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HKSCA President Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Meets U.S. Consul General Charles Goodman to Strengthen Bilateral Collaboration in Karachi




Karachi, Pakistan – The Houston–Karachi Sister City Association (HKSCA) delegation, led by President Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, was honored to be hosted at a luncheon by Charles Goodman, U.S. Consul General in Karachi, *Continued on page 12*

Ali Sheikhani Launches Houston's First 24/7 Desi Grocery Store "Papa Mart" with Grand Boat Basin Eid Mela

HOUSTON, TEXAS: The Pakistani-American community in Houston witnessed a festive and historic celebration as community leader and Sugar Land Constable Ali Sheikhani officially launched Papa Mart, described as Houston's first Indo-Pak grocery store operating 24 hours



a day, seven days a week, alongside a vibrant Boat Basin Eid Mela attended by *Continued on page 12*



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Trump rejects Iranian proposal to open Strait of Hormuz until nuclear concerns met

United States President Donald Trump rejected a proposal from Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, opting instead to maintain a naval blockade to pressure Tehran on its nuclear program, Axios reported. "The blockade is somewhat more effective than the bombing. They *Continued on page 13*

Pakistan working silently to find 'new formula' to break US-Iran deadlock

Away from the media limelight, Pakistan is working silently to break the ongoing deadlock between the United States and Iran, focusing on finding a new formula for a long-awaited agreement on the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran's nuclear programme, two government sources familiar with the matter told Anadolu on Wednesday. *Continued on page 13*

US to refuse visa to applicants who fear returning home

WASHINGTON: The United States has instructed its diplomatic missions worldwide to refuse visas to applicants who indicate fear of returning to their home country, in a new screening measure that has drawn concern from immigration lawyers and refugee advocates. According to a State Department cable circulated to all US embassies *Continued on page 12*

A Candidate Built on Merit; SARA KHAN for Fort Bend County Treasurer

Syed Feroz Ahmed
"Learning is the foundation of professional growth. It allows experience and skills to develop over time. When learning, experience, and skills come together, they enhance strategic thinking *Continued on page 12*




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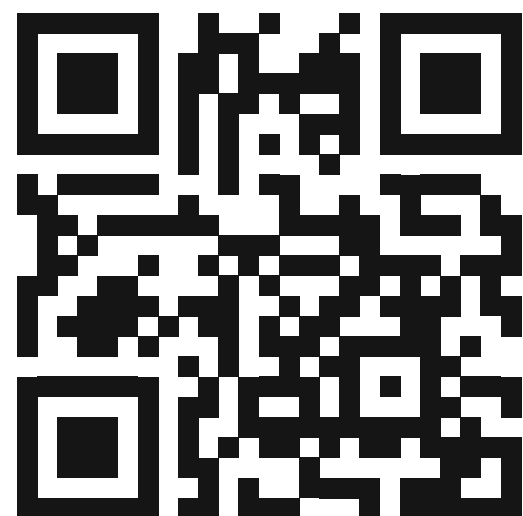
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The Moment of Destiny: A Call for National Unity

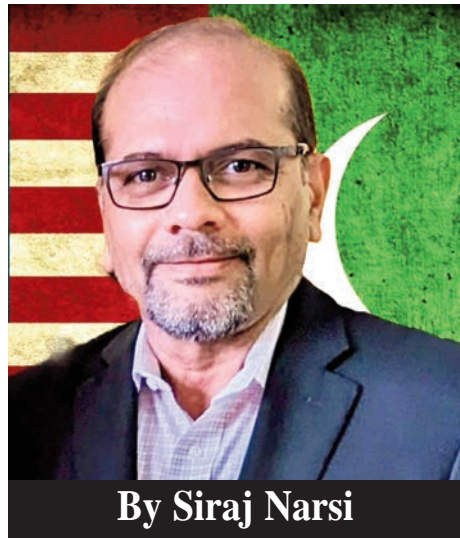
Standing among the Pakistani scholars, thinkers, enthusiastic young professionals and students at the Harvard University Pakistan Conference on April 12, I wondered about the theme echoing through the halls: Pakistan—from potential to performance.

For years, this phrase has been a hopeful academic exercise. The speakers spoke of our strategic location, our youth bulge, and our resilience as the "potential" that was always waiting for the right moment. For decades, we have been told that Pakistan's potential was a distant dream—a goal always just out of reach due to external challenges and internal strife.

Well, it now seems that the moment may finally have arrived. Over the past year, the world has watched Pakistan in awe as we transition from talking about performance to delivering it on the global stage. From a masterclass in military strategy that rewrote the war textbooks to our pivotal role in pulling the world back from the brink of third world war, Pakistan has arrived, with a bang.

We are no longer the nation being "blamed"; we are the nation being "consulted", being "depended upon". Yet, as we stand tall on the global stage, we are limping at home. Our international prestige is at an all-time high, but our internal foundation is fractured. We have become a diplomatic giant with an economic and political heart that is struggling to beat in rhythm. A House Divided Cannot Lead: It is a painful irony.

While the world's most powerful leaders



By Siraj Narsi

look to Islamabad for mediation and wisdom, our own hearts are filled with division. The current administration has achieved momentous success abroad - beyond anyone's imagination - yet it faces a crisis of legitimacy at home. Our economy remains on shaky grounds, and our political discourse has become a theater of anger and bitterness.

We cannot sustain this duality. You cannot lead the world if you are at war with yourself. To truly move from "potential to performance", that performance must be felt by every citizen, not just seen in foreign headlines.

The Call for Magnanimity: Now is the time for a "Grand National Reconciliation".

This is not a call for one side to surrender; it is a call for everyone to rise, together. I urge

the government to use this moment of international strength not to further isolate the opponents, but as a bridge towards them. Real power is shown through compassion, not crackdown. There is no greater wisdom at this time than to take the high road of reconciliation, prudence and maturity - the same prescription that was abundantly used to bring all conflicting parties in Iran-US war together.

There is no better time for magnanimity towards our own people than NOW. The opposition must also recognize that the country's recent successes belong to the people of Pakistan, not just to a party or a few individuals. No person is bigger than Pakistan, ever. This is a time of glory for Pakistan yet the social fabric of our nation is in tatters. It is time the agitation and protest give way to dialogue and compromise in the larger national interest. The enemy is already taking advantage of our internal divisions by sowing further division and hatred by clever use of social media, and the unsuspecting ones amongst us are falling for it.

I repeat, there is no better time for magnanimity towards our own people than NOW. Forgive, Forget, and Flourish: In order to flourish as a nation worthy of the international prestige we have recently earned, we must "forgive and forget" the personal and political grudges that have held us back for eighty years.

If we can mediate peace between global powers like the US and Iran, we can mediate peace between our own brothers and sisters too. Imagine a Pakistan where our brilliant military

minds, our passionate political leaders, our savvy diplomats, our visionary entrepreneurs and our resilient people are all pulling in the same direction. If we achieved this much while divided, imagine our power when we are "one". The Task Ahead: The confident new Pakistan is no longer a dream - it is a reality being recognized from Tehran to Riyadh and Beijing to Washington. But for this performance to be sustainable, it must be rooted in domestic stability - both political and economic - while continuing to build a stronger military to deter the enemies in view of the ever growing, multi-directional security threats. For this progress to last, it must be felt by the common people. We have earned the world's respect; now we must earn our own.

Let us shun the differences of the past. Let us choose harmony over hate. For the sake of our children and the honor of our green flag, let us build a Pakistan that is as stable within as it is strong without. Let us, together, foster an environment where every voice feels heard and every vote feels counted. Pakistan Hamesha Zindabad.

About the author:

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

The Weight of Silence: A Bullet, a Graph, and the Questions We Cannot Ask

I will not soon forget that evening in Washington. There were lights. There were words. And between them, a sound rose up that stilled everything - the sound of a gunshot. A single moment, which became the news. But news is never merely an event. News carries with it the question we do not wish to ask, the mirror into which we refuse to look. And this time the mirror was not the security detail's, nor the assailant's alone. It was the face of an entire nation, frightened by its own reflection.

Because that evening, something else was also under discussion. The ratings.

And it is here, precisely, that we ought to pause. For when the politics of a nation has been compressed into the thin lines of a graph, you may be certain that somewhere, quietly, its conscience has slipped from its proper place.

The numbers tell us that President Trump's approval rating has been hovering in recent days between 33 and 36 percent. A few months ago it stood between 38 and 43. The year before that, it had reached as high as 42 to 44. This is a graph - climbing, descending, pausing, moving on again. But graphs are never merely lines. Beneath every graph there are living human beings, and above them the shadows we have learned to call politics. And it is in those shadows that events are born.

Then, suddenly, three attacks.

The first, in which the bullet grazed an ear. The second, in which a man approached, armed, and came near. And the third, in that hall where power and the press were gathered together.

From here the questions begin to rise - not the questions one speaks aloud, but those that echo in the silence, and silence, I have learned again and again, has a weight all its own. Is it merely coincidence that danger swells in the moments of greatest political pressure? Is this only the story of one broken man, or is it the story of an atmosphere in which rage has begun to take on a shape? And the question that troubles me most: is any attack ever truly contained within a single individual, or is it the testimony of the fissures running through the society in



By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

which that individual draws his breath?

I have learned, in the course of a long life, that no man is born in a vacuum. No hatred descends from the sky. What we plant, we harvest - and then we marvel at the bitterness of the crop, as though we had nothing to do with the soil.

The international press settled, almost at once, upon a single phrase. Lone wolf. One man. One weapon. One moment. The New York Times and the other great institutions repeated the formulation, as if the words themselves were a kind of charm to ward off further thought. Because to call him a lone wolf is easy. To say instead that he was one of us, the offspring of the world we have built together, the child of our language, our anger, our television, our social media - that is harder. For to say it is to admit that we, all of us, in one form or another, are accomplices.

Tucker Carlson, who has always preferred to peer into the cracks of the prevailing story, will not accept this silence. He asks: Is it possible that, with such security, a man could reach so close? The question is not an accusation. It is the fog of doubt that

settles over every great event. His gesture is not toward any single agency, but toward that idea we have come to call the deep state - a power whose existence cannot be proven, but whose presence is nevertheless felt.

And here I must pause. For to ask a question is one thing; to take refuge inside a question is quite another. Some questions carry us closer to the truth. Others carry us further from it. Some questions are mirrors, and others are veils. We must learn, painfully, how to tell them apart.

On the other side, Reuters, The Guardian, and the other agencies tell us this attack was not the result of any foreign plot, but the expression of an internal collapse. A society fracturing from within. A society in which disagreement has ceased to be conversation and has become, instead, enmity. And this, perhaps, is the most painful diagnosis of all, because it points us toward no foreign enemy. It returns us to ourselves.

The story of the attacker himself bears this out. A man who poured his rage into language, who wrote a manifesto, who drew up a list, and then sought to translate his words into deed. His writings did not bear the syntax of any intelligence service. They bore the unmistakable echo of a broken mind. A mind that had been left, at some point, alone - abandoned by community, by family, by meaning, by itself.

But the question persists. Why is it that, after every great event, alongside the truth, another story is born? Why is it that with every gunshot one hears, faintly, the whisper of a conspiracy?

I think I know why. It is because the weight of the truth is more than we can bear. The truth is that a single, broken man can rend the peace of an entire nation. The truth is that hatred can grow without instruction, can flourish without orders. The truth is that the world is disordered, and that its disorder is the reflection of our own. And this truth is so bitter that we prefer the conspiracy in its place. For a conspiracy at least possesses an order. It has a plan. It has a culprit at whom we may point a finger. And to point the finger has always been easier than to look

into the mirror.

This is the place where journalism and philosophy meet. Journalism gives us the facts. Philosophy teaches us how to carry their weight.

The facts of this case are clear enough. There was an attack. A man was apprehended. No foreign network has surfaced. And yet the story does not end. For the real story is not the story of the bullet, but of the atmosphere into which it was fired. An atmosphere in which disagreement has become hatred. An atmosphere in which questions have grown more powerful than answers. An atmosphere in which the distance between fact and fantasy has begun, perilously, to close.

This attack was not merely the act of one man. Nor was it, necessarily, the fruit of some hidden conspiracy. It was the reflection of an atmosphere. An atmosphere in which trust has been hollowed out, in which every piece of news arrives with its attendant doubt, and in which every gunshot gives birth to a question whose answer we are unwilling to hear.

In the end, we are obliged to hold two truths together - truths that may seem to contradict one another, but which are both, nevertheless, true.

The first: that the numbers do not lie. The ratings fall, the ratings rise, and they move according to their own time. The second: that every event is far more intricate than any graph can suggest, because beneath every graph there are human beings, and human beings have never been merely numbers.

And so the question is not who carried out the attack. Nor is it merely who stands to benefit from it. The real question - the one we must put to ourselves, however unwelcome the answer may be - is this: Have we entered an age in which truth, doubt, and politics have become three characters in a single story?

And if so, then every gunshot is no longer merely a sound. It is a question. And the answer to that question lies not with any agency, not with any journalist, not with any politician.

The answer lies with our own conscience.

And conscience, as I have learned across a long life, is the most pitiless witness of them all.

Houston Energy Sector Braces for Lubricant and Manufactured Oil Shortages as Strait of Hormuz Tensions Escalate

HOUSTON — The ongoing escalation between the United States and Iran, coupled with the recent partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz, is sending shockwaves through Houston's energy and manufacturing corridors. While crude oil headlines dominate national news, a quieter but equally critical crisis is emerging: shortages of finished lubricants and manufactured oil products that keep Texas industry running.

The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman, handles roughly 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption and over 30% of seaborne oil trade. Its disruption does not just affect crude shipments. Base oils, additives, and specialty chemicals — the building blocks of finished lubricants — also transit the route from Middle Eastern and Asian refineries. With Iranian forces restricting commercial passage since late March, supply chains feeding Gulf Coast blenders have tightened dramatically.

"We're not talking about gasoline at the pump yet," said Dr. Karen Whitfield, supply chain analyst at the University of Houston's Energy Institute. "We're talking about the lifeblood of every refinery, plant, and trucking fleet in Fort Bend and Harris County. Without high-grade turbine oils, gear lubricants, and hydraulic fluids, maintenance cycles col-



By : Shoab Syed

lapse and downtime costs skyrocket."

Houston is home to more than 4,400 energy-related firms and serves as the U.S. hub for lubricant blending. Major facilities along the Ship Channel depend on Group I, II, and III base oils imported from Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea. Over 60% of certain additive packages originate from plants that rely on Hormuz for outbound shipments. Port of Houston data for Q1 2026 already shows a 17% year-over-year drop in lubricant feedstock arrivals.

Local manufacturers are feeling the pinch. Three midstream operators in Pasadena confirmed to the American Chronicle that allocations of synthetic compressor oils are now on a 90-day delay. A Katy-based trucking company reported parking 12% of its fleet due to lack of approved 15W-40 engine oil, with delivery quotes tripling since February.

The conflict's ripple effect extends beyond supply. Insurance premiums for vessels willing to transit Hormuz have surged 400%, according to Lloyd's of London. Those costs transfer directly to finished product pricing. Bulk ISO 46 hydraulic oil, which traded at \$8.20 per gallon in January, was quoted at \$13.75 last week to distributors in Mission Bend and Sugar Land.

Federal officials are monitoring the situation. The Department of Energy released 3 million barrels from the Northeast Gasoline Supply Reserve, but no equivalent exists for lubricants. The Defense Logistics Agency has begun prioritizing MIL-SPEC grease and oils for military readiness, further constraining civilian supply.

Industry groups are urging calm while seeking alternatives. The American Petroleum Institute's Houston chapter is coordinating with Mexican and Brazilian base oil producers to reroute shipments

through the Panama Canal. Meanwhile, rerefiners in Baytown are running at 104% capacity, collecting used oil to supplement virgin stock.

"During COVID we learned how fragile 'just-in-time' really is," said Michael Renteria, CEO of Gulf Coast LubeTech. "This is different. It's geopolitical, and it's cutting off the raw ingredients. Companies that didn't diversify sourcing 18 months ago are now bidding against each other for the same drums."

For Houston's workforce, the shortage could mean deferred maintenance and slowed expansion projects. Economists warn that every \$1 increase in lubricant cost translates to \$7 in downstream industrial expense due to equipment wear and outages.

The Biden administration has called for diplomatic de-escalation, while CENTCOM continues to escort commercial vessels. Until safe passage through Hormuz is restored, Houston's energy sector faces a test of resilience not seen since the 1973 oil embargo — this time not at the gas pump, but in the maintenance bay.

Local firms are advised to audit inventory, lock in contracts where possible, and explore re-refined alternatives. The Greater Houston Partnership will host an emergency supply chain roundtable on May 3 at the George R. Brown Convention Center.

