficial flavonols the body absorbs when

the fruits are combined in a smoothie.

"We sought to understand, on a very practical level, how a common food and food preparation like a banana-based smoothie could affect the availability of flavonols to be absorbed after intake," Ottaviani said.

Participants in the study enjoyed two different smoothies.

One was made with banana, which has high-PPO activity; the other was made with mixed berries, which have low-PPO activity.

Participants also took a flavanol capsule for comparison. Afterward, flavanol levels in their blood and urine were measured.

The results were clear: Folks who drank the banana smoothie had 84% lower flavanol levels than those who swallowed the control capsule.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recommends consuming 400 to 600 milligrams of flavonols each day for cardiometabolic health.

If you're shooting to reach that level, go heavy on the berries when your smoothie is made of ingredients like pineapple, oranges, mango or yogurt -- and skip the banana!

Ottaviani said the findings could open the door to more research on how food prep affects nutrient absorption.

Tea, for instance, is a major dietary source of flavonols, and how it is brewed could affect levels of the compounds available for the body to absorb.

The study was funded by a grant from Mars Inc., which helps researchers



Sunny Khairani & Rehan Siddiqi's Ramadan Tournament 2026 Lights Up Cricket Scene as Falconzz Seal Dramatic Victory

By Amjad Qaimkhawani

A high-energy Ramadan Tournament 2026, presented by Sunny Khairani and AJ Motors, in association with Jay Khairani, Rehan Siddiqi, and Don Ali Bhai of World Food Express, concluded with a spectacular final that kept fans on the edge

of their seats.

Featuring 16 competitive teams, the tournament built momentum throughout Ramadan, culminating in a gripping final between Stallions and Falconzz.

After winning the toss, Stallions opted to bat

first and delivered an impressive performance, posting a strong total of 138 runs for the loss of 3 wickets in just 8 overs. Their aggressive batting set a challenging target and raised expectations for a thrilling chase.

Falconzz, however, rose to the occasion with

remarkable composure and determination. In a nail-biting contest, they successfully chased down the target in just 7.4 overs, securing a memorable victory and claiming the championship title.

Taymoor Niazi of Falconzz emerged as the

standout performer of the tournament. He was named Best Batsman, Final MVP, and Tournament MVP, highlighting his dominant impact throughout the competition. Meanwhile, Ilyyas Sahil from Afghan Tigers earned the Best Bowler award for his exceptional bowling per-

formances.

Falconzz took home a cash prize of \$5,000 along with the championship trophy, while runners-up Stallions received \$2,000 and a trophy for their commendable efforts.

The tournament also featured participation

from several prominent cricket stars, adding prestige and excitement to the event. Notable players included USA international Ali Khan, West Indies all-rounder Fabian Allen, former Pakistan international Hamad Azam, Major League Cricket players Zia-ul-Haq and Hammad Azam, along

with Faraz Sheikh, Aryan Nadkarni, Usama Baloch, and many other talented cricketers.

The Ramadan Tournament 2026 not only showcased thrilling cricket but also brought together a vibrant community of players and fans, making it a memorable sporting celebration.



Swearing can help with focus, psychological flow, research suggests

Research suggests that using curse words can be healthy and helpful.

Next time you're primed to hold back a torrent of four-letter frustration, just let 'er rip instead.

"Swearing is an easily available way to help yourself feel focused, confident and less distracted, and 'go for it' a little more," said researcher Richard Stephens of Keele University in the U.K.

In a study published in the journal *American Psychologist*, he and his team reported that swearing helps people overcome inhibitions and push themselves harder on strength and endurance tests.

They had already revealed that swearing helps folks perform better on many physical challenges -- from how long they can support their body weight during a push-up exercise to how long they can plunge their hand into ice water.

"That is now a well-replicated, reliable finding," Stephens said in a news release. "But the question is: How is the swearing helping us? What's the psychological mechanism?"

He and his team theorized that swearing helps people break free of social constraints and push themselves harder in challenging situations.

To confirm that theory, they enlisted 192 people in a couple of experiments.

Each participant was asked to repeat a swear word of their choice or a neutral word every two seconds while doing a chair pushup.

Afterward, they were asked about their mental state during the challenge.

The queries included meas-

ures of mental states linked to disinhibition, including how funny they found the situation and how funny, distracted and self-confident they felt.

The questions also included a measure of what's known as psychological "flow" -- a state in which people become immersed in an activity in a focused yet pleasant way.

As researchers expected, folks who swore during the chair pushup challenge were able to support their body weight significantly longer than those who invoked a neutral word.

The upshot: This difference could be explained by increases in participants' reports of self-confidence, distraction, and psychological flow -- all important parts of disinhibition.

"These findings help explain why swearing is so commonplace," Stephens said.

"Swearing is literally a calorie neutral, drug free, low cost, readily available tool at our disposal for when we need a boost in performance," he said.

Next up: Does the boost from swearing pay off in contexts where success hinges on overcoming hesitancy?

"Our labs are now studying how swearing influences public speaking and romantic approach behaviors, two situations where people tend to hesitate or second-guess themselves," said study co-author Nicholas Washmuth of the University of Alabama in Huntsville.



Governor threatens to pull \$110M in public safety funds over Houston's new immigration policy

Continued from page 17

passed a controversial ordinance defining how police interact with federal immigration authorities.

"It doesn't come as a surprise to me," Councilmember Twila Carter, one of five members who voted against the measure, said.

The ordinance, sponsored by council members Alejandra Salinas, Abbie Kamin, and Edward Pollard, removes a previous rule that required Houston police officers to wait up to 30 minutes for federal immigration agents. Supporters say the change protects civil rights and helps build trust with immigrant communities.

But the state quickly pushed back.

Within two days of the vote, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton launched an investigation into whether the ordinance violates state law. Now, the governor's office says Houston is out of compliance and could lose millions in grant funding.

"Wow... where does anyone find \$110 million?" Carter said. "Maybe those who voted in favor can try to figure that one out."

In response, Councilmember Salinas defended the policy, calling the governor's threat "an attempt to bully our city for doing what is right," and maintaining the ordinance is legal.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire, who supported the measure, acknowledged the stakes, calling the situation a "crisis" and warning of real impacts to public safety if the funding is pulled.

"The potential loss of state funding poses real challenges for the Houston Police and Fire Departments and will impact public safety services across our city," the mayor said in a statement.

Still, Whitmire says he backed the ordinance because it aligns with current police practices and civil rights protections.

"I'm supporting it because I think it makes a statement that we've lis-

tened, and it's following the current practices of HPD of respecting the Fourth Amendment," Whitmire said last week.

He also noted at the time that state lawmakers could respond, something city leaders now say they anticipated.

"We actually knew there would be ramifications. It's a shame, but certainly not a surprise," Carter added.

The funding in question supports police and fire operations, equipment, and major-event security, including planning for the 2026 World Cup, which Houston is set to host.

City leaders are expected to discuss the issue further at a public safety committee meeting on Tuesday morning.

Here's what leaders across Texas are saying about Abbott's fight with Houston city officials over ICE policy

Political leaders and advocacy groups across Houston and Texas are divided on the political fight between Gov. Greg Abbott and the Houston city government over a new ordinance intended to curtail coordination between city police and federal immigration enforcement officers.