One Vision, One Direction When institutions, bureaucracy, and leadership move together, Pakistan moves forward

Syed Feroz Ahmed

Pakistan's recent actions on the global stage show an important truth; real change happens when institutions, bureaucracy, and political leadership work together with unity and purpose.

During the tensions surrounding the U.S.-Iran situation, Pakistan played a positive role by supporting peace and dialogue. This shows that Pakistan's position in international affairs is improving. The country is no longer seen as just reacting to events, but as helping to shape them. This growing confidence comes from better coordination within the country.

A major reason behind this progress is the teamwork between state institutions, civil bureaucracy, and the government led by Mian Shehbaz Sharif. When these three work separately, decisions become weak and slow. But when they work together with clear understanding, the results become strong and effective.

Another important success is Pakistan's ability to maintain balanced and effective relationships with major global powers, including the United States and China, as well as countries in the Middle East. In the current tense environment,

Pakistan has followed a neutral and responsible approach, avoiding taking sides while promoting peace. This balance has been possible because institutions, diplomatic channels, and the government are working together with a clear strategy. As a result, Pakistan has strengthened trust with different partners at the same time, which is not easy in today's divided world.

Pakistan has also shown progress in handling difficult regional and global situations. Its efforts to support dialogue in tensions involving the United States and Iran, along with managing regional pressures such as relations with India, reflect a more confident and coordinated approach. The recent victory of Pakistan in the India-Pakistan conflict is a clear example of the current government's achievement, made possible because the institutions and the government were on one page, working with unity and coordination.

These developments highlight one clear point when institutions, bureaucracy, and the government work with unity and understanding, Pakistan is able to act with strength and responsibility on the global stage. We have seen this in practice.

Pakistan's efforts to support peace show how

unity in decision making can improve a country's global image. In times of pressure, when leadership and institutions stand on one page, Pakistan is able to respond with clarity and confidence.

This is not only true for Pakistan. Around the world, successful countries move forward because their systems work together. Strong coordination leads to better policies, faster decisions, and real progress. The lesson is simple but powerful; unity brings success. If institutions, bureaucracy, and political leadership trust each other and work for the same goal, the country moves forward. If they are divided, progress slows down.

Political parties, including the opposition, must understand this reality. National success does not come from conflict or misunderstanding alone; it comes from positivity, cooperation, and understanding where it matters most.

Truly speaking, Pakistan's strength lies in working together. When there is understanding, there is stability. When there is unity, there is progress.

Pakistan's future depends on this same spirit. Political parties and institutions must recognize that the country's progress and achievements come

from strong, professional institutions, an effective bureaucracy, and responsible political leadership. If this unity and understanding continue, Pakistan can steadily move toward becoming a progressive and prosperous country. No challenge will be too great if all pillars of the state remain aligned and committed to the national interest. This is the time when political parties of the country and the opposition must understand the importance of working together in the interest of the country and future generations. We should avoid unnecessary criticism and instead adopt constructive steps to move forward as a progressive nation.

Pakistan's current image as a respected and responsible nation is the result of collective effort, not the achievement of any single institution or individual. It reflects the combined strength of dynamic political leadership under the current government led by Shehbaz Sharif, along with the professionalism of state institutions and the support of the bureaucracy. When all parts of the system work together with balance and trust, success becomes possible. This progress should be seen as a team achievement; built on shared responsibility, coordination, and a common vision for the country.

Constitutional order

FOLLOWING the passage of the 26th and 27th Amendments, in 2024 and 2025 respectively, jurists and members of the legal community across Pakistan have extensively debated how these changes have altered the constitutional structure of the nation. In particular, significant questions have been raised about the creation of the Federal Constitutional Court, as a judicial body above the Supreme Court,

as well as the new powers governing the transfer of high court judges. In fact, just yesterday, three judges of the Islamabad High Court were transferred to different provincial high courts by a majority decision of the Judicial Commission of Pakistan. As many of the country's top legal minds observed at a convention held in Karachi recently, the latest amendments have "ended" the concept of constitution-

al supremacy. The state must listen to this criticism instead of brushing it aside, and address the genuine complaints of constitutional experts.

The creation of the FCC has been seen by many as the establishment of a parallel judicial body to strip the Supreme Court of its constitutional jurisdiction, and leave it only as a court of appeals. Meanwhile, the criticism of the transfer of high court judges has been even sharper, with no less than the Chief Justice of Pakistan Yahya Afridi opposing the move.

As the chief justice had noted some days ago, transferring the IHC judges "could assume a punitive character" and would set a "dangerous precedent". These are no ordinary concerns, especially as they come from the nation's top judge. Speakers at the lawyers' convention had expressed similar fears, saying that the judges were being transferred for exposing "intervention" in the judicial system. In light of these facts, it is essential that the judiciary as well as the executive move to remove these misgivings. The

best way to go about it would be to maintain transparency regarding the attempts to restructure the judiciary. As one speaker at the convention pointed out, the hearing of petitions against the 26th and 27th Amendments should be telecast live. The state must remember that if changes that alter the spirit of the Constitution are bulldozed, and the independence of the judiciary is compromised, it will be very difficult to reverse these moves. That is why objections against these changes must be given a fair hearing.

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Pakistan's silent crisis

Nearly 40% of Pakistanis face mental illness; weak systems and stigma deepen the crisis

Saira Samo

Mental health in Pakistan has long been neglected; it is quietly emerging as one of the country's most overlooked issues, posing some of the gravest public-health challenges. Recent estimates suggest that nearly four in ten Pakistanis struggle with some form of mental disorder. This should be enough to lift the issue from the private domain to the national agenda.

Young people confronting unemployment and social pressures, women restricted within four walls, young girls denied timely marriages due to dowry demands or incompatible matches, communities affected by tribal feuds, and elderly citizens facing isolation all find themselves vulnerable. What binds these experiences is the absence of a system equipped to support them. The burden is no longer confined to any single demographic.

Pakistan's health infrastructure offers too little to too few. With fewer than 0.2 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, the system is structurally incapable of addressing a crisis of this scale. Primary healthcare centres rarely have trained counsellors, and educational institu-

tions lack mental-health support services. Meanwhile, stigma suppresses help-seeking behaviour, pushing many into silence rather than treatment.

Untreated depression and anxiety undermine productivity, affect academic performance and strain family relationships. This silence has deadly consequences.

The economic costs are considerable, but the human cost is far greater. In recent years, rising cases of self-harm, particularly among the youth, have signalled a further deterioration in emotional well-being.

According to various reports, Pakistan has experienced a sharp rise in suicides in 2024 and 2025, with an estimated 15 to 35 people taking their own lives each day. Research further indicates that 38 % of Pakistanis are living with depression, with 25% suffering from its severe form. The WHO reports that nearly 19,331 suicide deaths occur in the country each year.

We are often shocked when hearing about the deaths of loved ones who had long been suffering from mental health issues in silence. Such tragedies may stem from job stress,

excessive pressure from superiors or a lack of workplace support. Conflicts within marital relationships or strained relations with relatives over property are also factors that disturb mental health.

A few years ago, the entire nation was shaken by the news of SP Adeel Akber's death in Islamabad, as questions remain about whether it was accidental or a case of suicide. Other factors, such as unemployment, poverty, a lack of marital stability and the injustice individuals face within the system, further push people into severe mental distress.

What makes the situation more troubling is that mental health remains largely absent from public-policy discussions. It is not included in budget priorities, nor in any coordinated national strategy. As long as mental illness is viewed as a private burden rather than a public-health responsibility, the gap between need and provision will continue to widen.

This requires practical, incremental reforms. First, mental health must be prioritised within primary healthcare. Lady Health Workers for women and general practitioners

for others should be trained to identify early signs of distress. Second, schools and universities should establish counselling units to support students before crises escalate. Third, awareness campaigns must normalise conversations around mental health, replacing stigma with understanding.

The broader socio-economic environment is also a factor that needs attention. Poverty, unemployment, insecurity and social fragmentation all feed mental distress. Any policy response that overlooks these structural factors will remain incomplete.

In Pakistan, traditional threats are converging with newer, less visible ones. Mental health is among the latter. It does not spread itself through headlines but through the quiet suffering of millions. Understanding its urgency is not only a health concern but a national one.

If this mental health crisis continues to be ignored, it will result in more deaths and increased social disorder. It must therefore be treated as a top priority to protect precious lives.

Age of anger

How can politics manage this polarity?

Huma Yusuf

GBP 5.89 MILLION. That's the average annual pay package of a FTSE 100 CEO. And it's a number that keeps soaring, up 64 per cent over the past three years. But those CEOs still feel sorry for themselves when they contrast their takings to those of the American tech bros: according to the Financial Times, SpaceX's Elon Musk could earn \$1 trillion if he meets his targets, while Alphabet's Sundar Pichai is on track for \$692m over three years.

News of CEO pay rises coincides with dire UN warnings of an imminent global food 'catastrophe' and the return of 30m people to poverty. Before the war, 266m people, primarily in low-income, conflict-hit countries were facing 'acute food insecurity'. As uncertainty lingers across the Strait of Hormuz, petrol prices rise, fertiliser costs soar, poor farmers plant less and get worse yields, and more people go hungry. Up to 45m more, according to World Food Programme forecasts.

Pakistan, sadly, is among the 10 most food-insecure countries in the world. According to the UN food crises report, 9.3m Pakistanis are in "crisis" conditions, and a further 1.7m face a food "emergency", the severe states of food deprivation just short of famine. These 2025 stats are driven by flooding and climate-related disasters, and will be compounded this year by war-linked stresses on the food system. (Funny, isn't it, that this news generated fewer headlines and Insta reels than that of Karachiite Sualeh Asif's AI start-up Cursor being acquired by SpaceX for \$60 billion?)

This divergence between the ultra-rich, tech-enabled beneficiaries of the AI age and the desperately poor ravaged by conflict and climate change is the story of our times. Prolonged and proliferating conflicts in the region and globally will only exacerbate this divide. How can politics manage this polarity?

Recent years have brought portents of the 'age of anger'. The worldwide rise in far-right and populist political movements has been interpreted as a reaction to being left behind or left out. Identity politics has led to factionalism and social fragmentation, with examples of lashings out and localised violence against marginalised, vulnerable groups (trans people, asylum seekers, immigrants and, in Pakistan's case, religious minorities). There is a zero-sum mentality in politics, with perceptions that one group's gain inevitably indicates another's loss. Resulting social unrest produces cycles of upheaval and state suppression.

Pakistan has been through one loop of this cycle. Recall how in recent years each province was alight with protest, with the PTI, PTM, Baloch long marches and Haq Do Tehreek, Sindhi nationalist parties and the Awami Action Committee in Gilgit-Baltistan taking to the streets to decry enforced disappearances, disenfranchisement, soaring food costs, unjust resource planning, etc. That noise has since been quashed by state suppression and surveillance.

But can the cycle sustain when a large mass of people has nothing left to lose? When famine and disease threaten, violence becomes a last resort, the age of anger becomes an age of war. This is reflected in the growing trend in the West of executive protec-

tion. In addition to their hefty pay packages, those rich CEOs also get security guards, with Goldman Sachs last October reporting that 25 per cent of companies offer security details for top leaders. None want to fall victim to an assassin's rage, the way the CEO of UnitedHealthcare did in 2024.

Outside the elite corporate bubble, this manifests as a resignation to conflict as a permanent reality, as we see in Iran, Gaza, Lebanon and, more drastically, Sudan. Closer to home, violence persists despite intense suppressive tactics.

It is not too late to start a different cycle. It requires learning lessons and proactively opting for a different pathway. This is easier said than done. Recent elections in India's West Bengal state — where the BJP has allegedly cleansed electoral rolls on dubious grounds, disenfranchising up to 9m voters, many of them Muslim, in order to push out the long-standing Trinamool Congress — show how power seekers are resistant to learning tough lessons, and foreseeing the inevitable recourse of those forcibly excluded.

Let's hope for a better outcome with the US-Iran talks. A negotiated end to the violence, with both sides feeling they've secured a victory, however pyrrhic, could commence a more positive cycle. If conditions agreed are permanent, the prospect for rebuilding regional trust and then literally rebuilding the region, increase. These talks matter not just for the immediate relief they offer implicated countries but also for the poor and hungry everywhere on our interconnected globe, and to stave off a wider age of war.

The writer is a political and integrity risk analyst.

Religious education for minorities

Minority communities have long wanted their children to be taught their own religion at school.

Nabila Feroz Bhatti

ON March 30, the Punjab Education, Curriculum, Training and Assessment Authority (Pectaa) through a notification approved books for religious education in schools for students of six minority faiths — Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Kalash, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism — which will be implemented from this year.

Pakistan's religious minorities and civil society have long been demanding that children from minority communities be taught their own religion instead of ethics or Islamic studies in schools. The government began work on this demand in 2021. The National Curriculum Council approved the preparation of religious textbooks for adherents of seven religions in 2023 — Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Kalash, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and Baha'i.

At the federal level, capable people belonging to different faiths were selected from across the country to write textbooks for different religions. Education being the purview of the provinces after the 18th Amendment, the provincial governments were asked to print these books prepared by the National Book Foundation, a part of the Federal Ministry of Education, in their respective provinces and make them available for study. However, the governments continued to be lax. Reportedly, one provincial government demanded that the relevant community bear the expenses for the publication of these books, which is illogical. These books should be published in the same manner as all other textbooks,

including Islamic Studies textbooks, are published.

The Punjab government's decision to issue the notification was highly appreciated, but many questions were also raised. Of course, these questions were already in the minds of those who were advocating the move. Following are some discussion points around these questions.

Who will teach these additional subjects? Will teachers from the six minority communities be recruited in every school? Children living anywhere in the country should be equal in the eyes of the state. If the required infrastructure is provided to children of the majority faith to pursue their religious education, then this should also be the case for children belonging to religious minorities.

In practice, children of every religion are not present in every school in Punjab. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the population of Christians in Punjab is 24.6 million and the population of Hindus is about 22,850. The remaining are smaller communities. The government is aware of the number of religious minorities in each part of the province. The number of children going to school is expected to be proportional to the population of religious minorities. From this population, teachers can be recruited for children of a specific religion. Danish George, coordinator for Christian education in Pectaa, told the media that "teachers will be recruited to provide religious education to minority students in all government schools across the province".

How many children belonging to religious minorities study at government schools? Will private schools follow this decision? Even if a school has just one child from a minority community, the protection of the child's religious freedom is as important as that of all the children belonging to the majority faith studying in the school. As far as private schools are concerned, they also work under government rules and regulations. Once this policy is made, they will follow it.

Another concern is that children from religious minorities would be easily identifiable and socially targeted. Currently, some students from minority communities are studying ethics and others Islamiyat. These options do not align with their right of choice. If they opt for the latter, it is not easy for them to learn Arabic verses. If they select ethics, they are identifiable as minorities. Ethics content is also written from the perspective of the majority religion. There are no specialised teachers for ethics. It amounts to students from the majority community studying their own religion, and minorities students studying Islamiyat too. According to Article (2) of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, the state cannot discriminate among its children on the basis of religion. Ethics should be compulsory for all students to promote peace and harmony and children from the minority communities should not have to study ethics separately.

Another critical question that has often been debated is the involvement of the state in teaching religion in schools.

Indeed, Article (14) of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child requires the state to recognise the right of parents or guardians to provide religious guidance to their children in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. However, if the state is doing so for students of the majority faith, it should do the same for students from minority groups.

The Punjab government has taken a strong initiative. A solid strategy is needed to implement this major decision. It should not lead to the social isolation of minority children; rather, it should enhance the beauty of religious diversity in Pakistan.

A major challenge for children belonging to religious minorities is that, besides Nazra and Islamiyat, almost 40 per cent of the lessons in the compulsory subjects, such as Urdu, English, social studies and general knowledge, incorporate themes from mainstream religious beliefs, which children from minorities' groups also have to study. Article 22 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan states: "No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instructions, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony, or worship relates to a religion other than his own." We as a society should uphold this standard to our highest ability, providing room for tolerance in a rich and multi-faith Pakistan.

The writer is a member of the Working Group at the National Commission on the Rights of Child.

A man of vision

Abu Zehra

IT is uncommon that flair for politics, business acumen and a commitment to philanthropy are combined in the personality of one individual. But Haji Sir Abdullah Haroon, whose death anniversary was observed on April 27, was one of those rare individuals who excelled in all these fields. A public figure with a conscience, and a key member of the Pakistan Movement, Haroon was no typical seth, but a man with a genuine vision for the betterment of people, and great political foresight.

Abdullah Haroon — orphaned at a young age — faced difficulties in his early years but worked hard and reached the pinnacle of business and political success. He credited his mother for making him who he was. Later in life, remembering his own adversities, he did much to improve the lot of orphans and the destitute through various philanthropic projects.