Last week, the Houston City Council passed an ordinance in a 12-5 vote, prohibiting officers from detaining people or prolonging traffic stops due to civil immigration warrants.

On Monday, Abbott issued a letter to Mayor John Whitmire, threatening to terminate \$110 million in public safety grants to Houston if the city did not reverse course. The move has divided public leaders along party lines and prompted Whitmire, who supported the ordinance, to call a special city council meeting for Friday in order to repeal it.

Critics of Abbott

Left-leaning organizations have called the move "bullying." Caro Rivera Nelson, an attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, said Abbott is "turning his back on law enforcement" by threat-

ening to withhold public safety money.

"Defunding public safety to punish local government for following the Constitution is not within the governor's authority under state or federal law," Nelson said. "Houston may be the first, but it won't be the last. We urge Houston City Council to uphold the constitutional rights of every person in the city, including all those affected by these baseless attacks."

FIEL Houston, an immigration advocacy group, condemned the move from Abbott "for trying to circumvent the will of the Houston City Council by using bullying tactics."

"Immigrants deserve access to public safety, and this ordinance does just that. The city should respect the council and our population and should move forward with Prop A," said FIEL Houston Executive Director Cesar Espinosa, citing the voter-approved policy allowing council members to place items of the council agenda.

Woori Juntos, an organization advocating for Asian and Latino immigrants, called the ordinance "legally sound and reaffirms our Houston community members protections [sic] under the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution."

Critics of the city ordinance

Conservative leaders, in contrast, have said the Houston City Council is not prioritizing public safety. In an email sent to Harris County Republicans, Cindy Siegel, chair of the county GOP, said the ordinance "undermines how law enforcement works with federal immigration authorities."

"This policy ties the hands of law enforcement, creates confusion for officers on the ground, and puts politics ahead of public safety," she said. "At a time when our city is already dealing with serious challenges, this is a step in the wrong direction."

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, who is in the midst of a heated primary runoff election against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to keep his seat, called the ordinance "absurd" and "dangerous."

"Immigration enforcement is a critical part of ensuring national security and public safety," Cornyn said in a post on X. "There's no logical rea-

son [the Houston Police Department] shouldn't be able to fully cooperate with [ICE] agents who are simply enforcing our nation's immigration laws."

Harris County commissioners are scheduled to hold their own county-level evaluation of immigration enforcement policies, following the city council's actions. Orlando Sanchez, a Republican candidate for county judge, called on the court to "reject any effort to limit cooperation" with ICE.

"Public safety is not a partisan issue; it is a fundamental responsibility of county government, and I will always choose security over sanctuary-style policies," he said.

Harris County commissioners to discuss county immigration guidelines after controversial city policy

Harris County commissioners are set to discuss county-level guidelines on immigration enforcement Thursday, after a controversial policy was passed by Houston City Council to curtail ICE coordination.

Commissioner Rodney Ellis placed the discussion item on the agenda this week in response to the city council's recent ordinance to cut back on ICE interactions — which drew a threat by Texas Governor Greg Abbott to claw back \$110 million in public safety grants for the city.

In a statement, Ellis called the upcoming discussion one part of a broader public safety conversation. He said he's bringing the motion to discuss policies related to traffic stops because those interactions "have been a common entry point for ICE-related abuses."

"Immigrant communities are inseparable from the story of Harris County," he said. "The job of any elected official — whether you're in county, city, state, or federal office — is to ask what we can do, within the law, to keep the people we serve safe," Ellis said.

The commissioner plans to direct the office of county administration and the county attorney's office to

come back with policy proposals on county immigration enforcement practices in June, a spokesperson said.

Houston's ordinance prohibits police officers from detaining people or prolonging traffic stops due to civil immigration warrants.

The Houston Police Department is required to report to the mayor, who appoints police chiefs and sets operational guidelines for the law enforcement agency.

The Harris County Sheriff's Office, however, operates under an elected sheriff and as an independent entity from commissioners court. The court only oversees the office's funding — and the budgets of the county's eight elected constables' offices.

The sheriff's office coordinates with federal immigration officers through mandated detainees in the Harris County Jail. Last year, the state passed legislation giving jail staff authority to issue immigration detainees, known as 287(g) agreements.

Harris County Commissioners passed a resolution in February reaffirming their stance on ICE operations by calling on the federal government to enact comprehensive immigration enforcement reforms. They cited figures this year that the county leads the country in immigration holds at the Harris County Jail.

The resolution — which passed 3-1 with Commissioner Tom Ramsey dissenting and County Judge Lina Hidalgo absent — directed local law enforcement agencies to stick to clear and consistent processes while detaining and relocating individuals regardless of their immigration status.

According to county data, 895 people were held on ICE detainees inside the Harris County Jail on Monday. A state immigration detainer report shows that immigration holds in the county jail recently came at a cost of \$3.3 million.

Ramsey, who couldn't be reached for comment Tuesday, said in a post to X that the upcoming conversation is necessary. Hidalgo did not return an email seeking comment.

In a statement to Houston Public Media, Commissioner Lesley Briones said she has not received a specific proposal from any court office on the discussion, but welcomes all ideas to keep the county safe.

End of cost-free empire

Muhammad Wajahat Sultan

America had a policy of an asymmetric cost model. It means costing the other side far more. Select a small state, lash out locally and coerce it economically and militarily. It helped America to maintain invincibility and adventurism in states like Libya, Venezuela, Panama and Grenada.

All these states lacked the capacity to penalise America. This asymmetric model of cost, on the other hand, helped America, in all the historical years, to remain relevant.

Iran has done a historic thing which has never been faced by Americans. Iran started a security doctrine of forward defence in comparison with the asymmetric cost model. Iran attacked forward-deployed assets, US allies and targets against Israel and America in the region.

By blocking the Strait of Hormuz and threatening Bab al-Mandeb across the Gulf, Iran has effectively shaped an equal cost distribution for the US and its allies. It was a geographic opportunity for Iran, which it leveraged very well.

This idea of distributed retaliation to counter the asymmetric cost model helped Iran to emerge as a state with equal capacity to hurt America, which has never been faced by Americans, and they were strategically and operationally not prepared to counter such an obstacle before.

What America has miscalculated started in 2020. After the assassination of Major General Qasem Soleimani, Iran directly attacked a US military installation: the Al-Asad Airbase in Iraq. Iran didn't seek revenge through proxies or deniable escalation, and it was a clear signal that Iran has directly accom-

plished the capacity to resist a global power.

Americans remained in a magnificent illusion that the greater the defence budget, the more it automatically establishes them as superior on the battlefield. America anticipated that, as they have a greater budget, it could survive a war.

From the Vietnam War to the Iranian attacks, they politically and economically faced humiliation because of miscalculations. Iran, with a smaller chunk of military spending, doesn't believe in a higher military budget but in disruption. It creates low-cost, high-impact systems to make strategic denial.

With this strategy, Iran has managed to end the era of relatively cost-free US wars. America's greatest monopoly over global outreach with its military footprint has turned into a source of humiliation and lost glory. The American high-

cost military assets have only proved a fundamental weakness in the American war economy.

At both the tactical and economic levels, the Iranian low-cost, high-precision military build-up and alliance system to launch different weapons at low-cost pressured America to revisit its warfare approach, to engage in low-cost weapons and allies, and to deploy tactical and military capabilities in war zones.

Odd Arne Westad, in his forthcoming book, *The Lamps Are Going Out*, formulated how imperial overstretch is not just resisting America but proving that a cost-free empire is structurally over. Like Britain before World War I, the US has designed a global system of alliances, bases, and promises to protect the security of different alliances in different regions.

Iran's recent strategy of distributed retaliation has proved that the powerful dominance of the US is only a network of pressure points. Every base, maritime chokepoint and regional ally has witnessed a potential site of cost imposition. It marks a new age of symmetric cost, where the US is also bearing an equal share of the cost and security threat.

In the future, the contours of wars will change. The cost penalty over America has signalled to smaller states that they can hurt America. Wars initiated by great powers are no longer one-sided, and small states are equally deterred through distributed retaliation.

The idea of scale has been replaced with precision. America's invincibility in foreign adventurism without meeting the cost of its military action has ended. It is the rise of symmetrical warfare.

UPDATE: Suspect Surrenders in Killing of Nephew of Aafia Siddiqui, Claims Self-Defense

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the shooting stemmed from a previously arranged vehicle trade between Siddiqui and 23-year-old Eric Olvera. Authorities state that Siddiqui had gone with a friend to sell a car when Olvera allegedly pulled out a firearm and shot him. Siddiqui's friend immediately drove him from the scene while on the phone with emergency services, eventually stopping near Alvin Community College.

Following the incident, Olvera was charged with murder. In a major development, authorities confirmed that he turned himself in on April 6, 2026, and is currently being held without bond. However, his family has claimed that the shooting occurred in self-defense, a claim that investigators have not officially substantiated.

Ammad Siddiqui, a resident of Sugar Land, was a freshman business major at the University of Houston and had a strong passion for cars, which he also pursued through online vehicle trading.

His funeral prayer was held at Masjid Sabireen in Houston, where a large number of mourners from the Pakistani and Muslim community—especially the الشباب—gathered to offer prayers and pay their final respects. The burial took place in a local cemetery, with scenes of deep grief as family, friends, and community members mourned the loss of a young life.

Ammad's father, Muhammad Ali Siddiqui—brother of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui—and his mother, Dr. Lubna Khawaja, a Professor of Internal Medicine, remain devastated by the loss.

The case continues to unfold as authorities investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting, including the self-defense claim, while the community grapples with the shock and sorrow of this devastating incident.

Arif Kapatia Laid to Rest as Community Holds Emotional Memorial on His Birthday

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and community members gathered to offer their final respects.

Following his burial, a memorial gathering was held in his honor, coinciding with his birthday, making the occasion even more emotional for those in attendance. Friends and well-wishers came together to remember his life, character, and the strong bonds he shared with the community.

A cake-cutting ceremony was also held in his memory, symbolizing love and remembrance on what would have been his special day. Participants shared prayers for his forgiveness, asking Allah Almighty to grant him the highest place in Jannat-ul-Firdous and to give patience to his family during this difficult time.

Attendees described Arif Kapatia as a kind-hearted and generous indi-

vidual whose presence will be deeply missed. The event concluded with collective دعاء, as the community continues to mourn his loss while honoring his memory.

South Asian Fans Flock to See Asim Azhar at Rehan Siddiqui's Houston Show

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Azhar shared that he never expected the song to achieve such massive popularity, crediting fans' love for its success. He also revealed that during the production phase, he was asked to remove the vocals of the Sabri Sisters from the track, but he refused, believing it was essential to the song's essence.

Azhar also spoke about his passion for cricket, naming Babar Azam, Shadab Khan, Saim Ayub, and Abdullah Shafique among his favorite players.

On the occasion, Rehan Siddiqui noted that organizing 20 concerts within six weeks is a record-setting achievement, adding that no Pakistani artist has accomplished such an extensive tour in such a short period. He emphasized that the strong turnout reflects the growing global demand for Pakistani music and talent.

The Houston launch event has set the stage for what is expected to be a highly successful and impactful U.S. tour for Asim Azhar.

From Pakistan to Houston: Adil Malik Leads a Cultural Wave with Young Stunners' Historic U.S. Debut

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the strength of this vision through the successful production of a culturally rich and professionally executed live performance by Abu Ayaz Fareed Qawwal on November 8, 2025, at Embassy Suites by Hilton. The event attracted a diverse audience and set a new benchmark for South Asian musical showcases in the U.S., blending tradition, spirituality, and world-class production quality into a seamless experience.

Building on this strong foundation, Adil Malik and Mohammad Farhan Shaikh are now preparing for what is being described as a historic milestone in Pakistani entertainment the introduction of Young Stunners, Pakistan's most influential hip-hop duo, to major American stages in May and June 2026 across Houston and New York City. The duo will perform live on May 31 at Arena Theater, Houston, and June 5 at Westbury Music Fair, New York, marking a groundbreaking moment where Pakistan's contemporary urban music culture steps into mainstream international arenas at an unprecedented scale.

At the heart of Pakistan's modern music revolution stands Young Stunners, the groundbreaking hip-hop duo consisting of Talha Anjum and Talhah Yunus, with visionary producer Jokhay shaping their signature sound. Together, they have redefined South Asian urban music, transform-

ing it from an underground movement into a global cultural force resonating with millions of listeners worldwide.

Talha Anjum, widely regarded as one of the most influential Urdu rappers of his generation, also known as Mr. Most Stream, has emerged as one of Pakistan's most streamed local artists, accumulating hundreds of millions of streams across platforms. His music is defined by poetic storytelling, emotional depth, and raw lyrical authenticity. Drawing inspiration from literary giants such as Jaun Elia, he has built a powerful emotional connection with youth across South Asia and the global diaspora, making him one of the most recognizable voices in Desi hip-hop. Alongside him, Talhah Yunus brings a distinct artistic balance, blending melody, rhythm, and lyrical versatility. His creative energy complements the duo's identity, adding depth and dimension to their sound. Together, they have built a musical style that is not just rap, but a fusion of storytelling, culture, and modern sonic experimentation that resonates globally.

Behind their signature sound stands Jokhay, one of Pakistan's most influential producers, whose atmospheric beats, cinematic layering, and emotionally driven production style have helped define the identity of modern Urdu hip-hop. More than a producer, Jokhay is an architect of sound elevating Pakistani rap into a globally competitive and sonically refined genre.

Together, this trio has created some of the most iconic tracks in South Asian hip-hop history, consistently topping streaming charts, breaking regional barriers, and introducing Urdu rap to global audiences at scale. Their music reflects more than entertainment; it captures the voice of a generation navigating identity, ambition, struggle, heartbreak, and social realities.

Today, Young Stunners are widely recognized as one of the most streamed and influential hip-hop acts from the Asian region, with a rapidly expanding global fan base across Pakistan, India, the Middle East, the UK, and North America. Their success has not only elevated Pakistani hip-hop but also positioned South Asian rap as a rising force in global music conversations.

As they prepare for their historic U.S. debut, Young Stunners are not just performing concerts; they are representing a cultural movement. Their arrival on American stages marks a defining moment for Pakistani music, where local voices step into global arenas with confidence, identity, and undeniable impact.

A Cultural Statement on Global Stages

This upcoming U.S. tour is not just a series of concerts; it is a cultural statement. Presenting Pakistan's new-generation sound as bold, fearless, and globally relevant, it introduces international audiences to a musical identity being experienced at this scale for the first time.