The list of his philanthropic contributions is considerable, with many of these institutions continuing to operate today, specifically in Karachi. He had also funded Aligarh Muslim University, while despatching help for the Muslims of Palestine and Turkiye.

In business, through sheer hard work, he made a name for himself, and became known as Sindh's 'sugar king'. Despite suffering heavy losses in business at times, he refused to give up and continued to persevere. It would not be wrong to say that he was a socially aware businessman, whose aim in



life was not merely making profit, but to help others less fortunate by sharing his wealth.

But Abdullah Haroon's contributions to the political sphere — particularly campaigning for the rights of the subcontinent's Muslims, as well as a separate identity for Sindh — are no less than his achievements in business and philanthropy. He began his political journey with Congress, but later became a key member of the Muslim League, playing an influential role in organising what would become Pakistan's grand

old party in Sindh. He took part in electoral politics at all tiers, winning seats in the Karachi Municipal Committee, the Bombay Legislative Council, as well as the Indian Legislative Assembly. He was also attached to pan-Islamic causes of the time, playing an active role in the Khilafat Movement.

But perhaps two of his contributions in the political field have had a particularly lasting impact on the history of Pakistan: the resolution passed at the 1938 Sindh Provincial Muslim League Conference held in Karachi, and his efforts to separate Sindh from the Bombay Presidency.

Regarding the first achievement, the 1938 moot, presided over by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, is considered by many historians as the precursor to the Lahore Resolution of 1940, which is a major milestone in the journey towards achieving Pakistan. In the 1938 conference, Abdullah Haroon presciently stated that "we have nearly arrived at the parting of the ways", anticipating that the only answer to India's communal problem lay in "separate federations" for Muslims and Hindus. This would prove to be an observation with far-reaching consequences, and the 1940 resolution would only solidify and expand on this idea.

The other major contribution of Haji Abdullah Haroon is the separation of Sindh from Bombay in 1936. Interestingly, many non-Muslim leaders, including prominent Hindus and Parsis, had also endorsed the separation of Sindh. Abdullah Haroon argued that Sindh deserved to be a separate

province because of its distinct geography, and the fact that its people had distinct "habits, circumstances and dress". The Hindu far right at the time had reviled the idea of Sindh's separation.

However, largely due to Abdullah Haroon's relentless efforts, Sindh was given recognition as a unit separate from Bombay — to which it had been attached by the British colonialists in the 19th century — highlighting the province's unique history, culture and identity.

Though Haji Abdullah Haroon did not live to see an independent Pakistan, and Sindh as an integral part of the federation, as he died in 1942, his efforts for the realisation of Pakistan, as well as the highlighting of Sindh's identity, cannot be denied. Furthermore, in his life are valuable lessons about honesty in business, sincerity in philanthropy and dedication in public service that continue to be relevant.


Today, in Pakistan's public sphere, we notice that individuals work in silos. For example, there is the 'professional' political class, members of which indulge in wheeling and dealing in order to cling to power. Industrialists, on the other hand, concentrate on making money and staying on the right side of those in power. Meanwhile, some philanthropists make a show of their charity. Abdullah Haroon showed that one could be a principled politician and an honest industrialist who gave back to society without making a show of it.

The writer is a freelance contributor.





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Grand Launch, Grand Vision: Seva Signs Opens Doors in Style in Stafford

Seva Signs marked its grand opening with a vibrant ceremony in Stafford, Texas, featuring a ribbon-cutting by owner Aslam Kapadia and his family, alongside distinguished guests including the Mayor of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County Constable Ali Sheikhani. The evening included a cake-cutting ceremony, cultural performances, and a cocktail dinner, celebrating the launch of a state-of-the-art sign manufacturing facility and a promising new chapter for the local business community.



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India and Pakistan still cannot agree to restore the Indus Waters Treaty – but re-engagement could help bring lasting peace

Water cooperation is not only mutually beneficial for India and Pakistan, but essential. Restoring the Indus Waters Treaty could be a powerful foundation for rebuilding trust.

Bhargabi Bharadwaj

Water has long been entangled with the political and security dynamics between India and Pakistan. The Indus River Basin is a lifeline for more than 300 million people across both countries, supporting agriculture, energy production and livelihoods. Signed in 1960, the Indus Waters Treaty divided the basin's rivers between India and Pakistan while establishing detailed rules for cooperation, data sharing and dispute resolution. For more than six decades, it proved remarkably durable and acted as a stabilizing force for broader India-Pakistan relations. It has survived three wars and prolonged periods of diplomatic freeze, offering a rare pathway for cooperation.

But in recent years, the treaty had come under increasing strain. Following a militant attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, in April 2025 – for which India blamed Pakistan but Islamabad denied involvement – India chose to temporarily suspend its participation in the treaty and subsequently restricted the flow of water for short periods through the Baglihar and Kishanganga dams. Water scarcity during summer could increase the likelihood of India reducing downstream river flows into Pakistan, critical for irrigation, drinking supplies and hydropower generation. Should India's reservoir storage capacities improve amid surging water scarcity, there are risks of an escalating crisis.

India's decision to suspend the treaty not only significantly erodes the predictability and stability it had provided but also underscores how water can exacerbate tensions and even be instrumentalized as a tool of conflict – especially in the context of geopolitical rivalry.

An enduring treaty under pressure

The long-standing resilience of the Indus Waters Treaty rested on a shared understanding: that water cooperation could be at least partially insulated from broader geopolitical rivalry. However, this equilibrium has come under increasing strain in recent years.

The hydrological conditions of the Indus Basin are shifting rapidly. The area has some of the highest rates of glacial retreat globally – perennial snow and ice cover in the Indus declined by up to 24.8 per cent between 2001 and 2021 – while shifts in the timing and intensity of the Asian Summer Monsoon are reshaping shared water availability in the



Image — This photograph taken on 15 May 2025 shows a journalist standing against the backdrop of the Baglihar Dam, on the river Chenab in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir. Photo by SAJJAD HUSSAIN/AFP via Getty Images.

Climate change is increasing pressure on the resources, thereby rapidly eroding the trust needed to sustain cooperation.

region. But the treaty itself pre-dates modern climate science and rests on outdated hydrological assumptions, lacking mechanisms to factor for glacial retreat and largely ignoring groundwater depletion, now a critical stress point. Addressing these gaps is in the shared interest of both India and Pakistan.

Both countries also have growing populations and water demand, meaning pressures on water resources are mounting. In this context, a growing number of run-of-the-river hydropower projects on the western rivers allocated to Pakistan – combined with concerns over cumulative impacts, design specifications and flow timing – have made technical disputes more frequent and increasingly politicized.

Meanwhile, India's suspension of the treaty in response to security concerns signals a broader shift in bilateral relations, with water emerging as a geopolitical lever. As trust declines and treaty interpretations diverge, dispute resolution has become more difficult. Historically, the Indus Waters Treaty's institutional

framework – through the Permanent Indus Commission and third-party processes – has enabled data sharing and helped manage disputes, such as over the Baglihar dam.

Global lessons in trans-boundary water cooperation

Lessons from beyond South Asia underscore the importance of cooperation and show how some of these pressures can be alleviated.

The experience of the Aral Sea basin, often cited as one of the world's most severe environmental disasters, demonstrates both the consequences of poor water governance and the potential for partial recovery through cooperation. Decades of unsustainable water diversion devastated ecosystems, economies, and public health across Central Asia. However, recent efforts – particularly in the North Aral Sea – have shown that coordinated action and international support can restore water levels, revive fisheries and improve local livelihoods.

In the Mekong Delta, the Mekong River Commission brings together Cambodia, Laos,

Thailand and Vietnam in a shared governance framework that facilitates dialogue, joint flood and drought monitoring, and advance notification of major upstream projects. After facing similar pressures and distrust as the Indus treaty, cooperation on ecosystem restoration to help protect water resources has helped rebuild trust among the commission's stakeholders.

Similarly, in the Senegal River Basin, the Organisation pour la mise en valeur du fleuve Sénégal (OMVS) enables Mali, Mauritania and Senegal to jointly manage infrastructure and share benefits, helping reduce conflict while supporting more coordinated water management.

While the Indus context is very different, the underlying lesson is relevant: even deeply entrenched water challenges can be addressed when governance structures are strengthened, information is shared, and stakeholders recognize their interdependence.

Harnessing water for peace and stability

As demonstrated by the situation in the Indus Basin, water governance tends to remain siloed from broader stabilization and peacebuilding efforts. Too often treated as a technical domain for engineers and specialists, water is excluded from political negotiation and conflict resolution. But this limits the potential of water diplomacy to contribute to stability.

Integrating water governance into mediation, stabilization and reconstruction efforts can help bridge this gap. In practice, this means involving water experts in negotiations to address resource-

sharing in peace agreements and align infrastructure investment with confidence-building measures. A useful example is the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, which includes detailed provisions on water allocation and cooperation in the Jordan River basin. Despite broader political tensions and a fragile relationship between Jordan and Israel, these arrangements have largely endured, supporting Jordan's water security and sustaining coordination.

In the case of India and Pakistan, the situation highlights the need for international actors to support water diplomacy as part of their engagement in fragile and conflict-affected regions. This includes providing technical assistance, facilitating dialogue and helping to finance projects that deliver shared benefits. It also requires patience: rebuilding trust around shared resources is a gradual process, particularly where political tensions run deep.

Revitalizing the Indus Waters Treaty framework could provide a starting point towards building trust between India and Pakistan. However, climate change is increasing pressure on the resources, thereby rapidly eroding the trust needed to sustain cooperation. But unilateral action is less efficient and raises the costs of managing glacial retreat, through flood defences, storage and maintenance. Rebuilding cooperation will require identifying shared and domestic priorities grounded in scientific data on hydrological change, which will over time help rebuild trust. Reaffirming data sharing, reactivating dispute resolution mechanisms and expanding joint research on climate impacts could incrementally restore confidence. These steps may seem modest, but they are essential for restoring the predictability and transparency that underpin cooperation.

The treaty's history offers grounds for cautious optimism. It shows that even in one of the world's most challenging geopolitical relationships, sustained cooperation over water is possible. Reclaiming that spirit will not be easy, but it remains one of the most viable pathways towards reducing tensions and building a more durable peace. Water, in this sense, is not only a source of risk – it is an opportunity. The challenge for India and Pakistan, and for the international community, is to recognize and act on that opportunity before the costs of inaction become even harder to reverse.

HKSCA President Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Meets U.S. Consul General Charles Goodman to Strengthen Bilateral Collaboration in Karachi

Continued from front page

at his residence. The meeting was attended by senior officials of the U.S. Consulate General Karachi, including the Deputy Consul General and the Heads of Economic Development and Public Affairs, and served as a significant step toward strengthening bilateral engagement between Karachi and Houston.

The HKSCA delegation was led by President Muhammad Saeed Sheikh and included leadership from the HKSCA Karachi Chapter, notably Muhammad Kashif Ghayaas and Muhammad Yasir Qazi.

President Sheikh also briefed the Consul General on the history, mission, and key areas of work of HKSCA, highlighting its achievements in promoting trade, education, cultural exchange, and humanitarian assistance. Particular emphasis was placed on HKSCA's extensive humanitarian efforts during times of crisis, including major disaster response initiatives carried out in collaboration with Helping Hand for Relief and Development and other partner organizations. The delegation also acknowledged the generous and sustained support of Chief Patron Syed Javid Anwar, whose contributions have significantly advanced HKSCA's mission and impact.

The discussions were highly productive and focused on expanding bilateral trade, business collaboration, and investment opportunities between Pakistan and the United States. A key outcome of the meeting was the strong mutual interest in organizing a bilateral Pakistan-U.S. Business & Investment Forum in Houston, envisioned as a flagship platform to promote structured business-to-business engagement, attract investment, and strengthen commercial ties. The proposed forum is expected to be developed in close collaboration with the U.S. Consulate General Karachi, the Consulate General of Pakistan Houston, and HKSCA, along with leading business organizations in both countries through people to people business diplomacy.

Both sides discussed the importance of establishing a coordinated framework to advance this initiative, including the formation of a joint working group to guide planning, identify priority sectors, and ensure effective implementation. The forum is expected to focus on high-potential sectors such as food and agribusiness, information technology, healthcare, energy, and manufacturing, thereby creating new avenues for trade and investment cooperation.

The HKSCA delegation expressed its sincere appreciation for the Consulate's leadership, hospitality, and continued support in fostering meaningful bilateral engagement. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to translate these discussions into tangible outcomes that will further strengthen Pakistan-U.S. eco-

nomics relations.

Further details regarding the proposed Bi-Lateral Business & Investment Forum and related initiatives will be announced in due course.

President HKSCA Muhammad Saeed Sheikh presented, on behalf of the Honorable Mayor of Houston, an official and historic City Seal ceremonial to Charles Goodman, U.S. Consul General, as a symbol of goodwill and the enduring partnership between Houston and Karachi.

About Houston-Karachi Sister City Association (HKSCA): Established in 2009, HKSCA promotes economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and humanitarian collaboration between Houston and Karachi under the framework of Sister Cities International.

Ali Sheikhan Launches Houston's First 24/7 Desi Grocery Store "Papa Mart" with Grand Boat Basin Eid Mela

Continued from front page

hundreds of families from across the city.

The grand opening event transformed the venue into a lively cultural celebration filled with food, music, entertainment, shopping, and community spirit. Families, children, and visitors gathered in large numbers to participate in what many attendees called one of the most exciting South Asian community events of the season.

Ali Sheikhan, widely recognized in Houston and within the Pakistani diaspora for organizing charitable and community welfare initiatives both in the United States and Pakistan, received appreciation from attendees for introducing a unique concept aimed at serving the growing South Asian population in Houston.

Speaking during the inauguration, community members praised Sheikhan's continued efforts to support local families, promote unity, and create businesses that cater to the needs of the Indo-Pak community. Many highlighted that a 24-hour Desi grocery store with delivery services would be especially beneficial for working families and late-night shoppers.

The event featured major giveaways and entertainment for guests, including gold and silver jewelry prizes, toys for children, surprise gifts, and special promotional discounts on groceries and household items. Organizers said the celebration was intentionally expanded to provide a memorable Eid experience for the entire family.

Popular performer Shaheryar Raza Sherry entertained the crowd during the inauguration ceremony, adding energy and excitement to the festive evening. Children enjoyed games and activities while families explored the new store and took advantage of exclusive grand opening offers.

Papa Mart announced that it will remain open 24/7 and will also provide free delivery on online orders, making it one of the first Desi grocery concepts in Houston to offer around-the-clock convenience for customers.

Community members described the launch as more than just a busi-

ness opening, calling it a celebration of culture, entrepreneurship, and community connection within the Pakistani-American and South Asian population of Houston.

The successful inauguration of Papa Mart and the Boat Basin Eid Mela reflected the strong support and enthusiasm of Houston's diverse Desi community, while further strengthening Ali Sheikhan's reputation as an active community figure committed to public service and engagement.

US to refuse visa to applicants who fear returning home

Continued from front page

and consulates and cited by American media outlets, consular officers are now required to ask non-immigrant visa applicants two additional questions during interviews: whether they have experienced harm or mistreatment in their country of nationality or last habitual residence, and whether they fear such harm if they return.

Applicants who answer "yes" to either question are to be denied visas immediately, the directive states. The measure applies to visitor, student, and temporary work visa categories, including B-1/B-2, student, and certain work-related visas.

The instruction is reportedly linked to a 2025 executive order by President Donald Trump and has been attributed to Secretary of State Marco Rubio. It is part of what the administration describes as efforts to curb "asylum abuse" by preventing the use of temporary visas as a pathway to protection claims once inside the United States.

The information was initially circulated by commercial visa assistance companies and was later confirmed by US and international media outlets, including The Washington Post and The Guardian.

Previously, fear-of-return assessments were conducted only when individuals applied for asylum after arriving in the United States. The new policy shifts that screening to the visa application stage abroad, effectively requiring applicants to disclose potential protection claims before entry.

The State Department has defended the directive, reiterating that a US visa is a "privilege, not a right", and that individuals who do not intend to comply with US immigration laws should not seek entry. Officials argue that the measure is aimed at ensuring the integrity of temporary visa categories.

Immigration lawyers and rights groups, however, have warned that the policy could have far-reaching consequences for legitimate travellers, including students, academics, journalists, and business professionals who may have credible fears of persecution in their home countries. They say a truthful response could automatically result in visa refusal, potentially discouraging lawful travel and undermining international protection norms.

Critics cited by The Washington Post, which first reported details of the cable, also raised concerns that the policy could affect future asylum claims made after entry into the US, though the administration has not

clarified how such responses will be treated in later immigration proceedings.

Officials at the Pakistan Embassy in Washington, when asked about the development, said they had not received any country-specific communication from the US government. They indicated that the measure appears to be part of a global policy shift applied uniformly across all nationalities rather than a Pakistan-specific action.

They added that procedural changes in US non-immigrant visa processing are typically circulated internally by the State Department to all embassies and consulates simultaneously, rather than communicated through bilateral diplomatic channels.

The directive is expected to take effect immediately, with consular posts already updating interview procedures.

SARA KHAN for Fort Bend County Treasurer

Continued from front page

and strengthen the ability to analyze situations clearly. This combination leads to better judgment and more effective decision making at all levels of leadership."(SFA). Within this framework, Sara Khan emerges as a compelling candidate for the position of FBC Treasurer in the upcoming runoff election on May 26. She reflects the very principles that define effective leadership and responsible stewardship.

The role of Treasurer extends far beyond administrative duties; it is a cornerstone of senior management that requires exceptional organizational ability, disciplined financial oversight, and unwavering accountability. Sara Khan brings a proven track record in finance and budget management, supported by hands on experience and a deep understanding of fiscal responsibility. Her ability to manage complex financial structures with clarity and precision demonstrates both competence and confidence, qualities essential for this position.

In addition to her technical expertise, she demonstrates integrity, maturity in navigating corporate culture, and leadership grounded in merit. These are not merely aspirational traits but demonstrated strengths. She leads with credibility, guided by principles rather than convenience, and focused on results rather than rhetoric.

Sara Khan also exhibits strong and dependable leadership in practice. She listens attentively, makes thoughtful decisions, and collaborates effectively to achieve shared goals. Her commitment to transparency and accountability ensures responsible financial management, while her balanced approach allows her to represent the interests of the FBC community with fairness and confidence.

As a new face, she brings fresh perspective and renewed energy to the role. If elected, she would become the first woman to serve as FBC Treasurer, an important milestone for both women and the broader FBC community. Her leadership would reflect progress and inclusion, while inspiring confidence in a future that values equal opportunity and diverse

voices.

At a time when the Treasurer's role demands both vision and vigilance, merit must remain the defining criterion. Sara Khan stands as a candidate whose qualifications speak clearly and convincingly where merit is not only present, but proven.

The choice before the FBC community is clear to select a leader who combines knowledge, experience, integrity, and vision. Sara Khan represents these qualities with strength and clarity, offering an opportunity to advance progress, responsibility, and merit-based leadership. A vote for her is a vote for trust, transparency, and a stronger financial future for the community.

US backs \$2.4 billion American firm investment offer in Pakistan

President Donald Trump's administration has backed a \$2.4 billion investment offer by an American firm to install advanced security systems at major Pakistani airports to detect criminals and transnational threats.

US Chargé d'Affaires to Pakistan Natalie A Baker has recently supported an investment proposal by Securiport — an American firm — to install Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) capability systems, according to the official documents. She urged the Pakistani authorities to consider the proposal.

The proposed solution guarantees data transport from the airline to the government while allowing Pakistan to retain full ownership and custody of all the data, with 24/7 support and training, showed these details.

In case Pakistan accepts the US offer, it may also help fast-track the installation of these systems. A separate move by the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) to install such systems has recently become controversial due to transparency concerns raised by the Senate Standing Committee on Defence.

Securiport has proposed funding all upfront investment related to the deployment of its system and offered to recover its costs over the contract term via a government-mandated passenger security surcharge model, showed the details.

The company has offered to invest \$2.4b over the proposed 25-year life of the contract. The company would also establish a subsidiary in Pakistan through which it will train over 1,000 Pakistani citizens in these modern technologies, according to the proposal.

Natalie extended the "support" of the US government for the Securiport investment proposal in a communication with the Ministry of Defence, which is the PAA's administrative division.

Natalie supported the proposal of deploying the API and PNR capability systems by the US firm.

"We appreciate your consideration of Securiport's proposal and continued partnership with the US in advancing Pakistan's security and our efforts to achieve safe, secure and efficient travel", said Natalie, in a correspondence with Pakistani authorities.

According to the offer, the API and the PNR systems would be operated by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which would provide the government with an integrated biometric-enabled border management plan.

Pakistan working silently to find 'new formula' to break US-Iran deadlock

Continued from front page

"Both sides are actively engaged in back-channel diplomacy, conveying formulae and counter-formulae through Pakistan to reach an agreement," a source said, adding that the current negotiations were focused on the nearly closed Strait of Hormuz and the nuclear issue.

The sources, however, did not provide details on the formulae from either side, saying that Pakistan's focus was on finding a "middle way" on the two simmering issues.

Washington and Tehran are currently deadlocked over a fresh Iranian peace proposal conveyed by Pakistan, following two visits to Islamabad last week by Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister.

The proposal offered to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for the US lifting its blockade of Iranian ports.

Tehran has also suggested that talks on its nuclear programme should be postponed for the next round of discussions, an offer President Donald Trump "has not so far shown an interest in accepting", according to sources.

"Nothing [in the formulae] is definitive as exchanges are ongoing," said the source.

"Hopefully, the two sides will reach common ground soon," the source added, saying that FM Ishaq Dar and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir were "personally engaged" in the ongoing backdoor diplomacy to break the stalemate.

The two have been actively participating in the mediation process, as CDF Munir has spoken to Trump several times in recent weeks.

"Iran's current stance is that since the nuclear issue is a complex one and [it] requires long and comprehensive talks, the Strait of Hormuz matter should be discussed in the first phase, which is easier to resolve. The US side, however, doesn't agree with the proposal and wants an agreement on both issues concurrently," the source said.

"But Trump is still discussing the proposal with his advisers," they added

Slim chances of war resuming

Pakistan hosted the first round of negotiations between Washington and Tehran on April 11-12, but failed to produce an agreement to end the war.

The talks followed a two-week ceasefire brokered by Pakistan on April 8, which was later extended by Trump.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said today that Islamabad's diplomatic efforts were continuing "consistently" to bring a negotiated settlement to the conflict, which has crippled global energy supplies and daily lives in the wider Middle East.

Downplaying the chances of the war resuming, Pakistani sources appeared convinced that the ongoing ceasefire would continue despite "hard-hitting" statements from both sides.

"It's a nerve-testing game between the two sides. Otherwise,

there are fewer chances of the resumption of war from the US despite a reported military buildup in the Middle East, which Tehran sees as a psychological tactic," a source said.

"Iran's impression is that, due to already disrupted energy supplies worldwide, growing opposition to war within the US and from its European allies, and Trump's dwindling approval ratings, are major hurdles to resuming the war. That's why it (Tehran) doesn't seem to be in a hurry," the source added.

Washington believes that Iran's "increasing" economic predicaments will force the Islamic republic to reach an agreement, which suits the US, the source said.

"Forget about media statements. Both sides have to satisfy their domestic audiences," another source said.

Nuclear issue and regional security framework

Aragchi's latest trips to Pakistan, Oman, and Russia and phone calls with his Saudi, Egyptian, French, and Qatari counterparts focused on the Strait of Hormuz and the nuclear issue, sources said.

The US has already rejected an offer from Moscow to keep Iran's enriched uranium, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told India Today earlier this month.

Another focus of the Moscow visit was to seek guarantees for the implementation of any potential agreement "in letter and spirit" with the US. According to sources, Iran wants Russian President Vladimir Putin as a guarantor for the possible agreement, especially to ensure that there will be no US and Israeli attacks in the future.

Aside from talks with the US, the Islamic republic is also discussing a "regional security framework" with regional nations to defend the region from any "outside aggression", a move sources see as premature due to several factors, including US economic and military influence and security agreements with Gulf nations, international sanctions on Tehran, and strained Iran-Arab relations, especially after Tehran attacks US sites in several Gulf countries in retaliation for US and Israeli strikes.

Trump rejects Iranian proposal to open Strait of Hormuz until nuclear concerns met

Continued from front page

are choking," Trump told the news outlet. "It is going to be worse for" Iran.

He claimed Iran was seeking an agreement to lift the US blockade on the strategically important waterway.

The president dismissed the Iranian offer to unblock the vital waterway and postpone nuclear discussions, insisting that his primary goal remained preventing Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Trump claimed that the inability to export oil has left Iranian infrastructure "close to exploding".

While Trump views the blockade as a powerful lever, sources told Axios that US Central Command had developed plans for a "short and powerful" wave of aerial strikes to break the diplomatic stalemate if Iran does not yield.

Trump has yet to authorise kinetic action, sources said.

He earlier urged Iran to "get smart soon" over a nuclear deal, declaring: "No more Mr nice guy!"

"Iran can't get their act together. They don't know how to sign a non-nuclear deal. They better get smart soon," Trump threatened on his Truth Social platform.

Notably, the post included an image of the US president wearing a black suit and sunglasses while holding a firearm, with explosions in an Iranian landscape behind him.

The US and Israel launched a joint offensive against Iran on February 28, prompting Tehran to respond with strikes on what it described as US interests across the region, many of them in Gulf countries.

A ceasefire was announced on April 8 through Pakistani mediation, followed by talks hosted in Islamabad on April 11-12, but the negotiations ended without an agreement.

Trump later said the truce had been extended at Pakistan's request pending a proposal from Tehran.

He signalled on Monday that he was unlikely to accept Iran's latest proposal to end the war after Tehran proposed a plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz while leaving questions about its nuclear program for later negotiations.

Trump urges Iran to sign a deal after report suggests US may extend blockade

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) cited US officials as saying the president had instructed aides to prepare for an extended blockade of Iran's ports in a bid to force Tehran to capitulate.

Officials said that Trump had opted to continue squeezing Iran's economy and oil exports with the blockade as his other options - resuming bombing or walking away from the conflict - carried more risk, according to the WSJ.

Iran wants some kind of US acknowledgement of its right to enrich uranium for what it says are peaceful, civilian purposes.

It has a stockpile of roughly 440 kilograms (970 pounds) of uranium enriched to 60%, material that could be used for several nuclear weapons if further enriched.

Iranian officials said on Tuesday the country could withstand the blockade as it was using alternative trade routes, and the Islamic Republic did not consider the war over.

The US-Israeli war on Iran has killed thousands of civilians in Iran and Lebanon, thrown energy markets into turmoil and disrupted global trade routes.

Iran wants formal end to conflict first

Iran's most recent offer for resolving the two-month war, suspended since April 8 under a ceasefire agreement, would set aside discussion of its nuclear programme until the conflict is formally ended and shipping issues resolved.

That proposal did not meet Trump's demand to have the nuclear issue discussed from the outset, however.

US intelligence agencies, at the request of senior administration officials, are studying how Iran would respond if Trump were to declare a unilateral victory in the two-month-old war that has become a political liability for the White House, two US officials and a person familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Tehran has largely blocked all shipping apart from its own from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz, a choke-point for global energy supplies, since the war began on February 28. This month,

the US began blockading Iranian ships.

Iran urges UNSC action on Gaza, condemns Israeli regime for regional instability

Addressing an open briefing of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on the situation in the Middle East, held in New York on April 28, Iranian envoy to the UN Saeed Iravani warned that Gaza remains under siege amid continued Israeli military attacks and humanitarian restrictions, according to Iran's semi-official Tasnim News Agency.

"Gaza remains devastated and under siege. Israel, the occupying regime, continues to violate the ceasefire through military attacks and severe restrictions on humanitarian access, deepening hunger and civilian suffering," he said.

"At the same time, illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank continues in clear violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, further entrenching occupation and instability."

He stressed that any viable solution must guarantee a permanent ceasefire, the withdrawal of occupying forces, and full humanitarian access, while reaffirming the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and calling for accountability for violations of international law.

"The Security Council must act decisively to compel Israel to fully uphold the ceasefire in Lebanon, immediately halt all attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and withdraw all its occupying forces."

"The United States and the Israeli regime must bear full responsibility and must be held accountable. Individual criminal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity must be pursued in accordance with international law."

IRGC tightens grip as wartime power shift hardens Iran's stance

Two months into a war started by the US and Israel, Iran no longer has a single, undisputed clerical arbiter at the pinnacle of power, a break with the past that may be hardening Tehran's stance as it weighs renewed talks with Washington.

Since its creation in 1979, the Islamic Republic has revolved around a supreme leader with final authority on all key matters of state. But the murder of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, along with members of his family, including his granddaughter, on the first day of the war, and the elevation of his wounded son, Mojtaba, have ushered in a different order dominated by commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and marked by the absence of a decisive, authoritative referee.

Mojtaba Khamenei remains at the apex of the system, but three people familiar with internal deliberations say his role is largely to legitimise decisions made by his generals rather than issue directives himself.

Wartime pressure has concentrated power into a narrower, harder-line inner circle rooted in the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), the Supreme Leader's office and the IRGC, which now dominates both military strategy and key political decisions, Iranian officials and analysts say.

"The Iranians are painfully slow in their response," said a senior Pakistani government official briefed on peace talks between Iran and the United States that Islamabad has been mediating. "There is apparently no one decision-making command structure. At times, it takes them 2 to 3 days to respond."

Analysts said the obstacle to a deal is not internal infighting in Tehran, but the gap between what Washington is pre-

pared to offer and what Iran's hardline Guards are willing to accept.

The diplomatic face of Iran at the talks with the US has been Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, more recently joined by parliament speaker Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf -- a former Guards commander, Tehran mayor and presidential candidate -- who has emerged during the war as a key conduit between Iran's political, security and clerical elites.

On the ground, however, the central interlocutor has been IRGC commander Ahmad Vahidi, according to a Pakistani and two Iranian sources who identified him weeks ago as Iran's pivotal figure, including on the night a ceasefire was announced.

Mojtaba, who was severely injured in the opening Israeli and US strike that killed his father and other relatives and left him disfigured with serious leg wounds, has not appeared publicly and communicates through IRGC aides or limited audio links because of security constraints, two people close to his inner circle said.

There was no immediate reply from the Iranian foreign ministry to a request for comment on the issues raised in this article. Iranian officials have previously denied any divisions over negotiations with the United States.

Real power wielded by wartime leadership, 'insiders' claim

Iran submitted a new proposal to Washington on Monday, which, according to senior Iranian sources, envisions staged talks, with the nuclear issue to be set aside at the start until the war ends and disputes over Gulf shipping are resolved. Washington insists the nuclear issue must be addressed from the outset.

"Neither side wants to negotiate," said Alan Eyre, an Iran expert and former US diplomat, adding that both believed time would weaken the other -- Iran through leverage over Hormuz and Washington through economic pressure and a blockade.

For now, neither side can afford to bend, Eyre said: Iran's IRGC is wary of appearing weak to Washington, while President Donald Trump faces midterm election pressure and little room for flexibility without political cost.

"For either, flexibility would be seen as weakness," Eyre said.

That caution reflects not just the pressures of the moment, but the way power is now exercised inside Iran. While Mojtaba is formally Iran's ultimate authority, he is a figure of assent rather than command, insiders say, endorsing outcomes forged through institutional consensus, rather than imposing authority. Real power, they say, has moved to a unified wartime leadership centred on the SNSC.

"Important deals probably pass through him," Iranian analyst Arash Azizi said, "but I can't see him overruling the National Security Council. How could he go against those running the war effort?"

Hardline figures such as former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and a cluster of radical MPs have raised their profile using forceful rhetoric during the war, but they lack the institutional clout to derail decisions or shape outcomes.

Mojtaba owes his elevation to the Guards, who sidelined pragmatists and backed him as a reliable guardian of their hardline agenda. Already strengthened by war, the Guards' growing dominance signals a more aggressive foreign policy and tighter domestic repression, sources familiar with the country's inner policy-making circles told Reuters.

Houston Emerges as a Hub for Pakistani and Indian Cuisine

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

A Strong Pakistani Culinary Presence

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

diners from across the metropolitan area.

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

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

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

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

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

Fine Dining and Modern Fusion

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

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

A Reflection of Community Growth

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

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

Here is the list:

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

. Phone: (832) 786-8000

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

, plus classics like biryani and mango lassi.

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

. Phone: (832) 999-4490

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

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

. Phone: (832) 593-0110

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

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

. Phone: (832) 915-0898

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

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

. Phone: (281) 800-5880

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 477-7897

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

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

. Phone: (346) 594-2097

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

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

. Phone: (281) 240-0786

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

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

Javed Nihari – 14631 Beechnut St, Houston, TX 77083

. Phone: (346) 330-4240

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

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

. Phone: (713) 587-9300

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

Chai Shai – 6632 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (832) 939-8112

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

. Halal meats and sweets.

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

. Phone: (281) 741-2571

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

Himalaya Restaurant – 6652 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 532-2837

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

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

. Phone: (713) 952-0606

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (832) 500-4618

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

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7398

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

Shalamar Restaurant – 15142 Highway 3, Webster, TX 77598

. Phone: (281) 488-4151

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 496-3232

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

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

Maharaja Bhog – 8338 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 771-2464

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

Shiv Sagar – 6662 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 977-0150

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

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

. Phone: (346) 266-1626

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

inspired thali buffet and a variety of healthy veggie dishes.