Malik's vision reflects a deep understanding of entertainment as both an art form and an industry, where storytelling, branding, production, and audience experience merge into a single powerful ecosystem.

Over the years, he has successfully executed numerous large-scale

concerts and entertainment projects across Pakistan, overseeing every detail from artist management and curation to stage design, technical production, logistics, and audience engagement consistently delivering events that meet international standards of safety, creativity, and execution.

Now serving in a leadership role at Total Multimedia as Regional Manager Events in Texas, while simultaneously expanding Elixir Events & Productions, Adil Malik is focused on building a long-term entertainment infrastructure for South Asian artists in North America. His vision goes far beyond individual shows; he is developing sustainable touring circuits, fostering cross-cultural collaborations, mentoring emerging talent, and positioning Pakistan as a serious and respected contributor to the global entertainment economy.

His approach is not limited to organizing events; it extends to shaping an entire ecosystem where artists can grow, connect, and thrive on international platforms. As Houston prepares to host one of the most anticipated South Asian music events of 2026, the city is rapidly emerging as a cultural hub for this new wave of entertainment.

At the center of it all stands Adil Malik, a visionary whose creativity, execution, and leadership are transforming him into a global cultural ambassador. His journey represents more than professional success; it reflects a powerful movement that bridges continents through music, strengthens cultural identity, and redefines how the world experiences the sound of Pakistan, positioning him as a driving force in the country's global artistic expansion and a key figure shaping the future of its entertainment industry on the world stage.

Pakistani American Community in Houston Benefits from AI Innovation Symposium

Continued from page 17

in Houston, the symposium served as an important platform for learning and opportunity. Participants gained insights into how AI can be applied in fields such as healthcare, business, education, engineering, and digital marketing—areas where the community is increasingly active and growing.

Experts led keynote sessions, panel discussions, and hands-on workshops focusing on ethical AI use, automation, and emerging technologies. These sessions helped attendees understand how AI tools can improve productivity, support small businesses, and create new career pathways for students and young professionals.

Community members also highlighted the value of networking opportunities at the event, where they connected with industry leaders and tech innovators. Many Pakistani American entrepreneurs explored how AI-driven solutions can help modernize their businesses, improve customer service, and expand digital reach.

Organizers from Houston Community College emphasized that the symposium is designed to make advanced technology more accessible to diverse communities, including immigrant and minority groups who are increasingly contributing to the region's economic growth.

The event concluded with strong interest in future editions, including the upcoming 6th Annual AI Conference, which is expected to further strengthen collaboration between academia, industry, and local communities.

For Houston's Pakistani American population, the symposium underscored a clear message: artificial intelligence is not just a global trend, but a practical tool that can open doors to education, entrepreneurship, and long-term economic empowerment.

Altaf Hussain Calls for Peace, Questions Global Double Standards Amid US-Iran Tensions

Continued from page 17

civilians, particularly women and children.

Referring to recent geopolitical developments, Hussain alleged that ongoing bombardment by Israel in Lebanon was undermining diplomatic efforts between Washington and Tehran. He pointed out that despite mediation efforts reportedly supported by Pakistan, the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate, raising concerns about the sincerity and effectiveness of international peace initiatives.

He also questioned what he described as a "double standard" in global politics, criticizing the United States and its allies for their strong backing of Israel while failing to enforce international law uniformly. According to Hussain, this perceived imbalance weakens trust in global governance systems.

Turning his attention to international institutions, Hussain criticized the United Nations, calling its current structure ineffective in resolving conflicts. He argued that repeated use of veto power by major powers has rendered the UN Security Council unable to act decisively in crises, including those involving Iran and the broader Middle East. Hussain proposed a complete restructuring of the UN, including the elimination of veto power and the adoption of a two-thirds majority voting system for resolving international disputes.

He further criticized the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, stating that it has failed to fulfill its mandate of supporting Muslim-majority countries during times of crisis. Citing conflicts in Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, Hussain claimed the organization has neither taken effective action nor issued meaningful condemnation.

Calling the OIC "symbolic and ineffective," Hussain suggested that if it cannot uphold its founding purpose, it should be dissolved altogether.

The MQM leader concluded by reiterating his appeal for peace, stressing that war is not a solution and that global powers must prioritize negotiations to prevent further loss of innocent lives.

THE GREAT GOLD SQUEEZE

Gold has long balanced sentiment and survival—but rising prices are reshaping that equation.

By Fouzia Nasir Ahmad/Amir Khan

Gold, in the subcontinent, has always been much more than just a metal you can buy and sell—it's embedded in our social and emotional lives. It lives in velvet-lined boxes that smell faintly of stale attar and old wood, in musty bank lockers visited before weddings, in the quiet arithmetic of mothers who expertly weigh bangles against their children's futures. It is flashed loudly—stacked on wrists, layered at the throat—but its meaning is often whispered: security, status, love, insurance against an uncertain tomorrow.

Gold is a store of value, yes, but it's also intertwined with a family's financial planning, social status, and traditions. This cultural symbol represents love, security, and continuity across generations. Bangles, necklaces, and coins are more than adornments—they carry identity, pride, and memory. As jewellery, it is personal and emotional. Families invest in it for daughters, pass it down as heirloom with pride, and rely on it during uncertainty.

A wedding worth in gold

For many families, the biggest expense in a wedding is gold, not the venue, not the food, not even the dress. The gold that will adorn the bride is a tangible sign of her worth and a reservoir of security for her future. In fact, when a daughter is born, it is common for mothers to begin saving and investing in gold from day one, quietly building the trove that will later be transformed into bangles, necklaces, and coins for her wedding. Every festival, every Eid, every achievement or milestone that a daughter accomplishes, the family rewards her with gold—and every small bonus is an opportunity to add to this private, glittering inheritance.

Across Pakistan and India, gold is less a commodity than a companion to life's milestones. Families give it at births, at Eids, at moments when words feel insufficient. To give gold is to give something that endures, something that can be melted, reshaped, passed down—never quite lost.

But beneath the shimmer lies something more pragmatic, even quietly defiant. For generations of women in the subcontinent, gold has doubled as autonomy—wealth that could be held, hidden, or reclaimed when other forms of ownership were denied or uncertain. Even today, in a country navigating inflation and currency swings, gold remains a fallback language of stability, a way to store value when everything else feels negotiable.

Which is why, when conflict erupts far from home—between nations like Iran, the United States, and Israel—it does not feel distant. It arrives at our door, instead, at the price of a tola. In the hesitation before a purchase. In the recalibration of wedding budgets and inheritance plans. Because here, gold is not just reacting to war. It is absorbing.

Is gold affected by war?

Gold prices fluctuate during wartime because, despite its traditional role as a "safe haven," it is heavily influenced by competing financial forces—specifically the US dollar, interest rates, and the need for market liquidity.