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7806

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

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

. Phone: (713) 864-6667

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

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

. Phone: (713) 960-8472

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 955-9878

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

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

. Phone: (713) 522-2022

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

. Uses local ingredients and has bakery items.

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

. Phone: (713) 242-8087

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

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

. Phone: (832) 886-4291

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

. Creative cocktails and vegetarian options also featured.

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

. Phone: (713) 334-5555

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

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

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The Poet of the East Remembered: Houston Gathers to Revive Iqbal's Call for Self-Realization



HOUSTON, TX — The enduring echoes of Allama Muhammad Iqbal's philosophy resonated powerfully through Houston this week, as the Quaid-e-Azam Foundation USA hosted a stirring commemorative event to mark the death anniversary of the Poet of the East.

Far from a simple retrospective, the gathering served as a dynamic call to action. A diverse coalition of community leaders, literary figures, and intellectuals convened to explore

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Free Plants, Fresh Ideas, and Community Unity Highlight Houston Gathering

HOUSTON: The Community Garden Houston Group organized a vibrant and well-attended event at PAGH, bringing together distinguished guests, gardening enthusiasts, and members of the Pakistani-American community to promote vegetable gardening, sustainable backyard practices, and community harmony.



The program was skillfully conducted by Mr. Faheem Akhond, who warmly appreciated the efforts and support of the host community for making the event successful. He highlighted the importance of collec-

tive community engagement in promoting healthy and environmentally friendly lifestyles.

The President of Community Garden Houston, Najeeb Ahmed, delivered an engaging address

emphasizing the growing importance of home gardening, sustainable food practices, and environmental awareness. He encouraged families to utilize available backyard spaces

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ISGH North Zone Hosts Eid Brunch Honoring Volunteers and Community Spirit



Community members and volunteers gather during the ISGH North Zone Eid Celebration & Team Appreciation Brunch held at Tempura 1960 in Houston.

The Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) North Zone hosted a vibrant Eid Celebration & Team Appreciation Brunch on Sunday, April 26, bringing together community members, volunteers, and leadership in a warm and festive setting.

Held at Tempura 1960 from 12:00 PM to 2:00 PM, the event served as a platform to celebrate Eid while recognizing the dedication and hard work of volunteers who play a vital role in advancing ISGH's community initiatives.

The brunch was hosted by

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Seva Signs Grand Opening Celebrated with Dignitaries, Ribbon Cutting, and Festive Ceremonies in Stafford



Stafford, TX: Seva Signs marked its grand opening with a spectacular and well-attended ceremony, bringing together prominent community leaders, business professionals, and invited guests for an evening of celebration and networking.

The highlight of the event was

the ribbon-cutting ceremony, led by owner Aslam Kapadia along with his family, officially inaugurating the state-of-the-art sign manufacturing facility. The occasion was further elevated by the presence of distinguished guests, including the Mayor of Sugar Land and Fort Bend County

Constable Ali Sheikhani, among others, reflecting strong community support for the new venture.

Adding to the festive atmosphere, a cake-cutting ceremony was also held, symbolizing a sweet beginning for the business. Guests enjoyed

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A Final Resting Place of Our Own: Houston's Muslim Community Nears Historic Milestone

HOUSTON, TX — The long-standing dream of a dedicated, faith-compliant burial ground for Houston's Muslim community is moving from vision to reality as the

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In India, trial happens by extended detention

Those who question the government's policies on rights and freedoms, find themselves in an endless chase for justice



“It is harder to dissent in India today than it was 12 years ago. Under Modi, laws have been aggressively used against critics of Hindu nationalism, and disproportionately against Indian Muslims

Ria Chakrabarty

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ

KARACHI: The world's largest democracy, or so the slogan goes, has perfected a quiet kind of cruelty against those who speak truth to power. For activists and journalists who question Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government, the punishment is arbitrary detention without trial, stretched endlessly into a legal void where no charge is filed and no freedom is granted. UN experts have called this pattern a violation of international human rights law.

To understand how this machinery operates, one need look no further than the case of Umar Khalid, a 33-year-old student activist and doctoral graduate of Jawaharlal Nehru University. Arrested on September 13, 2020, Khalid has spent more than five years in pretrial detention. His alleged crime was not violence, not conspiracy to commit terror, but a speech. On February 17, 2020, standing before 700 protesters in Amravati, Maharashtra, he spoke against the Citizenship Amendment Act. He invoked Mahatma Gandhi's tradition of non-violent civil disobedience. He explicitly urged protesters not to respond to violence with violence. For this, he was charged with 29 offences, including sedition, criminal conspiracy, and terrorism under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

Prosecutors labeled him a 'key conspirator,' a 'silent whisperer,' and an architect of 'remote supervision' over protests. Yet, despite the severity of these accusations, more than five years have passed without a single day of trial. The case remains stuck at the stage of arguments over charges. No verdict has been reached, no evidence has been tested in open court. Instead, Khalid sits in Tihar Jail, sharing facilities with convicted criminals, while the government offers no proof that his words ever incited violence.

It was precisely this Kafkaesque legal limbo that prompted the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to intervene. In November 2025, the body delivered a scathing opinion on Khalid's detention, finding his imprisonment to be arbitrary under four separate categories of international law. The government of India did not bother to respond to the UN's communication. It offered no defence, no explanation, and no denial of the allegations levelled by the experts.

The first category of arbitrariness identified by the Working Group concerns the very legal basis of Khalid's detention. Indian courts, the UN found, failed to conduct an individualized determination of whether his continued detention was reasonable or necessary. Section 43(D)(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act effectively makes bail nearly impossible by requiring only 'prima facie' evidence of an offence — a threshold so low that courts denied Khalid bail multiple times, not because he posed a flight risk or a danger to society, but simply because the charges against him were serious. As the Working Group reminded, pretrial detention should be the exception, not the rule. In Khalid's case, the Modi administration made it the rule.

Moving to the second category, the UN experts determined that Khalid's detention directly resulted from the peaceful exercise of his fundamental rights, freedom of expression, assembly, association, and participation in public affairs. His speech explicitly rejected violence and there is no evidence he ever called for riots. Yet, the government used vague provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the

Indian Penal Code, whose definitions of 'unlawful activities' and 'sedition' remain dangerously imprecise to criminalize his activism. The UN warned that such vague laws confer excessive discretionary powers upon state agencies, enabling them to silence dissent under the guise of national security.

Even more alarming are the fair trial violations uncovered under the third category. After his arrest on September 13, 2020, Khalid was denied access to his lawyers for two full days — even though his lawyers were present outside the police station. His 11-hour interrogation the day before his arrest took place without legal counsel. His bail application then languished before the Supreme Court for over nine months and 18 days, adjourned approximately 12 times due to recusals, scheduling conflicts, and benches changed without explanation. More than five years later, his trial has not even started. The UN experts called this an excessive delay that violated his presumption of innocence, effectively punishing him for crimes that remain unproven and untried.

Finally, the Working Group found that Khalid was targeted on discriminatory grounds under the fifth category, specifically, his political opinion and his status as a human rights defender focused on Muslim minority rights and indigenous communities. The UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders has previously identified a pattern of Indian authorities using national security legislation to silence activists working on religious minority issues. Khalid's case fits squarely into that pattern, the Working Group concluded.

Taken together, these findings paint a disturbing picture of India's legal system as a tool for silencing dissent. And the government's refusal to engage with the UN Working Group only deepens the concern. In the absence of any reply, the UN experts recommended Khalid's immediate release, along with compensation and a full investigation into the violations of his rights.

But for Khalid, there is no freedom and he remains in jail. His case is not an outlier, it serves as a warning for the declines that are becoming ever so evident under Prime Minister Modi and his Hindu nationalists BJP leadership. Across the country, activists, journalists, and students who question government policy find themselves trapped in the same legal purgatory, charged under vague laws, denied bail, held for years without trial. The world's largest democracy, experts and advocacy groups caution, has learned to detain first and ask questions never. And the UN has now put it on notice not just in Khalid's case but also Jagtar Singh Johal's detention.

If Khalid's case exposes how the system operates, Johal's case shows how long it can keep someone behind bars without ever proving anything. Eight years — roughly three thousand and eighty-nine days later, Johal remains inside, with no end in sight. Johal is a British national and a Sikh human rights defender, but he didn't come to India to fight the government, he came to get married. In November 2017, not long after his wedding in Punjab, hooded men took him. They turned out to be police officers. For ten days they held him somewhere undisclosed, no lawyers, no family. He says they gave him electric shocks, forced him into stress positions, kept him from sleeping, and threatened to kill him. The Indian government has never seriously investigated any of it.

When he reappeared, he was in court, charged with terror-



ism offences. Some carried the death penalty. The charges reportedly rested on confessions that came out of that ten-day black hole. In March 2025, a court acquitted him on one of the charges. No reliable evidence, the judge said. But Johal, like Khalid, who awaits any form of trial, is still in jail.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the same body that condemned Umar Khalid's detention, has now issued a statement on Johal's case. "Eight and a half years of arbitrary detention without a clear path to trial is not justice," they said. "It is unlawful suffering. The prolonged uncertainty alone is a form of psychological torture."

The same machinery that held Khalid for five years without trial and Johal for eight has also held Irfan Mehraj captive, a Kashmiri journalist who has spent more than 1,000 days in a maximum-security prison in New Delhi, over 500 miles from his home in Srinagar, with no trial begun and no bail resolved.

In February this year, an international intervention pulled his case into the global spotlight when the New York-based Human Rights Foundation and the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development submitted an individual complaint to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention on his behalf, urging the body to declare his detention arbitrary and in violation of international law. But the warning from HRF went further: Mehraj's case is not an aberration but part of a pattern where Indian authorities jail first and dispense justice, if it comes at all, much later. "Mehraj's case exemplifies India's practice of 'trial by jail'," Hannah Van Dijke, legal and research officer at HRF told the Express Tribune, adding that dissidents are subjected to indefinite pre-trial detention where the legal process itself becomes the punishment.

Indian authorities claim Mehraj's detention is linked to his former work with the Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society, accusing him of terrorism and secession under what is known as the "NGO terror funding case," part of a broader probe launched in 2020 against JKCCS and other Kashmiri NGOs that has already drawn widespread international criticism, including from the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. HRF points out that Mehraj's reporting shows a consistent commitment to highlighting human rights issues in Kashmir — documenting everything from young women volunteering during the 2014 floods in Srinagar to the struggles of the Pandit community and ongoing abuses by authorities. "Holding a journalist and human rights defender like Irfan Mehraj under this case is a blatant violation of press freedom and human rights," said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, executive director of the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development. His imprisonment, she added, appears to punish him for legitimate reporting and advocacy and reflects a wider pattern of silencing independent voices in Kashmir. "Alongside Khurram Parvez, his case underscores the authorities' failure to uphold freedom of expression and meet international obligations."

If Mehraj's case feels familiar, it is because the same law keeps appearing. At the core of all these cases — Khalid, Johal, Mehraj, Parvez — is the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, or UAPA, a terrorism prevention law with a provision allowing for very lengthy pre-trial detention. In practice, as Van Dijke told

Continued on Page 20

In India, trial happens by extended detention



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India's political freedoms have eroded and the country is no longer fully democratic

Hannah Van Dijcke



“

It is fair to say that we are seeing a growing pattern of prolonged pre-detention as a tool to silence critics in India

Ahmed Adam

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The UAPA makes it much easier for Indian authorities to imprison dissidents because they do not have to go to official trial. Before Narendra Modi's government came to power in 2014, the law's use was negligible, but according to *The Guardian*, between 2014 and 2020, some 10,552 people were arrested under the UAPA. Among them was Khurram Parvez, detained in 2021 for documenting violence, torture, and enforced disappearances of Kashmiris by Indian armed forces. Among them was Umar Khalid, arrested for a speech. Among them is Irfan Mehraj, a journalist held for more than 1,000 days without trial.

Van Dijcke did not mince words in her interview with *The Express Tribune* earlier this year. India's political freedoms have eroded, she said bluntly, and the country is no longer fully democratic. "We reclassified India from a democracy to what we call a hybrid authoritarian regime, a system that falls between a fully democratic and an authoritarian state." Mehraj's case, she added, is a clear example of where the judiciary and the legal system are failing. "He has been in detention, without any trial, for more than 1,000 days. That is something you will never see in a democracy, as the general rule in international law is that pre-trial detention should be as short as possible."

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has put India on notice multiple times, and each time the government of India has offered no response, no defence, and no denial. The *Express Tribune* tried contacting various Indian government offices, including the External Affairs Ministry for comment, but each query was met with radio silence.

In Johal's case, his imprisonment was first recognised by a UN panel as arbitrary detention four years ago. Since then, the activist from Dumbarton has claimed to have been tortured, something the Indian authorities have previously denied and have repeatedly maintained due process is being followed.

Now, the UN experts, according to a recent article published by the BBC, have sent a new communication about the case to the Indian authorities and said they will monitor developments. The ten experts, the British news organisation reported, are UN Special Rapporteurs, independent human rights specialists appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, and four members of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

Ria Chakrabarty, senior policy director at Hindus for Human Rights, has been following these cases closely. She argues the government has weaponized anti-terror laws against its critics. "There's no question," she told the *Express Tribune*, "that it is harder to dissent in India today than it was 12 years ago." Under Modi, she explained, these laws have been aggressively used against critics of Hindu nationalism, and disproportionately against Indian

Muslims.

She pointed to a pattern that began even before the high-profile cases of Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam. The first big case, she said, was actually that of anti-caste and tribal activists who rallied at Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra and were later attacked by Hindu nationalist mobs. Twelve leaders of the movement for the rights of caste-oppressed people and Adivasis were jailed for allegedly working with Maoists to overthrow the Modi government. The Supreme Court of India has slowly released most of them, she said, but one, Father Stan Swamy, a Jesuit priest, died in prison at the age of 84. Both the Supreme Court and the UN have judged that many of the detainees were held with no evidence of terrorism. "But this case is important to understand," she said, "because then the Indian Home Ministry started using the same playbook against Muslim activists who would lead protests subjected to Hindu nationalist violence, and later, primarily Sikh farmers protesting farm laws."

When Muslims protested the Citizenship Amendment Act, she explained, they were also protesting the core of the Hindu nationalist thesis that India should ever be anything but a secular republic. "Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam were arrested with dozens of others to silence criticism, not just of Modi, but of Hindu nationalism as a project," she said. "That is the real pattern we see in the last 12 years of Modi's government."

On the judiciary, she said: "Right now, Indians have many questions about how much they trust the judiciary." In the cases of Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and Irfan Mehraj, she told the *Express Tribune*, "the judiciary is undoubtedly trying to make an example out of these activists." She noted that Khalid and Imam applied for bail alongside five others. The other five were granted very restrictive bail, but Khalid and Imam were denied. "The Supreme Court alleged that these two were the masterminds behind the Delhi riots in 2020," she said, "but Umar was not in the city during the time of the violence, and the UN has deemed his detention arbitrary."

At the heart of all this, she explained, is the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, a law that has existed since 1967 and has been amended over the years to become increasingly draconian. "These laws are often called 'no-bail laws' because they allow long periods of pre-trial detention, supposedly to prevent acts of terror," she told the *Express Tribune*. "The UAPA has been amended in many ways to restrict people's freedom of expression. These laws are written to undermine Indians' rights to speedy and fair trials." The numbers bear this out, she said. Less than five per cent of UAPA cases lead to conviction. A majority do not even go to trial. More than 10,000 people have been arrested under the UAPA. "During the arrest period, police are allowed to build a charge sheet to

substantiate a terrorism allegation," she explained. In 2020, more than half of UAPA investigations lasted over three years. During that time, people are usually detained in jail, and bail is very difficult to obtain. "Many Indian legal scholars and human rights defenders will often say that the UAPA process is the punishment because the law presumes the accused is guilty, and they have to prove their innocence."

When asked about Hindu majoritarian ideology, she said: "It's at the heart of how the current government approaches all criticism." "When we say all of this, we are actually saying that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is trying to capture the institutions of Indian governance." The Home Ministry, she told the *Express Tribune*, is now a political tool. Regardless of how individual police officers relate to the RSS or their personal politics, when the top law enforcement agency becomes a tool of Hindu nationalism, it influences the way all police forces work. She pointed to the Delhi riots case as a routine example. "Hindu nationalists will instigate violence in Muslim neighborhoods, and then authorities will arrest Muslim community leaders and bulldoze the homes and businesses in that area," she said. "The government punished Muslim activists who protested a discriminatory law rather than the perpetrators of the violence that swept Delhi."