While geopolitics might initially drive gold prices up, the subsequent economic impacts of war often trigger selling, leading to high volatility. Here is a breakdown of why gold fluctuates during conflict:

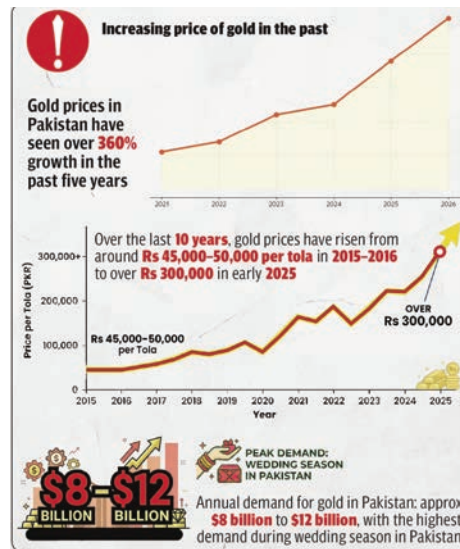
Rising interest rates and inflation

War often causes oil prices to spike, and this one in particular because of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, which increases inflation concerns. To combat this, central banks raised interest rates, making non-yielding assets like gold less appealing compared to interest-bearing assets like Treasuries.

Stronger USD

In times of crisis, investors often rush to the US dollar as the ultimate safe haven, not gold. A strengthening dollar makes gold more expensive for international buyers, reducing demand and lowering prices.

Profit-Taking and Liquidity Needs: If a conflict follows a period where gold has already hit record highs, investors often sell gold to take profits. Furthermore, if investors face losses in other areas (stocks, crypto), they may sell their gold holdings to cover margin calls, causing rapid price drops. Early phases of a conflict often see a "fear markup" where gold spikes, but as the situation



becomes clearer, the price corrects, leading to high volatility.

Despite short-term volatility and drops, gold often holds value over the long term during prolonged conflicts, especially if central banks respond to a resulting recession with rate cuts or if central banks (like China) use the conflict as a reason to reduce dependency on the USD.

While a sharper decline in gold prices has come post the February 28 Middle East conflict, silver has also mirrored this trend with a steep decline.

Volatile or fluctuating gold prices have made wedding planning increasingly unpredictable for families. Even after a recent dip, gold remains far more expensive than it was just a few years ago, putting it out of reach for many. Combined with the escalating costs of putting together dowries, lavish venues, and overwhelmingly "filmi" ceremonies, it has turned marriage into a eginormous financial strain. For countless young people, these pressures are not just burdensome—they are postponing weddings altogether, although it would be sensible to trim the expenses down.

The wedding industry in Pakistan is a massive, booming, multi-billion-rupee economic engine, with annual spending estimated between 900 billion rupees and over one trillion rupees. Yet, the soaring gold prices—are not only affecting it but also personal finance because gold acts as a personal wealth fund for families.

A 2020 Gallup Pakistan survey revealed that in urban centres such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, many in their late 20s and early 30s are postponing major purchases, from homes to cars, because significant savings are tied up in dowries and wedding expenses. The Punjab Women's Development Department reports that over 50 percent of women above 30 remain unmarried due to these financial pressures.

In rural areas, where incomes are lower, the impact is even sharper. Families struggling to meet dowry expectations—including large amounts of gold—are increasingly unable to invest in housing or save funds.

Many young men delay both marriage and major investments, because they are unable to meet rising gold and wedding expenses.

"We have heard from our elders and seen it in practice also that gold comes in handy during difficult times," says 66-year-old Nasreen Kosar, a resident of Liaqatabad. In the past, when gold prices were low, people would save small amounts of money to buy gold, and when a problem arose and there wasn't enough cash to solve it, they would sell the gold to cover their expenses. But now, the price of one tola of gold has risen above 470,000 rupees."

Buying gold has become a dream for the poor and middle class. Kosar added that due to the current poor economic conditions and lack of job opportunities, the middle-class is trying to improve their finances by starting a small business or buying a vehicle, through their family gold investment. If they have gold at home, they can sell it and use the proceeds to start a small business easily. "Something similar happened in my family. My son lost his job, but he knew how to drive, and had four tolas of gold that my mother had given to me as a wedding gift. It came in handy during difficult times. Selling the gold, which was bought at a lower price in the past,

brought us a decent profit, which my son used to buy a car. Today, thanks to that gold, our household is running smoothly."

Forty-year-old Noshin Khan from Keamari shares that, no matter which community a family belongs to, women often take pride in having some amount of gold. It is a tradition to give gold to girls during weddings. Nowadays, middle- or lower-class families cannot afford to give gold at weddings. "That is why, presently, a lot of people melt down family gold, reshape it, and then give it as gifts in their daughters' wedding."

Since gold prices in Pakistan have skyrocketed, people now give silver or artificial jewellery instead of gold during weddings, observes senior journalist Mushtaq Sohail, who reports on social issues. "I too, due to my financial position, gave away artificial jewellery at a family wedding."

According to Sohail Rafiq, a jeweller, rising gold prices have severely affected our business. "Those who give gold to their daughters at weddings often melt family jewellery and redesign it, which incurs initial costs ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 rupees or more," he shares. "Giving silver and other artificial jewellery at weddings has become increasingly popular, with modern artificial jewellery sets costing anywhere from 5,000 rupees to over 100,000 rupees. "The middle class buys artificial jewellery valued at less than or more than 50,000 rupees for weddings. At present, a set of at least two tolas costs around 950,000 rupees, enough to cover the weddings of two daughters. Due to rising gold prices, people are now buying silver as a safe investment, but even the price of silver per tola has increased beyond 7,000 rupees. If gold prices continue to rise, people will stop giving gold at weddings or other celebrations. However, artificial jewelry offers a good profit margin, which is why jewellers are increasingly focusing on it."

Minister of State for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and Chairman of the Reforms & Resource Mobilisation Commission, economist, fellow chartered accountant, Ashfaq Tola, pointed out that the global economy is currently fluctuating due to war and other issues. "When the economic situation worsens, it negatively affects currencies worldwide," he says. "Gold is considered a safe investment in such circumstances. This is why the wealthy often prioritise buying gold to secure their assets, and in difficult times, if the value of currency drops, they can sell the gold to earn a profit and address their financial problems. Gold is an investment that can be easily converted into the currency of any country."

Currently, there is a growing trend worldwide where affluent individuals are purchasing gold to safeguard their money through secure investments. Tola noted that in Pakistan, gold prices have increased dramatically over the past two years. "In Pakistan, only the wealthy can afford gold," he says. "The rise in gold prices has adversely affected the livelihoods of people associated with the jewellery trade, forcing many to shift to artificial jewellery. Currently, over 70 percent % of the population cannot afford the new gold price, and more than 50 percent of those in the jewellery business have been impacted by rising gold prices.

"People are now buying silver and gold as safe investments, which is why their prices are also increasing. He concluded that the country's economic situation is improving, the currency is under control, but there is a need to create employment opportunities and boost investment across various sectors.

Affirming that gold continues to hold a dominant position as a preferred safe-haven asset in Pakistan, driven by its strong historical returns, ease of transaction, and resilience during economic uncertainty, Abdullah Abdul Razzaq, a member of All-Pakistan Gems and Jewellers Sarafa Association (APGJSA) pointed out that gold prices have witnessed extraordinary growth over the years. "We have seen annual increases, in some cases ranging between 100% to 200%, reinforcing investor confidence. This consistent upward trajectory has shaped public perception, making gold one of the most trusted stores of value, particularly in an environment marked by inflation, currency depreciation, and financial instability."