Finally, asked what message she would deliver to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ria said: "India is a pluralistic country, and Hindu traditions at their best have long insisted that truth and the divine are encountered through many paths, many philosophies, and many forms. Criticism and diversity of thought are integral to both being a good Indian and being a good Hindu. India's thousands of political prisoners deserve to be free, because they did what any good Indian should do: peacefully participate in the democratic process of dissent. Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, Irfan Mehraj, and countless other political dissidents are not criminals for disagreeing with you, and as the leader of a diverse, secular republic, it is your constitutional duty to uphold the rights of people who disagree with you. A Hinduism that sees the sacred in multiplicity cannot be reconciled with a politics that fears diversity."

The *Express Tribune* also reached out to Ahmed Adam from the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, who has tracked these cases from an international legal perspective and sees a deeper failure. In Adam's opinion, the primary failure in Khalid's case is not investigative sloppiness or judicial delay, it is the arrest itself. "He should not have been arrested at all," he said. "And since his arrest, we have seen the entire legal and judicial system being weaponized against him. We see Khalid's case as emblematic of not only a pattern of using anti-terrorism laws to silence dis-

sent but also deliberate erosion of the rule of law and independent institutions such as the judiciary."

On the question of whether prolonged pre-trial detention is becoming normalized in India, Adam said: "It is fair to say that we are seeing a growing pattern of prolonged pre-detention as a tool to silence critics in India." He pointed to the UAPA's restrictive bail conditions and lengthy investigations, noting that despite the law's poor conviction rate, "the lengthy investigations and prolonged detention without trial become punishment itself for those targeted."

When asked who should be applying pressure on India, Adam did not spare New Delhi's democratic allies. "Disappointingly, we are seeing states and international institutions increasingly prioritizing political and economic interests and trade at the expense of human rights, protection of minorities, principles of rule of law and integrity of independent institutions."

The Indian government has consistently ignored recommendations and opinions from UN human rights mechanisms, Adam pointed out, and has even openly attacked those mechanisms to dissuade scrutiny of its record. But he argued that UN opinions still matter. "One of their most important impacts is the international validation, legitimacy and visibility they bring to human rights defenders, activists and dissidents in such cases." These opinions become crucial platforms for international solidarity, he explained. "They give detainees and their families hope and a feeling that they are not alone."

Describing Khalid's case as part of a clear pattern, Adam said human rights defenders, political activists, independent journalists, academics, lawyers, and dissidents are all being targeted for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. This crackdown, he added, has come at a time of increasing persecution of religious minorities, particularly Muslims, as well as Dalits and Adivasis, driven by rising majoritarian and nationalistic political narratives. "These two trends are unraveling India's democracy," he warned. "The current BJP government is one of the first to successfully weaponize majoritarian narratives that vilified minorities, disinformation, and targeting of critics, and capture of independent institutions to gain and maintain power. Failure of the rest of the world to take note of this has led to proliferation of these trends across the world by authoritarians and aspiring authoritarians," he cautioned.

That persecution of religious minorities, Adam explained, is not incidental. It is central to how the law is being used. "It is safe to say Muslims and Kashmiris have been disproportionately targeted, especially using anti-terrorism and national security laws such as the UAPA. This also follows the broader pattern of vilification and securitization of the entire Muslim community in India," he concluded.

Before tears became the script



By Rabia Khan

"I spent forty years shaping women into strong, confident individuals—able to protect themselves, spread happiness, and live with dignity. But today, across countless channels, the same woman is shown beaten, helpless, and in tears," said renowned playwright Haseena Moin, in an interview once, before she passed away six years ago in March.

When I read these words, I felt a deep sense of sadness and discomfort. It did not seem like just a statement, but a painful truth that we often ignore. It felt like someone had clearly expressed what we see every day but rarely question. There was also a feeling of loss, as if something valuable has slowly been left behind. It made me reflect on the kind of stories we watch on TV and accept, and whether we are becoming used to seeing pain instead of questioning it. More than anything, it reminded me that we need to rethink what we create and show about women today.

Moin has not only been celebrated for creating unforgettable characters in Pakistani television, and she also left behind a legacy that continues to be admired by audiences across generations. She played a leading role in shaping classic PTV dramas from the 1970s through the 1990s, apart from contributing to radio, stage, and film.

She began her career with Radio Pakistan in the late 1960s and made her television debut with an Eid play, *Eid Ka Jora*, in 1969, which opened the door to her journey as a writer. Recognition came with early successes such as *Shehzori* and *Kiran Kahani*, followed by block-buster serials such as *Ankahi*, *Tanhaiyan*, and *Dhoop Kanar*.

Eras are shaped by many factors, and sometimes their decline is marked by the loss of a single influential figure. For many people in Pakistan, especially those who grew up in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, the passing of Haseena Moin felt like the end of an important chapter in television history. Known fondly as Haseena Apa, she created characters that connected deeply with urban middle-class women, particularly from Urdu-speaking families, because they reflected real life, dreams, and everyday struggles. Her female characters were rebellious, strong and independent, yet they remained balanced. They valued family, relationships, and personal growth without rejecting cultural norms.

They faced problems, felt pain, and made mistakes, but they stayed hopeful, learned from their experiences, and moved forward gracefully. Unlike many modern portrayals that show women in extreme ways, her characters were balanced both strength and softness.

Being an educated and independent woman herself, she wrote honest and relatable stories giving young women positive role models to look up to. Her dramas avoided unnecessary negativity and focused on humour, warmth, and human emotions, which helped them, connect with audiences even in difficult times. Today, many feel that the kind of dignity, simplicity, and balance she brought to both her writing and her life is no longer seen in our media or even in society, making her contribution even more valuable and deeply missed.

Her work stood out for its focus on strong, thoughtful female characters at a time when such portrayals were rare. She wrote about women who were confident, educated, and knew their worth, drawing her characters from everyday life to create that the viewers could easily relate to, whether it was a strict, disciplinarian elder like Ghazi played by Azra Sherwani in *Uncle Urfi*, a humorous friend like Jamshed Ansari in *Ankahi*, or her confident male leads. Her influence

also extended to films, including projects like *Henna* (1991), what made her writing timeless was its simplicity and emotional truth—her stories reflected real human behaviour rather than an exaggerated mish-mash.

Women in her characters spoke openly and made their own decisions. They laughed, argued, and lived like real people. She showed that a woman can be strong without being disrespectful and independent without leaving behind her values. At a time when society expected women to stay quiet, she gave them a voice.

She often said in her interviews that the atmosphere of her home was reflected in her dramas—a home where respect and kindness were important. Her father believed strongly that girls should never be physically hit. Boys could be scolded or punished, but raising a hand on girls was unacceptable. This value of protection and respect shaped her worldview and became the foundation of her storytelling.

Moreover, her stories were rooted in honesty and humanity. She believed that honesty, in her time, existed at its peak. People were more genuine in their relationships, and that authenticity made her characters resonate with viewers.

However, today, the picture is disturbingly different. Women on television are increasingly shown being beaten, humiliated, or thrown out of their homes. They are crying, suffering, and living in constant pain. And the audience watches it as entertainment. What was once perhaps five percent negativity has now increased to ninety-five percent! It is as if the dirt from a drain has been pulled out and spread everywhere, without anyone taking responsibility to clean it.

People, however, want to see good stories. They want to be inspired, uplifted, and reminded of hope. They want stories that celebrate strength, kindness, and happiness, not endless cycles of misery.

Umme Salma, Urdu professor, at the University of Sindh, contrasted this trend with Moin's work, pointing out that today's writers have even reduced women to degrading labels, such as "do takay ki aurat" being used across dramas to create hype and popularity. "Do these writers truly understand what they are writing?" asks Umme Salma, explaining that a woman holds the highest level of respect in our society as a mother, daughter, and individual, yet television is slowly damaging that respect by normalising humiliation. "This careless portrayal is not just poor writing; it reflects a deeper disconnect between media and values. Where Haseena Moin uplifted women with dignity and grace, many writers today seem to be pulling them down for attention, forgetting that words on screen shape how society thinks and behaves."

"When almost 70 or more channels are showing the same kind of story—where women are crying, suffering, and being oppressed—it slowly becomes normal in people's minds," Salma adds. "Viewers get used to seeing women in pain, and this repeated image starts to feel like reality. But the moment even one drama comes forward with a bold, confident, and courageous woman, society reacts differently. Instead of appreciating the change, people begin to criticise. Women showed in progressive light are considered too bold, disobedient and hence unfit for a married life, and against our culture and values."

This reaction clearly shows the problem is not with strong female characters, but with the perception that has been built in audiences. "Strong negativity repeatedly shown has become acceptable, showing a strong woman feels unusual or even wrong," Umme Salma emphasised that this mindset is dangerous because it discourages writers

from creating positive and empowering characters. It also sends a message that women should remain within their, suppressed, confined and limited roles.

"The truth is, people do want to watch positive characters," she says. "They want stories that give hope, strength, and a sense of happiness not just pain and suffering, because they are already facing enough of that in their real lives."

This is when we miss Haseena Moin.

Her modern-yet-rooted-in-tradition, strong, independent, and respectable women did not need rescuing, they defined their own paths.

Today, writers are moving in the opposite direction. Most dramas focus on conflict, negativity, and sensationalism. Writers seem to think that pain sells better than inspiration. They repeat old tropes: women suffering endlessly, men dominating, families in constant turmoil. Subtlety and depth are replaced with loud arguments and emotional exaggeration, where originality is rare.

Her characters Zara, Zoya and Sana became household names, representing confidence, simplicity, and emotional strength. Her storytelling was so influential that an entire generation of Zaras, Zoyas and Sanas followed *Ankahi* and *Tanhaiyan*, across the borders too as her plays were not only popular in Pakistan but also widely appreciated and loved by audiences in India.

"Earlier, writers focused on meaningful content, which made their work feel more real," says Ahmed Raza, a digital media manager in Islamabad. "These days screen writing is driven by ratings and repetition of the same themes for the same reason."

According to him, women are now shown as dependent, limited, and weak. "Repeated negative portrayals can influence the society's mindset," he says. "In many cases, men may also be affected by these portrayals, leading to a reduced sense of responsibility and less respect towards women in real life." Raza believes writers today are following trends instead of observing reality, and as a result, they are not showing balanced characters such as working women who can manage both their careers and households. He stressed that dramas should reflect real life, where women play multiple roles with strength and dignity.

"A unique attribute about Moin's writing was her use of light humour and simple conversations to highlight serious issues," says Naha Shamshad, an avid fan of TV plays. "Her plays were easy to connect with, without being too heavy or dramatic. In contrast, today's dramas often focus on long conflicts that are monotonous and repeated."

Shamshad also pointed out that Moin trusted her audience to understand the storyline, while many present-day serials over-explain everything, making them less engaging and less meaningful.

Moin's absence is felt so much today because no one today dares to write like her. We miss her not only because her dramas were enjoyable, but because they taught lessons without sounding preachy. They taught us that media has the power to build society, not just reflect it.

How long are we going to see television glorify misery rather than celebrating resilience? Relying on shock value and harsh language to attract attention, our TV writers have become trapped in a cycle of cheap emotional manipulation, chasing ratings instead of impact, repeating the same formulas—loud conflicts, broken relationships, damsels in distress, humiliated, insulted, or suffering.

Perhaps today's writers do not even come close to her observation, her talent, her education, and her sense of humility and pragmatism. Moin's legacy challenges the present-day writers to make meaningful stories again -- to inspire instead of depress, empower instead of oppress? Can these writers give women characters dignity, positivity, and hope that they once had?

Her work remains a lesson for us all. Media does not merely entertain; it shapes minds, mirrors society, and carries the power to instill values. Until today's television dramas reclaim that vision, we will continue to keenly feel the absence of Haseena Moin—a woman who spent four decades crafting women who were bold, joyful, and strong, yet whose lessons modern screenwriters have either forgotten or never truly learned.

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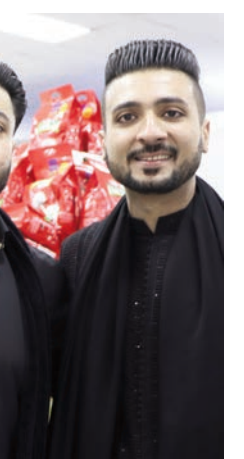
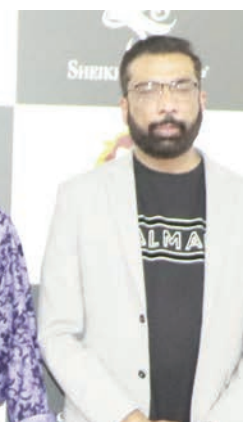
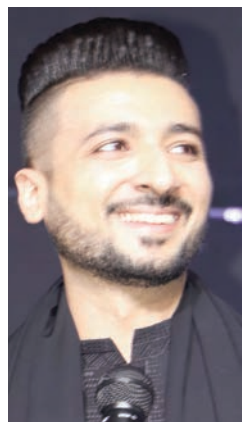
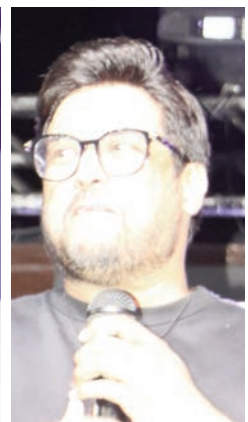
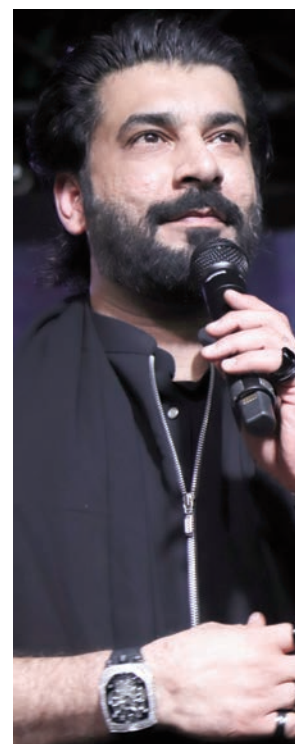
Quaid-e-Azam Foundation USA Commemorates the Enduring Legacy of the Poet of the East

Marking the death anniversary of the visionary thinker, the foundation brought together Houston's literary and civic leaders to reflect on Iqbal's timeless blueprint for spiritual and collective progress.



Ali Sheikhani Hosts Mega Community Celebration at the Historic Launch of 24-Hour Papa Mart

The Boat Basin Eid Mela and grand opening celebration featured live entertainment, giveaways, family activities, and special discounts as hundreds gathered to welcome Houston's first 24-hour Indo-Pak grocery store.



A moment of unity and appreciation at ISGH North Zone's Eid Brunch in Houston

The Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) North Zone hosted a special Eid Celebration & Team Appreciation Brunch on April 26 at Tempura 1960. Led by Dr. M. Usman Khan, the event brought together community members and volunteers to celebrate Eid and recognize their ongoing contributions. The gathering reflected ISGH's mission of unity, service, and community engagement across Greater Houston.



The comfort of closure

When life doesn't give us proper endings, we need to live with grief, guilt and unanswered questions

By Taha Kehar

KARACHI: Conventional wisdom would have us believe that a powerful, promising tale must follow a cohesive structure. If German playwright Gustav Freytag's five-part dramatic structure is to serve as a blueprint, all narratives must contain specific benchmarks: a clear exposition, followed by rising action that steers readers toward a climax, and then gradually moves towards resolution. Even if a story doesn't follow a linear trajectory, with a beginning, middle or end, it is still expected to adhere to some semblance of structure.

However, Freytag's model seems to place far too many expectations on a narrative. Some stories are inherently uneventful, devoid of nail-biting suspense or a clear climax. Immersing ourselves in such tales can be an uninspiring pursuit and we often regret wasting time and energy on a story stripped of verve and intensity. The growing preoccupation with provocative plotlines has led many of us to produce formulaic, melodramatic stories that overlook the sheer monotony of life. A vast majority of stories unfold in a subtle rhythm, without so much as a bang or a whimper.

Likewise, not all stories are destined for a satisfying ending; many linger in the corridors of time, unfinished and unresolved. The absence of closure is what irks most of us who still labour under the illusion that a story must carry a lesson—a gift-wrapped parting thought that makes the bumpy journey feel worthwhile. It is difficult to rid ourselves of these false assumptions, especially if we continue to view storytelling as a means of edifying the masses.

Children's fiction is often viewed as an escapist fantasy, containing just enough trappings of reality to prepare young minds for life, without drawing them too deeply into its complexities. There is no guarantee that adults embrace 'life lessons' with alacrity. On the contrary, many of them simply disregard any epiphanies, preferring the comfort of old habits to any opportunity for spiritual growth.

Stories provide a mirror to this deliberate act of evasion. Few among us are forced to bear the consequences of these decisions and there is rarely any sense of glorious comeuppance attached with them. As a result, the villains get away with all manner of moral and emotional offences, and everyone, including the reader, has to make peace with it.

The villain takes it all

If we follow this logic, the search for resolution seems almost naive. Literature is an ever-present reminder of this cold fact, even if it doesn't actively condone it.

In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the actions of the perceived villains don't invite severe penalties. Baby Kochamma, who colluded with the prevailing power structures to undermine her niece's happiness, isn't subjected to meaningful scrutiny. In fact, she remains firmly entrenched in the gable-roofed house she once shared with those she harmed, ultimately outliving most of them. Some readers might interpret her loneliness as a form of vindication, but Baby Kochamma harbours no remorse about her actions and instead

perfects the art of indifference. Watching such a vile character escape accountability for destroying innocent lives can shatter the reader's faith in justice. As they finish the novel, they will be left reeling at the senseless personal carnage wrought by a deeply broken individual.

In this context, closure can be found in the unsettling realisation that not everyone's actions are worthy of redemption, especially when they show no capacity for growth. Even so, the desire for an emotional resolution feels like a privilege in a world where individuals resist change and conveniently construct their own skewed versions of events, casting themselves as victims of other people's cruelty. Many may find consolation in the notion that individuals are products of oppressive social structures that fuel their problematic conduct. However, people aren't mere puppets held by the ventriloquist's string; they possess the agency to act responsibly. This tension makes the question of healing all the more pressing, as the inability to achieve it can feel like a form of personal failure.

The benefit of hindsight

Narratives found in religious texts often provide a more definitive and structured view on the subject. The Quranic story of Yusuf (AS) begins with a young boy narrating one of his dreams to his father, before being thrust into a series of trials and tribulations, including betrayal by his siblings, enslavement and imprisonment. After enduring prolonged hardship, he is released from prison and elevated into a position of honour and authority in the very land where he first arrived as a captive.

This story aligns closely with Freytag's model of dramatic structure, but it also suggests that closure is achieved through the benefit of hindsight. As a result, we are encouraged to continue wading through the currents of time and to wait for the opportune moment when answers eventually surface.

A search for structure

An endless waiting game only seems appealing in fiction; in reality, even the most earnest and relentless pursuit for the truth is marked by impatience. All of us are driven by timelines, which is why we tend to understand life's most complex phenomena through clearly defined stages. The Kübler-Ross model may outline the five stages of grief, but it risks portraying bereavement as a mechanical, methodical process with a fixed roadmap. Loss is an intricate emotion that cannot be held captive to these structured frameworks. Instead, it unfolds differently in each case and takes unpredictable turns. This is why Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, in *Notes on Grief*, describes loss as a "cruel kind of education".

My own experience with grief has been far from uniform; it is, in many ways, a chaotic patchwork of emotions. On the morning of November 25, 2021, I entered my ailing mother's room before leaving for work and said a customary goodbye. She made a sarcastic remark about my shoes, and we shared a brief moment of laughter before I

walked out of the door. Three hours later, she was gone.

I received the news by phone and promptly returned home for her last rites. She had been ill for a year, so her death, though painful, wasn't unexpected. I was prepared for the final goodbye, but woefully unprepared for its emotional aftermath. My only consolation was that our farewell had, in its own way, been both peaceful and joyous.

Last year, I lost a loved one to an illness that consumed him like a slow, insidious poison. When his final moment came, I was not there. The circumstances surrounding my absence were different from when my mother died. A few weeks earlier, we had fallen out and some cruel words were exchanged like gunfire in a battlefield.

In the long months after his funeral service, as I became immersed in the intricacies of his family life, I carried the memory of our last exchange like a burden—a lingering curse. It felt like a cruel rupture, a reminder that not all stories end with the comfort of closure.

Yet, it is difficult to imagine moving forward without it. At times, closure seems like a hard-earned reward after a relentless struggle. The possibility of progressing with a clear mind seems remote without putting old matters to rest.

Under these circumstances, religion offers relief in the form of rituals—a path that I prefer, though I cannot advocate it as a universal solution. Literature, too, seems inadequate in helping us find solace after bereavement. While it succeeds in holding up a mirror to our emotions, it cannot always open up the doors we long to pass through in search of peace.

The psychology of healing

That's why the quest for closure is better understood as a psychological journey rather than a literary or religious voyage. Expert advice can help steer us out of the quagmires many of us find ourselves in.

"Psychologically, closure is defined as something that is solved," states Margaret Lobo Fialho, a life coach who specialises in Time Line Therapy (TLT) and self-development. "[It is defined as] a closed chapter—a sense of a need for resolution and understanding in the emotional sense."

She believes the concept is intimately linked to "acceptance" and "meaning-making", but is processed differently.

"Acceptance is about acknowledging reality and living with it," Fialho explains. "Meaning-making helps [us] find numerous lessons of growth and purpose."

When asked whether psychological closure is a crucial ingredient for personal and emotional wellbeing, she agrees emphatically.

"A healing process influences healthy 'internal' closure," Fialho opines. "Healing comes first before anything [else]."

Be that as it may, she notes that research suggests closure may not be indispensable for long-term emotional recovery.

"Recovery tends to depend more on processes such as acceptance, emotional

processing and meaning making," Fialho asserts. "A large body of psychological writing argues that the need for closure before healing is misleading."

Huma Sheikh, a trainee therapist, claims that the need for closure varies across clinical groups.

"High levels of cognitive dissonance can make recovery harder," she says. "Long-term recovery is often more robust when individuals learn to live with unresolved experiences."

Sheikh asserts that emotional resilience is linked with the ability to function well even without external validation or clear answers.

We the people

At its core, closure is a deeply personal process that must be tailored to an individual's emotional needs and personality. As a result, no universal formula can be devised to achieve it. The trajectory varies from person to person and the outcome also differs.

"Personality traits and attachment styles strongly influence how a person seeks closure," Fialho says.

She argues that people with anxious attachment styles fear abandonment, have a strong desire for explanations and constantly need reassurance. "Those with an avoidant personality often distance themselves and avoid confrontations," Fialho explains. "A [person with a] secure personality appreciates straightforward open conversations and is open to healing to move on."

Beyond personality traits, cultural norms also shape our perceptions about how to process a traumatic event.

"Some cultures encourage open discussions of feelings to gain peace of mind while others value emotional restraint and quiet acceptance," Fialho said.

She believes mourning periods and memorial events provide "structured ways to process loss".

"Culture influences whether closure is required, how it is achieved and how people move forward after loss," Fialho adds.

Echoing these sentiments, Sheikh states that the dichotomies between Eastern and Western culture also determine people's outlook on these matters.

"Western psychological frameworks often over-emphasise the 'stage model' of grief," she states. "Many Eastern and indigenous cultures prioritise ancestral continuity and the ongoing presence of the deceased."

According to Sheikh, these beliefs transform the act of moving forward with life into a "cultural construct" rather than a universal psychological requirement.

"This can place undue pressure on individuals to achieve a state of resolution that may not align with their internal reality," she asserts.

Barriers to peace

Fialho believes that the pursuit of emotional resolution can also impede the healing process and prolong a person's distress.

"Constantly searching for answers can lead to overthinking, which keeps the loss emotionally active," she says. "Relying on...another person for closure may prevent [people from] moving on, especially if they don't provide clear

answers."

Citing the findings of modern psychology guru Gabor Maté, Sheikh states that when the focus remains on obtaining an apology or explanation from another, it can perpetuate a cycle of emotional dependence and victimhood.

"This external focus often hinders the development of self-authored peace," she adds.

Beyond the external

In the absence of direct closure, individuals need to devise their own emotional roadmap.

"It becomes important to look inward and focus on the personal healing process," Fialho says. Healing should be a priority regardless of whether closure is achieved."

If this strategy is to work, people need to stop depending on the external world for validation or concrete answers and focus on their own internal processes.

"This [requires people to] connect with their higher [self]," Fialho says. She advocates self-care and personal development, seeking therapy, spending time with nature and journaling.

"Through these approaches, individuals can gradually process their emotions, gain perspective and extract meaningful lessons from the experience," she concludes.

Referring to the work of renowned psychologist Alfred Adler, Sheikh highlights the effectiveness of teleological thinking, a technique whereby individuals opt for a future-oriented approach instead of remaining mired in the past.

"Symbolism and rituals allow the psyche to enact a transition without requiring participation from anyone else," she says.

A for ambiguity

In an age when ambiguity is unavoidable and neat conclusions are unlikely, Fialho says therapeutic practice should give priority to "internal closure".

"At times, people experience sudden losses or a one-sided end to a relationship that leaves them with unanswered questions," she explains.

"In such situations, therapy can help individuals accept reality, process their emotions and gradually find a sense of being and resolution."

Echoing these concerns, Sheikh states modern-day therapeutic practice needs to account for negative stimuli.

"Helping a client deal with unresolved matters fosters a more sophisticated level of ego strength," she says. "Rather than facilitating a forced conclusion, the clinicians should support the client in building a life that is meaningful despite the presence of the unresolved."

A many-splendoured

Life is undoubtedly a story that both adheres to and defies Freytag's dramatic structure. That tension is part of the beauty of life. It has the potential to reveal everything, yet often withholds crucial details. As mere mortals navigate its mysteries, many of them may need to borrow a leaf from the Stoics' handbook. They must learn to find contentment in what they can make peace with, while accepting that some wisdom will always remain beyond their reach.

A Final Resting Place of Our Own: Houston's Muslim Community Nears Historic Milestone

Continued from page 17

Park Southwest Cemetery. In a power move for community representation, PAGH leaders Syed Arshad Iqbal and Mahmood Ahmed recently finalized high-level negotiations with Family Service Counselor Kendra Lewis to formalize this request. This isn't just about real estate; it is a significant development designed to ensure that Islamic traditions—from specific shroud protocols to the precise orientation of the grave—are honored with absolute dignity and without compromise.

With Houston's Muslim population surging, the need for culturally appropriate burial space has reached a critical tipping point. This initiative provides immediate relief for grieving families while simultaneously future-proofing the community's needs for generations to come. By securing these 5,000 plots, PAGH is not only ensuring cultural integrity according to the Sunnah but is also laying the tactical groundwork for the eventual establishment of a fully independent Muslim cemetery under their direct supervision. This forward-thinking strategy addresses the urgent demand for infrastructure that keeps pace with the region's rapid demographic growth.

Community leaders have described this effort as a crucial milestone that reflects PAGH's evolving commitment to the most sacred and essential needs of the Greater Houston area. By moving beyond social advocacy into long-term religious infrastructure, the organization is ensuring that future generations have a place of peace that mirrors their identity and faith. As the proposal awaits final approval, the move is being widely celebrated as a legacy-defining initiative, proving that Houston's Muslims are no longer just looking for temporary space—they are building a permanent and dignified home for their history.

Seva Signs Grand Opening Celebrated with Dignitaries, Ribbon Cutting, and Festive Ceremonies in Stafford

Continued from page 17

vibrant cultural dance performances, which brought energy and entertainment to the evening.

Held on April 22, 2026, at Seva Signs' facility on Jebbia Lane in Stafford, the event showcased the company's vision of delivering high-quality, innovative signage solutions under one roof. Attendees had the opportunity to tour the facility, interact with the team, and learn more about the services offered.

The evening continued with a cocktail and dinner reception, creating a warm and engaging environment for clients, community leaders, family, and friends to connect and celebrate together.

Owned by renowned community

leader Aslam Kapadia, Seva Signs represents a significant addition to the region's business landscape. The successful launch underscores both entrepreneurial growth and the spirit of collaboration within the Fort Bend County community.

ISGH North Zone Hosts Eid Brunch Honoring Volunteers and Community Spirit

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Dr. M. Usman Khan, who appreciated the contributions of team members and emphasized the importance of unity, service, and continued engagement within the community. Attendees enjoyed an afternoon of networking, fellowship, and reflection. Established in 1969, ISGH is one of the largest Islamic organizations in North America, operating more than 20 centers across the Greater Houston area.

Through religious services, educational programs, social outreach, and interfaith initiatives, ISGH continues to play a key role in community development. Organized through a zonal system, ISGH ensures effective grassroots engagement, with the North Zone actively contributing to local programs and services.

The event concluded on a high note, reinforcing the spirit of togetherness and appreciation that defines the organization's mission.

Free Plants, Fresh Ideas, and Community Unity Highlight Houston Gathering

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for cultivating fresh vegetables and creating greener surroundings.

The event featured a series of informative speeches by prominent community members and speakers including Eng. Dilawar Abbass, Nadeem Sheikh, renowned poet Ghanzafar Hashmi, Shakeel Khan, Furman Ali, Anwar Alam, and Ilyas Chaudhry. Each speaker shared valuable insights on vegetable gardening, seasonal planting techniques, organic growing methods, and the health benefits associated with home-grown produce.

Deputy Consul General of Pakistan in Houston, Mr. Ashar Shahzad, also addressed the gathering and delivered an inspiring speech, appreciating the initiative for promoting environmental responsibility and strengthening community bonds. His remarks were warmly received by attendees.

During the event, Mr. Faheem Akhoond informed the jubilant crowd that Mr. Ashar Shahzad will be leaving for Uganda in July for his next diplomatic assignment and said that he will be greatly missed by the Houston community for his active engagement and support.

A special highlight of the event was the free distribution of plants among participants, giving attendees an opportunity to immediately begin their own gardening efforts at home. The gesture added a practical and

meaningful dimension to the initiative and was enthusiastically welcomed by families and children.

The gathering was especially significant as it reflected a rare and positive moment of unity within the community, where diverse groups came together on one platform, setting aside differences in favor of collective progress and shared purpose.

The program concluded on a high note, leaving participants inspired to transform their backyards into productive green spaces while continuing to promote harmony, cooperation, and community spirit through shared environmental action.

The Poet of the East Remembered: Houston Gathers to Revive Iqbal's Call for Self-Realization

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how Iqbal's profound vision remains a vital compass for South Asians navigating the modern world.

The highlight of the evening was a passionate address by Asaf Qadeer, Co-founder of the Quaid-e-Azam Foundation, who challenged the audience to move beyond mere admiration of Iqbal's poetry and actively implement his philosophy.

"Allama Iqbal did not just dream of a nation; he provided the intellectual and spiritual blueprint for our collective survival and prosperity," Qadeer stated in his keynote remarks. "His revolutionary concept of Khudi—the elevation and realization of the self—is not a relic of history. It is an urgent, living mandate. To our youth facing the complex challenges of today, Iqbal's message is clear: discover your inner strength, strive for uncompromising excellence, and become the architects of your own destiny."

Qadeer further emphasized the Foundation's commitment to ensuring that Iqbal's teachings are accessible to the younger generation, noting that true tribute lies in action, not just remembrance.

Other distinguished speakers echoed these sentiments, paying rich tribute to Iqbal's role in awakening a profound sense of identity and hope among the Muslims of the subcontinent during a critical historical juncture. They noted that his intellectual contributions transcend both time and geography, offering universal lessons in spiritual growth and resilience.

The commemorative event concluded with a renewed, unified commitment from the attendees. Participants pledged to carry forward the torch of Iqbal's teachings, ensuring that the Poet of the East remains a brilliant guiding light for future generations in Houston and beyond.

New US bill proposes 3-year H-1B visa freeze

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The legislation calls for a temporary halt in issuing new H-1B visas for three years. Supporters argue that the pause would allow the government to review and reform the program, ensuring it prioritizes American workers. The bill also introduces

stricter eligibility rules, higher wage thresholds, and tighter compliance requirements for employers.

According to MSN, the proposed freeze is the most controversial aspect of the bill. Advocates claim it would reduce reliance on foreign labor and create more job opportunities for U.S. citizens. However, critics warn that such a pause could disrupt industries that depend on highly skilled workers, particularly in technology and healthcare.

In addition to the freeze, the bill outlines several reforms. These include prioritizing high-skilled applicants with advanced degrees, increasing minimum salary requirements, and enhancing transparency in hiring practices. Employers may also need to prove they attempted to hire American workers before turning to foreign candidates.

The proposal targets outsourcing firms by potentially limiting their access to H-1B visas. It also addresses labor concerns such as unpaid "benching," and restricts third-party job placements. These measures aim to prevent misuse of the program and improve accountability.

Professionals, who constitute a significant portion of H-1B visa holders, could be heavily affected. A prolonged pause may disrupt career plans and reduce opportunities in the U.S. At the same time, countries like Canada and Australia could attract more global talent as alternatives.

The bill is still under consideration and has not yet become law. Its future remains uncertain as debates continue in Congress. If passed, it could mark a major shift in U.S. immigration policy, balancing domestic workforce concerns with the need to remain competitive in attracting global talent.

Houston and Karachi Strike a Powerful Blow Against Cancer with Heartfelt Medical Mission

Continued from page 17

Pakistan. This humanitarian surge, led by Saeed Sheikh, President of the Houston Karachi Sister City Association, saw a high-level delegation—joined by the dedicated In-Kind Gifts team from Helping Hand Pakistan—descend upon Karachi's Bait-ul-Sukoon Cancer Hospital with a singular mission: to turn the tide of suffering through collective action. By delivering critical medical equipment and specialized supplies directly into the hands of frontline healthcare providers, this initiative has effectively upgraded the hospital's arsenal in the fight against a devastating disease.