According to him, one of the key reasons for the popularity of gold over other asset classes, such as real

estate, stocks, or government bonds, is its simplicity and accessibility. "Unlike property transactions, which require extensive verification, documentation, and legal processes, or stock market investments that involve formal account setups and regulatory procedures, gold can be purchased instantly without paperwork or bureaucratic hurdles," he shares. "Its compact nature and high liquidity further enhance its appeal, as it can be easily stored, transported, and converted into cash whenever needed. These characteristics make gold especially attractive to Pakistani investors who prioritise convenience and security."

Since the gold market in Pakistan is currently facing multiple challenges stemming from both domestic policies and international developments, Razzaq highlighted that import and export activities have been severely disrupted, partly due to ongoing tensions in the Middle East and partly due to the heavy burden of duties and taxes imposed on the sector. "These restrictions have constrained trade flows, reduced market activity, and, at times, led to unusual situations where gold was sold below cost due to weak demand and limited liquidity," he notes, emphasising that if the government revisits these duties and reduces the tax burden, it could help stabilise prices, revive trading activity, and make gold more accessible to the broader population.

On the global front, Razzaq explained that international price movements have a direct and immediate impact on local markets. During periods of geopolitical tension or conflict, investors worldwide rush toward gold as a safe-haven asset, driving prices higher. This trend is mirrored in Pakistan, where rising global prices translate into higher local rates. However, this also creates a paradox: while gold becomes more attractive as an investment, it simultaneously becomes less affordable for the average consumer. As a result, local demand often declines during price surges, as buyers delay purchases in anticipation of potential corrections.

This dynamic is particularly evident during the wedding season, traditionally a peak period for gold consumption in Pakistan. "We can see a sharp increase in prices has significantly altered buying behaviour, with middle- and lower-income households increasingly turning to imitation jewellery as a substitute," says Razzaq. "Others are opting for silver jewellery as a more affordable alternative. He estimated that nearly 80% of traditional gold-related wedding business has diminished, with only about 20% to 25% of consumers still purchasing gold for such occasions. Even within this segment, there is a growing preference for buying gold as an investment rather than for ornamental use."

Although silver jewellery is emerging as a new trend in response to changing geo-political and economic dynamics, people are gifting pure gold bars instead of traditional gold sets. "This approach allows them to maintain cultural traditions while ensuring that the value of the gift is preserved and can be utilised in the future if needed," says Razzaq. "It reflects a broader shift in mindset, where practicality and financial security are taking precedence over purely decorative considerations."

Razzaq also discussed the role of taxes and religious obligations, emphasising that while taxes are an unavoidable global reality and a civic responsibility, they are unlikely to significantly alter long-term demand for gold. Similarly, he highlighted the importance of Zakat, noting that for believers, fulfilling this obligation not only ensures spiritual satisfaction but is also seen as a means of financial stability and growth.

Looking ahead, he observed a clear generational shift in preferences. Younger investors, Gen Z, both in Pakistan and globally, are increasingly inclined toward pure gold as an investment asset, rather than traditional jewellery. This trend aligns with a broader global movement where individuals are diversifying into assets like gold and even alternatives such as digital currencies, seeking protection against economic volatility. Overall, gold in Pakistan is evolving from a cultural and ornamental commodity into a strategic financial instrument, shaped by rising prices, policy challenges, and changing consumer behaviour.

Gold, once a promise you could wear, is fast becoming a privilege you can only watch from afar.

Why Gen Z has trouble saying 'forever'

'Let's see where this goes' is the new language of commitment.

By Rabia Khan

Two young people meet at university. They start texting every day, share memes, talk late at night, and spend time together after classes. Their friends assume they are a couple. When someone asks, "Are you two together?" the answer is simple: "We're just talking."

Weeks turn into months, and the relationship still has no clear name. This kind of situation is very common among Generation Z. Many relationships exist somewhere between friendship and commitment.

Because of this, people often say that Gen Z is afraid of commitment. But the reality is more complicated. Growing up in a fast-changing world filled with uncertainty, many young people simply want to understand themselves, their careers, and their partners before making long-term promises.

No wonder surveys show that 56% of Gen Z (ages 18–29) are single, far more than previous generations, and that they are the least likely to rush into romantic relationships. For this generation, commitment isn't dead—it's being rewritten on their terms.

The same approach extends to work. Nearly half of Gen Z employees plan to leave their jobs within a year, often taking roles knowing they won't stay long. It's not disloyalty—it's a search for purpose, growth, and authenticity before committing.

Ruhaf Khan, a university student from the Department of Education, believes commitment in friendships still holds deep value for her generation. "A true friend is someone with whom one can share personal thoughts and secrets," she says. "Someone who stands beside you in both good and difficult times, and someone who shares similar values. In contrast, acquaintances remain at the surface level people with whom interactions are polite but not deeply personal."

For Ruhaf, "Loyalty is the most important component of any relationship."

However, she also acknowledged that maintaining any relationship today requires conscious effort. If people stop investing time and attention, even strong relationships can slowly fade.

According to Ruhaf, love, trust, and mutual support are the foundations of a healthy family environment. While disagreements and differences sometimes arise, communication helps resolve many issues. However, she also notes that modern life has reduced people's connection with the wider community. With busy schedules and increasing social distance, building strong community ties has become more difficult for many young people.

Interestingly, Ruhaf's approach to hobbies reflects a broader Gen Z trait—constant exploration. Instead of sticking to one passion, she enjoys trying different activities. "Every day I feel like trying something new."

Her reflections suggest that Gen Z is not necessarily afraid of commitment. Rather, they are navigating a complex world with changing priorities. What older generations see as hesitation may simply be a generation taking time to understand itself before making lasting commitments.

Mubashir Khan, a young mathematics graduate from Government College University believes Gen Z is often misunderstood when it comes to commitment. "Young people today are simply more careful before making serious decisions," he believes. "Finding the right partner in the early twenties can actually be a good thing. "If you meet the right person early, you can grow and become successful together. But the partner should support you, not make the relationship challenging."

Mubashir also explained that many Gen Z individuals try to protect their freedom and mental health, which is why they avoid rushing into commitments. He says he follows the same approach in his own life focusing on personal growth, peace of mind, and making thoughtful decisions before committing to anything long-term.



Aiman Ali, who is currently pursuing her bachelors in business commerce, believes that both ambitions and concerns shape her generation's approach to commitment.

Aiman does not see marriage as the ultimate goal of life. "It is a part of life, not life itself," she explains, adding that the right time for marriage is after completing education and achieving financial and emotional stability. Until then, she believes relationships often remain uncertain. She remarked that every relationship begins as a 'situationship' until it eventually leads to marriage.

Aiman emphasised loyalty and respect over constant communication. "Even a simple message occasionally can maintain a friendship despite busy schedules." However, she admitted ending a close relationship once because she felt jealousy and competition had replaced trust.

Aiman rejects the idea that Gen Z lacks dedication. She believes young people are serious about their future but also value fair salaries and positive work environments. She also shares that she once dreamed of becoming a doctor but had to give up that goal due to high education costs and exam challenges.

"Young people may be cautious about relationships and marriage, but they remain strongly committed to building better lives and supporting their families," says Aiman. "Gen Z is not afraid of making a commitment. What we fear is failure."

Esha Anwar shares a more critical perspective on Gen Z's approach to commitment. "Young people today tend to be more cautious about entering long-term relationships than previous generations," she says. She believes that growing up in a time when divorce rates appear high has significantly influenced Gen Z's thinking about marriage. In her view, nearly "90 percent" of young people are affected by the fear of relationships ending in divorce, which makes them more cautious about committing.

However, Esha does not see marrying later in life as a sign of fear. Instead, she considers it a personal choice shaped by career ambitions and personal growth. Most young people today prefer to focus on building their future before starting a family or settling into a long-term relationship. Gen Z tends to value independence and self-development more than lifelong partnerships.

Esha emphasised "Focussing on career and personal growth should come before investing emotional energy in someone who may not be fully committed. Building a stable future is more important than rushing into uncertain relationships."

Makhdoom Mahalaka, a student of International Relations believes the issue is often misunderstood.

"People frequently say Gen Z avoids commitment in relationships, marriage, careers, and even financial responsibilities, but the reality is much more complex than that assumption," she explains. "Gen Z tends to be more careful before committing. Instead of rushing into decisions, they prefer to understand the other person first. This is why situa-

tionships or undefined relationships have become more common. This does not necessarily mean fear of commitment; rather, young people want to wait for the right person and the right time."

"Today's generation values honesty, trust, and emotional support," Mahalaka adds. "Many young people today prefer having fewer but deeper friendships instead of maintaining large social circles."

She pointed out that this generation does not strongly believe in staying in one job for decades like previous generations did. Instead, they look for workplaces that provide growth, learning opportunities, and meaningful values. If these elements are missing, they are more willing to move on and explore better options.

"They prefer to make thoughtful choices that align with their values," Mahalaka explains. "For them, freedom, mental peace, and personal growth are essential, which is why their lifestyle sometimes appears very different from that of previous generations."

Every generation is shaped by its times, and for Gen Z, uncertainty has been constant. Growing up amid economic instability, rapid technological change, and crises like Covid-19, they view stability and long-term decisions differently. Unlike earlier generations, milestones like steady jobs, early marriage, or homeownership are less certain. Facing high competition, rising costs, and limited security, hesitation is understandable—commitment today is both an emotional and practical choice.

Another key factor shaping Gen Z's approach to commitment is how dating has changed. Unlike the past, when relationships grew within small social circles, technology now connects people far beyond their immediate surroundings. While this access is exciting, it also increases the pressure to choose carefully. Many young people prioritise compatibility, shared interests, and emotional understanding before defining a relationship. What may look like avoidance is often a deliberate effort to avoid superficial commitments.

Maryam Ahmed, a computer science student explained that relationships often move from meeting and texting to hanging out and the "talking stage" before becoming official. She's experienced situationships, which she finds confusing, and believes marriage should ideally come in the mid-to-late twenties after emotional and financial stability.

For friendships, she values trust, support, and loyalty over constant communication and has ended friendships where she felt respect was lost. "Gen Z stays loyal to employers who offer growth, respect, and fair pay," Maryam explains. "We aren't scared of commitment,— just careful and thoughtful, prioritising personal freedom, growth, and well-being."

Ironically, abundance itself challenges Gen Z's commitment. With more career paths, lifestyles, and social options than ever, choosing one path can feel like closing doors to others. This "paradox of choice" makes decision-making harder, so hesita-

tion is often a response to navigating endless possibilities rather than fear of commitment.

Social media has also reshaped expectations about relationships.

Young people today are constantly exposed to images of romantic gestures, luxurious lifestyles, and seemingly perfect partnerships. Seeing "perfect" couples online and public breakups repeatedly can make long-term relationships seem risky.

These images rarely show the ordinary struggles that every relationship experiences.

As a result, many individuals unconsciously compare their own relationships with these polished portrayals. If their experiences do not match the idealised versions they see online, doubts can appear.

Some young people delay commitment because they feel their relationship must meet unrealistic standards. They want certainty that they have chosen the "right" partner, a certainty that rarely exists in real life.

"Unlike previous generations, Gen Z doesn't want to marry or feel the same pressure to marry," says Nadia Khan. "Earlier generations even played 'marriage games' in school, imagining future spouses and children, but today's youth approach relationships more thoughtfully and prioritise personal growth over following traditional expectations."

Gen Z isn't entirely "commitment-phobic." While around 32% are ready for long-term relationships, the remaining are like "let's see where this goes", prefer flexible arrangements like situationships or casual dating.

When asked about responsibility, Mubashir Khan rejected the idea that Gen Z is running away from it. He says, "young people are willing to take responsibility, but they prefer to do it by their own choice and readiness, rather than under societal pressure."

A key trait of Gen Z is openness about mental health. Unlike previous generations, they talk openly about anxiety, burnout, and self-care. This awareness affects relationships: they set boundaries and leave situations that harm their well-being. The pandemic, social isolation, and rising anxiety have made many Gen Zers cautious, afraid that opening up could lead to rejection or heartbreak and harm their mental well-being.

In societies like Pakistan, traditional expectations around marriage remain strong, with early commitment seen as a sign of stability. When Gen Z delays these milestones, it can create tension, as older generations may view it as irresponsibility, while young people feel pressured. This gap reflects differing life experiences and calls for empathy from both sides.

In fact, this generation often shows strong dedication to causes they care about—social justice, environmental protection, community activism, and personal development. Their commitment may simply appear in different areas of life.

When it comes to relationships, they want partnerships built on understanding rather than obligation. This approach may take longer, but it often leads to deeper connections.

Every generation navigates its own challenges while shaping new social norms. Gen Z is no exception. Their cautious approach to commitment reflects the complexities of the world they inhabit: Fear of commitment is heightened: "Why risk heartbreak when you can just keep scrolling?"

For many Gen Zers, flexibility and self-discovery come first, with serious relationships often postponed until personal and financial goals are achieved. Commitment isn't disappearing; humans still seek trust and connection. For Gen Z, the timeline may be slower, but their choices come after reflection and thought. In today's fast-paced world, taking time before promising "forever" ensures that commitment remains sincere, not rushed.

Rabia Khan covers social issues, literature, and cultural values of Pakistan.

HISTORY: WHEN PERSIA FREED THE JEWS

When Cyrus the Great defeated Babylon, he handed the exiled Jews something they had not had in decades...

Masood Lohar

When Babylon fell to the armies of Cyrus the Great in 539 BCE, the world witnessed not just the collapse of an empire but the birth of a new vision of rule.

For the Jews exiled in Babylon, this Persian conqueror was no ordinary king. He was a liberator, remembered in scripture as “the Lord’s anointed” — the only non-Jew ever to be given the title of Messiah in the Hebrew Bible.

This remarkable episode — where a Persian monarch enabled the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem — remains one of history’s most fascinating encounters between two ancient civilisations. It is a story of exile and return, of empire and faith, and of how tolerance can shape legacies that endure for millennia.