While the equipment provides the technical edge, the true victory lies in the profound emotional restoration of the patients. In the corridors of Bait-ul-Sukoon, the hospital management expressed their deepest gratitude to Medical Brigades and the implementing partner, Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD), noting that these resources sparked a visible transformation—replacing the weariness of battle with the radiance of renewed hope. This wasn't just a delivery of goods; it was a powerful message to the vulnerable that they

are not fighting alone. This massive undertaking was fueled by a powerhouse coalition including the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston, APPNA South Texas Chapter, and the Alliance for Disaster Relief. Together, these partners have proven that when two cities unite under the banner of compassion, a small effort can bring the biggest smiles to those who need them most.

Mayor Whitmire faces ethics complaints over city-funded podcast

Mayor John Whitmire is facing formal ethics complaints from the Houston Progressive Caucus over his new podcast, "901 Bagby: Inside the Mayor's Office."

According to members of the caucus, the group filed grievances over the past week with the Texas Ethics Commission, the city of Houston's Inspector General, and the City Controller's waste, fraud and abuse division.

The complaints came after Houston Public Media obtained documents showing the podcast costs up to \$60,000 in public funds. Because the podcast is taxpayer-funded, the group argued Whitmire's brief allusion to next year's municipal election during the first episode of the podcast ran afoul of state ethics rules around political advertising.

"We can't be using taxpayer funds for an elected official to be pontificating or talking about or giving opinions about their future elections," said Audrey Nath, co-chair of the caucus. "He should reimburse the people of Houston. Pay back the \$60,000 from his own campaign funds."

In the first episode, podcast host and former KPRC 2 anchor Owen Conflenti—owner of Conflenti Media, which the city paid \$60,000 for "advertising services"—asked Whitmire about his relationship with previous mayors of Houston.

After answering the question and reflecting on term limits, Whitmire said, "I'm so confident that we're on the right track that I don't—I don't worry about the politics or re-election."

"You win elections in between elections," Whitmire told Conflenti. "I don't have time for politics."

The Texas Ethics Commission (TEC) enforces state laws concerning ethics and campaign finances. Under state law, public dollars cannot be used for political advertising.

Responding to a question from Houston Public Media, legal assistant Lindsay Powers with the TEC defined political advertising as "a communication supporting or opposing a candidate for nomination or election to a public office," but said the TEC "cannot make determinations regarding the sufficiency of political advertising for a podcast" in response to a news media inquiry.

In a statement after this story was first published, Whitmire's office said the podcast is "another communications channel the City is utilizing to keep the public informed and engaged. It serves the same purpose as social media, press releases, and other public forms of communication." The contracting process with Conflenti Media "was conducted in accordance with the existing city ordinances and procurement guidelines," his office added.

The stories we weave

The verdict did not matter as much as the mystery around it, which remains unsolved even today



By Faiza Shah

The Staircase is a curious piece of television. It extends beyond straightforward adaptation in that it is based on a documentary about a murder trial that took place in Durham, North Carolina, following the mysterious death of a woman on a staircase in 2001, more than two decades ago. So the time of the setting of the gruesome death seems like a lifetime away, for all practical purposes, the world before 9/11. Yet enacting and dramatising the documentary for 2026, the creator Antonio Campos has pulled out a drawer stuck underneath all the media attention the Peterson case received; a drawer containing the enduring search for an evasive truth behind a man and what he was capable of. The obfuscation and lies come out of the woodwork as the trial proceeds. But the truth about the death remains shrouded in secrecy.

Michael Peterson, a successful novelist, married Kathleen, a successful telecom executive and they have a blended family of five children. Two sons from his first wife, two adopted daughters and Kathleen's daughter from her previous marriage. On a night in December 2001, Michael placed a call to 911 to help his wife who fell down the stairs in their home. She has lost consciousness, he says, hysterically, while his wife lies lifeless in a pool of blood around her. Yet he says she is still breathing. He remains the sole witness to her death and maintained he did not kill his wife to date.

The husband and wife

Colin Firth is a surprising choice for this role. He bears no physical resemblance to Michael. However, from the get go he brings back the recollection of the original documentary. Michael is a performative, egotistical man, smug in his conviction that he can charm the socks of anyone. The irony is that as soon as you are introduced to him in the documentary, you hold him circumspect for his manner of conversation and the very fact that he is allowing himself and his family to be filmed during his trial. He displays magnanimity and emotion - lots of it - at all the right moments.

Throughout the five-month long trial, his children dote on him.. What more evidence of a good man does one need?

Firth, who will forever remain the perfect Mr Darcy, has probably not played such a complex character in the past - certainly not a real-life murder suspect. And the show gives him time to marinate in it across eight episodes. As Michael, he will evoke in you reactions that the actor is not associated with, he is darkly dubious whereas we are familiar with his humble charm. It is only the softness around his eyes that Firth could not get rid of which are a total contrast to Michael's beady eyes.

The role of Kathleen has offered Toni Colette much more elasticity than any of her recent roles, especially those seen in Netflix productions. Off the bat, her characterisation hints at 'a bit too good to true' feeling, so you may wait for her mask to fall. But she is shown to be a working mother and supportive wife who glues the family together as honestly as she can in her situation. She is Michael's provider. He awaits his books getting picked up for TV or a film deal. She makes sure all the children are home for the holidays. Michael can throw a tantrum and antagonise them no matter what the season. For Thanksgiving right before her death, Kathleen finds out that Michael told off his older daughter about her bad



grades and refused to send her a ticket to visit Durham. That is just how severe Michael is shown to be toward his children. When she finds out, Kathleen promises to send money for the ticket despite being stretched thin. Just one instance of how she quietly tries to bring order and togetherness in their unconventional domestic world.

The Petersons' marriage is idolised. But the chink in the armour is always there. In a flashback, in the second half of the show, Kathleen is telling someone about her fiancé Michael, who is too much and wonderful both at the same time. It is exciting to her then and after marriage it is something to work around. Colette is flawlessly comfortable in her skin as a woman who is holding up her business and home running successfully without any real support. Her meltdown when her company is losing stocks is the only window where she is shown to lose composure. Yet the feeling of her being a saint is not held over your head. She is just doing the best she can and has the wherewithal to do it better than some people.

Michael is a charismatic personality who is tremendously lucky to have kind and forgiving people around him who consistently overlook his flaws. He has made for himself a larger than life persona as an extremely clever man and talented writer, so somehow all who exist in his ken put him on a pedestal no matter how domineering his ways. They allow him his manipulations and maneuvers. Whether it be his sons, always seeking his approval, his daughters who show unconditional love for him and indeed all family. Or Kathleen... who seems to treat their marriage as an equal partnership all the while pulling all the weight in the union for all practical purposes. There is another person who comes later in Michael's life, who will make you feel better about ignoring the red flags in your exes. But more on her later.

The lawyers

As luck and fate would have it, Michael has a devoted brother, Bill, who is a lawyer and who helps him hire a noted attorney David Rudolf, played dexterously by Michael Stuhlborg, probably the most sympathetic and decent lawyer you will see on television. There is goodness oozing out of both Bill and David and one wonders how they take on legal battles as wholesome and untainted as they seem. They are both antithetical to the sharks that many TV shows are based around for courtroom drama. The show makes the district attorney and his assistant a foil to Michael's legal team, when the state prosecutor begins a smear campaign against him. By digging only a little into his private life, Michael's affairs with men surface and a new question hangs heavy in the air: did Kathleen know her husband was bisexual?

Bill and David are steadfast in their belief of Michael's innocence which is a miracle in itself. It is not just one curveball that is thrown their way. Michael's past is uncannily patterned, truths he has hidden from the light which throw a damning shadow on his trial to prove innocence. One can expect blind trust from his brother but David too acts like he has sworn fealty to him to fight to death. He is unshakeable in his belief overall despite an abundance of circumstantial evidence that does not add up to save his client.

The children

Out of all the children, Sophie Turner shines as Margaret, the elder daughter. Turner has offered the role a tempered pathos and relatability as a daughter who loves her dad and will do anything to prove his innocence. Her

readiness to help is annoying after a while but she depicts what daughters in our part of the World especially are conditioned to do and that is to sacrifice to keep the peace. Her close relationship with her younger sister Margie is tested by the unpacking they have to do as a family of their past, their childhood and their dynamic with their dad. He and his first wife were named the guardians of Margaret and Margie and adopted them after the girls' biological mother died.

Every other sibling's backstory is explored in great detail in order to paint a context for whether they would believe Michael is a killer or their protective dad. Every relationship with his children has a strain of sorts and he is not a parent who makes them all feel loved equally. Whenever he wants, Michael chooses a favourite kid to "rely" on more than the others.

His sons Todd and Clay seem to have more of a direct access to him, and have more screen time. But I found the glimpse into Margaret and Margie's story more touching than the rest. Margaret cannot help but be the big sister who plays her part for the good of her family while younger and wearing her heart on her sleeve, Margie questions things that feel off and trusts her gut more.

The drama

The trap in the attempt to place all characters in the story in their individual context is tedium. It inevitably surfaces halfway through the limited drama series. This Netflix format, stretched to maintain the binge-watching, does not seem to be debated in the editorial offices. The Staircase does not avoid this trap either. Those with attention spans even shorter than mine might miss out on the climax of the show because they have had enough of following around a family being a family. Having said that, the suspect is a page-turner himself, so the viewers will be compelled to see 'what next' as the trial keeps peeling back the layers of his secret life. And there are lacunae in both defence and protection that are still being debated today.

The filmmakers

Here is the ultimate reach of the dramatisation of the documentary based on a true crime - a play within a play. The French documentary filmmakers are part of the characters in the story. Not only has the drama brought to the foreground the individual struggles of each family member but it also offers a long focus on how inextricably absorbed were the filmmakers with the subject of their documentary. On the whole their sentiments reiterate that perception can hardly be objective, as two out of three producers of the documentary are completely swayed by the humanness of Michael's case, the love he professes for his wife and his unshakeable stance that he will never admit he is guilty of committing her murder because he never would and never did. That leaves the third filmmaker who is quintessentially French in his outspokenness about all the evidence that points otherwise. Michael is a cheat and a liar; he lives off his wife's money. He is hungry for fame; he never tires of watching himself on TV or listening to praises about his novels. He is not above board with his wife or even his fans for he never speaks the whole truth. When the whole picture accidentally comes out, he defends himself using the general excuse of life as it transpires and the incongruity of it all. You can't pin him down.

The other two biased towards the suspect and feeling him to be wrongfully indicted are a case study of extreme naivete. Or you can call it the pureness of believing the best about people. Jean-Xavier and Sophie (Juliet Binoche) colour their sketch of Michael by acknowledging his words and outward emotion, so enhanced does their subject become in their imagination that they are in love with him, each in their own way. It is remarkable to discover that despite a conviction of murder for which he is incarcerated for 16 years, Sophie secretly writes letters to him in jail much like Ted Bundy's wife wrote him expressing her sympathy while he was on trial for multiple murders. Bundy was an American serial killer who raped and murdered at least 30 women.

The Staircase takes its time to lay out the biases of every player in the trial around the suspect. The kaleidoscope of emotions and affiliations that help and protect one man become a web of lies and preconceived notions. At the heart of the web is one man who ensnares all these people into being good and loving towards him, no matter how selfish or cruel he is.

Apples vs. Oranges: Which Fruit Is Better for Your Blood Sugar?

Apples and oranges are both easy and delicious ways to eat more fruit, but if you're managing your blood glucose, which one should you choose? The natural sugars in both fruits provide energy and increase blood sugar, but the effects may be different depending on which one you choose and how you eat it.

How all foods, including apples and oranges, affect your blood sugar comes down to the presence and amount of specific nutrients, including carbohydrates, protein and fat. "Carbohydrates have the most immediate impact on blood glucose levels, while protein and fat help slow digestion and reduce how quickly sugar enters the bloodstream," says Maggie Bell, M.S., RN, RDN.

How Apples Affect Blood Sugar

One medium apple (182 grams) provides 25 grams of carbohydrates, including 4.5 grams of fiber and 19 grams of natural sugars, with under half a gram of both protein and fat. Because the nutrient content of an apple is primarily made up of carbohydrates, you can expect it to increase your blood sugar, providing your body with energy. However, the presence of additional nutrients and compounds influences how that happens. "Apples contain fiber (especially in the skin), which helps slow how quickly sugar enters the bloodstream, so they tend to have a more steady impact on blood sugar," says Talia Follador, RDN, LDN.¹

You can expect a sharper spike in blood glucose if you peel your apple before eating it. Apples' skins are mostly made of soluble fiber, which helps delay the digestion and absorption of sugars, and they contain alpha-glucosidase-inhibiting enzymes, further supporting a gradual effect of carbohydrates on your blood glucose.

But because we rarely eat foods in isolation, pay close attention to what you're eating with your apple. "To support better blood sugar balance, it can be helpful to pair an apple with a source of protein and healthy fat, such as nuts or nut butter, which further slows digestion and helps prevent rapid spikes," Bell shares.

How Oranges Affect Blood Sugar

One large orange (184 grams) contains 21 grams of carbohydrates, 4.5 grams of fiber, 109% Daily Value for vitamin C and 14% DV for folate. Similar to the apple, the 17 grams of natural sugars in an orange will increase your blood glucose, but the fiber slows down the rate of digestion.⁴ Plus, the high vitamin content adds serious nutritional value. "Oranges are also a great source of fiber and tend to have a relatively gentle effect on blood sugar when eaten whole," says Follador, adding that, "similar to apples, pairing them with protein or fat can help keep things more balanced."

While the high polyphenol and vitamin C content of oranges doesn't significantly affect their immediate effect on blood glucose, it may improve glucose metabolism over time. Researchers have found that long-term citrus consumption is associated with improvements in fasting blood glucose and markers of insulin resistance. These long-term benefits could be related to changes in the gut microbiome and influences on inflammation and oxidative stress.⁵

And while 100% orange juice is a good source of beneficial bioactive compounds, vitamins and minerals, its higher sugar concentration and lack of fiber will likely result in a much sharper blood glucose spike unless paired with a balanced, high-protein meal or snack.

Which Is Better for Your Blood Sugar?

The good news is that you don't have to choose between the two fruits when eating a blood sugar-friendly diet. "Both apples and oranges can support healthy blood sugar levels when eaten in their whole form, as they each contain fiber that helps slow the absorption of sugar into the bloodstream," says Bell.

When comparing apples and oranges gram for gram, they have the same amount of fiber

and very similar carbohydrate and sugar content. Both are also rich in various vitamins, minerals and bioactive plant compounds that support overall blood sugar metabolism. "The bigger factor is how you're eating them, not which one you choose," Follador emphasizes. Pairing whole fruit with protein and healthy fats, like yogurt and peanut butter, for a balanced meal or snack will best support steady blood sugar levels and prevent rapid spikes.

Other Tips for Better Blood Sugar

Add movement after meals: "Light activity after eating (like a short walk or a few air squats) significantly improves blood-sugar responses," says Follador. While longer workouts may provide additional health benefits, research shows that even a 10-minute short walk after eating can significantly reduce peak post-meal glucose levels.⁶

Make time to relax: A healthy body can handle short bouts of stress, but chronic stress can cause changes that significantly increase the risk of insulin resistance and diabetes. Practicing restorative activities like deep breathing, prioritizing sleep, yoga, meditation and mental health counseling can help manage stress. These interventions can reduce the presence of damaging stress hormones in the body caused by chronic stress.⁷

Be mindful of your portion sizes: When you're managing blood sugar, no food is ever off-limits, but you do need to be mindful of your portion sizes. Even foods like ice cream, cakes and cookies can be eaten without blood sugar spikes, as long as they're enjoyed in smaller portions and paired with protein, fiber and fats.

Our Expert Take

Apples and oranges are both blood sugar-friendly fruits, combining natural sugars with fiber to support energy and provide valuable nutrients. One is not necessarily better than the other, but you'll want to enjoy both in their whole forms to take advantage of the fiber found in the skins and pulp, and pair them with a meal or snack rich in protein and healthy fats for optimal blood sugar regulation.



GREEN REVOLUTION BEGINS AT PAGH

Planting Hope: Community Garden Houston Group Event Inspires Eco-Friendly Living and Community Harmony

A vibrant gathering by the Community Garden Houston Group at PAGH brought together Pakistani-American families, experts, and community leaders to promote sustainable backyard gardening and environmental awareness. Featuring insightful talks, community unity, and free plant distribution, the event inspired attendees to embrace healthier, eco-friendly lifestyles while strengthening bonds within the community.



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