The Exile and the Promise of Return

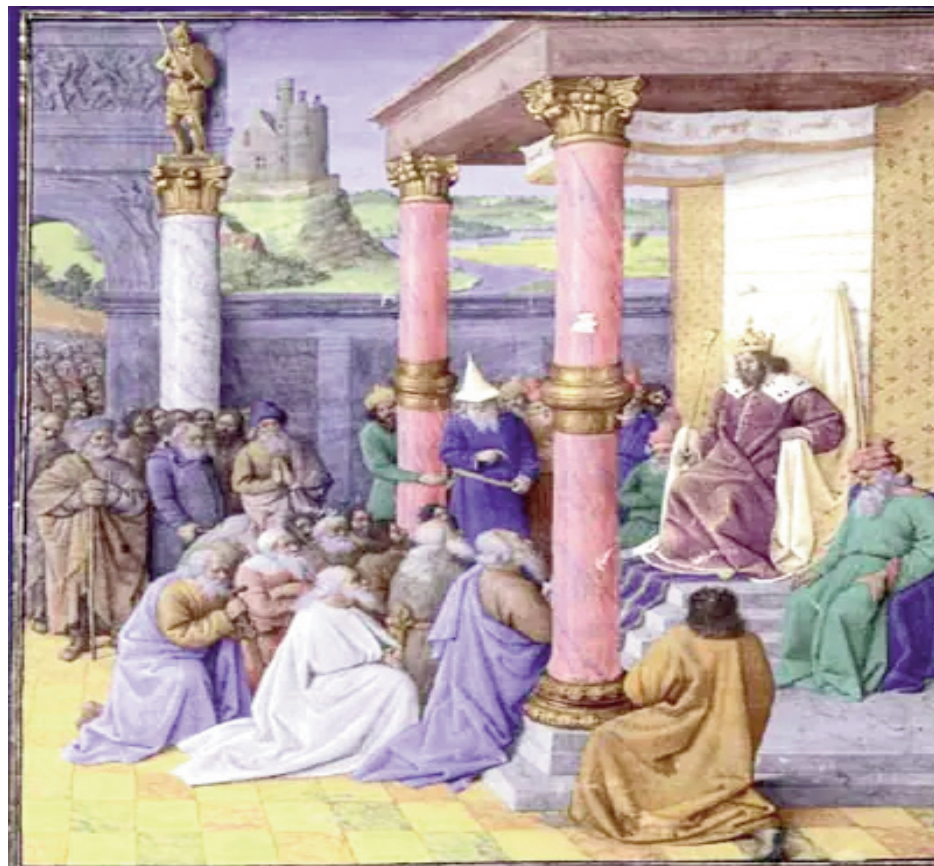
The Jews had been living under the shadow of Babylonian captivity since 586 BCE, when King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the First Temple [Solomon’s Temple] in Jerusalem and deported thousands to Babylon. For decades, their identity was tested in foreign lands, their rituals suppressed, their hopes dimmed.

Then came Cyrus. In a sweeping campaign, he conquered Babylon and issued a decree that allowed displaced peoples — including the Jews — to return to their homelands. For the Jewish community, this was nothing short of miraculous. The Book of Ezra records his edict: “The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth... and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.”

A King Unlike Others

What made Cyrus different from other conquerors? Unlike rulers who sought to erase local traditions, Cyrus embraced diversity. His empire stretched across vast lands, yet he allowed subject peoples to worship freely and govern themselves in matters of faith.

The famous Cyrus Cylinder, an ancient



A depiction of Emperor Cyrus the Great and the Hebrews by Frenchman Jean Fouquet circa 1470 | Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

clay cylinder inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform and discovered in Babylon, describes his policy of restoring temples and returning exiled communities — a vision of rule that resonates with modern ideas of human rights.

For the Jews, Cyrus was not just a political figure but a spiritual saviour. The prophet Isaiah even described him as chosen by God to deliver Israel. This intertwining of Persian statecraft and Jewish theology created a bond that shaped both traditions.

The Second Temple: A Symbol of Renewal

The return of the Jews to Jerusalem was more than a physical journey; it was a spiritual

rebirth. By 516 BCE, the Jews had rebuilt the Second Temple, a structure that would stand for centuries as the heart of Jewish worship. This temple became a symbol of resilience, a reminder that exile could be overcome and faith restored.

Persian support for the project was crucial. By granting resources and protection, Cyrus ensured that the Jews could re-establish their religious life. In return, Jewish prayers even invoked blessings for the Persian kings — a rare acknowledgment of foreign rulers in Jewish liturgy.

Cultural Crossroads

The Persian-Jewish encounter was not

only political but cultural. Scholars note that, during this period, Jewish thought absorbed influences from Persian religion, particularly Zoroastrianism. Concepts such as angels, demons and eschatology found echoes in Jewish writings. At the same time, Persian administration introduced systems of governance that shaped Jewish communal organisation.

This exchange highlights how civilisations, even when unequal in power, can enrich one another. The Jews preserved their identity, but they also adapted, integrating elements that would later define their theology.

Lessons for Today

Why does this ancient story matter now? Because it offers a model of leadership rooted in respect. Cyrus’ policies remind us that empires need not thrive on suppression; they can endure by embracing diversity. His vision stands in stark contrast to rulers who sought uniformity through force.

In a world still grappling with questions of coexistence, the Persian-Jewish relationship is a reminder that tolerance is not weakness — it is strength. It shows how faith and empire can coexist, how liberation can come from unexpected quarters and how respect can leave legacies that outlast conquest.

A Forgotten Chapter Worth Remembering

For readers in South Asia, this story resonates deeply. Our own histories are filled with exiles, migrations and encounters between civilisations. The tale of Cyrus and the Jews is not just about antiquity — it is about the timeless human quest for dignity and belonging.

Cyrus the Great remains a towering figure in both Persian and Jewish memory. To the Jews, he was the king who gave them back their temple. To the Persians, he was the founder of an empire built on vision and tolerance. To us today, he is a reminder that leadership, when tempered with humanity, can change the course of history.

Pakistan sends fighter jets to Saudi Arabia under mutual defence pact

Saudi Defense Ministry says Pakistani force consists of fighter and support aircraft belonging to Pakistan Air Force

Pakistan has sent fighter jets and other military forces to Saudi Arabia to boost security under a defence pact between the two countries, the kingdom’s defence ministry said on Saturday.

In September 2025, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a landmark “Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement”, declaring that “any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both”. The pact was signed during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s visit to Riyadh at the invitation of Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Saudi Arabia’s defence ministry said in a statement today that Pakistani fighter jets and support aircraft had arrived at the King Abdulaziz Air Base in the country’s Eastern Province.

“The Pakistani force consists of fighter and support aircraft belonging to the Pakistan Air Force, with the aim of enhancing joint military coordination,” the statement said, adding that it would raise the level of operational readiness between the armed forces of the two countries and support security and stability at both regional and international levels.

Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-

Malki also posted the statement on his X account.

Riyadh and Islamabad signed the mutual defence pact in September 2025, committing both sides to treat any aggression against either country as an attack on both. That significantly deepened a decades-old security partnership.

Pakistan has long provided military support to the kingdom, including training and advisory deployments, while Saudi Arabia has repeatedly stepped in to support Pakistan financially during periods of economic stress.

The development came a day after Riyadh

assured Islamabad of full financial support to address issues stemming from the Middle East conflict, during Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s meeting with Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Jadaan on Friday.

Government officials said the visiting finance minister assured his country’s full financial support to Pakistan and reiterated the kingdom’s trust in Islamabad’s role in mediating talks between the United States and Iran.

In 2018, Riyadh announced a \$6 billion support package for Pakistan, including a \$3b deposit at the central bank and \$3b worth of oil supplies on deferred payment.



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