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Proposed Hormuz passage deal not feasible for shipping industry, sources say

A proposed deal between Iran and Oman that would give Tehran control over ships entering the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz is not easily workable due to US sanctions and restrictive insurance clauses on any payments, four industry sources said.

Until US-Israeli airstrikes at the end of February unleashed war

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World Food Warehouse Celebrates Grand Reopening Under New Management



Houston, Texas: Hundreds of shoppers turned out for the grand reopening of World Food Warehouse on Friday evening, marking a new chapter for one of Houston's long-

time international grocery destinations under the leadership of Hisham Qaddura.

The store, located at 14625 Beechnut St., Houston, TX 77083,

welcomed customers with storewide promotions, fresh products, prize giveaways, and a renewed commitment to serving Houston's

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CDF Munir discusses enhancement of defence, security cooperation with Somalia: ISPR

Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir discussed the enhancement of bilateral defence and security cooperation with Somalia in a meeting with the country's defence minister, the military's media wing said.

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U.S. Makes Visa Bond Permanent: What It Means for Pakistani Families and Visitors

WASHINGTON — The United States has officially made its visa bond program permanent, granting

Continued on page 12

Harris County launches 'Priority Pass' in an effort to streamline vehicle registration

The Harris County Tax

Continued on page 12

Senate minority leader criticizes Trump's proposed 'Golden Fleet' battleships as costly 'vanity' project

US Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer on Thursday criticised President Donald Trump's proposed new class of battleships, accusing him of

Continued on page 12

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Amnesty International: True Scale of Indian Arms Flow to Israel Vastly Undercounted, Implicating Indian State Directly

WASHINGTON — The true scale of Indian weapons, ammunition, and components flowing into Israel's defence supply chain is almost certainly far greater than the thousands of shipments documented in its recent

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The Same Old Lock on History's Door: Provinces, Power, and the Question of Intent

By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

There are moments in the life of a nation when a single voice, cutting through the practiced silence of its assemblies, manages to compress the question of centuries into a single sentence. "Look at the intent" — this is not a slogan. It is a whip, and it falls on the hand of every man who, in the name of remaking power, goes back to pick at the country's oldest wounds. Because Pakistan's story, looked at closely, is not one catastrophe. It is a sequence, a chain in which every generation has asked the same question and received, every time, the same answer: the intent was rotten from the start.

A voice rises, from some corner of the halls of power: "I do not accept the premise that things went wrong. I only wish that whatever happened in these seventy years had happened in good faith." This is not a simple sentence. It is an indictment, a testimony that stands in the dock of history and speaks for itself. When Ayub Khan turned the machinery of local government into the ladder of his own political survival, a chance at reform was lost, and lost deliberately. When General Zia-ul-Haq disfigured the constitution, when he postponed the elections of 1979 for the sole purpose of burying the Pakistan Peoples Party, and carved out, through the non-party elections of 1985, a new political tribe built entirely in his own image — that was not an election. That was a declaration of intent. Musharraf came later and did what men in uniform do when they inherit an old wine: he poured Ayub's vintage into a new bottle. It happened to serve the public somewhat better than what came before, which is exactly why the politicians experienced it as poison, and reversed it the moment he was gone. And years after that, under General Bajwa, the same generation of 1985 was hunted down, one by one, chosen and eliminated, the Peoples Party wrapped into the same net — as if history kept sharpening its own knife only to cut itself.

The question was never whether new provinces should exist. The question is where this desire came from. Not from parliament. Not from any major political party. Not from any door that opens onto the will of the people. From which threshold, then, did this voice rise? It is said that the wish came from the establishment, though the establishment itself has never admitted as much — and whatever is spoken from behind a curtain becomes, by that very fact, the first proof of a corrupted intent. And here is the deeper irony: the one thing the whole nation actually agrees on — that local government deserves real power, that pushing authority down to the lowest rung is a foundational duty — is precisely the consensus being hijacked, turned instead toward the creation of new provinces and the machinery of a referendum. That is not reform. That is a con dressed in the language of reform. The day political parties

agree on a basic question, and that same question is nonetheless twisted into a fresh controversy, you may be sure the real target lies somewhere else entirely.

History forgives no one, but it keeps a ledger on everyone — a ledger of name, of family, of character. And that ledger is not reserved for men in uniform. It waits, too, for the politicians who once puffed out their chests against that same uniform and today sit as its dependents. Let it be remembered: this hybrid system, which everyone now weeps over, was not born in a vacuum. It was born under Imran Khan, out of the dream of a "Naya Pakistan," mid-wifed by the very people who today present themselves as its harshest critics. And the parties that yesterday stood in open protest against this hybrid order have today become the establishment's kept woman — no honor left, no freedom left, only a bond stitched together by interest and, to this day, sustained by interest alone. And the spoiled child that these same political orphans have adopted, amendment after amendment, has a story that no line describes better than the old ghazal: the peerless spoiled child cries for the moon to play with. This child is no longer satisfied with anything less than the moon. He has already collected, from constitutional immunity onward, every toy his appetite ever demanded — and it looks very much as though tomorrow this same spoiled child may ask for the moon of the presidency itself. And the hands that made him constitutionally untouchable have become, by their own doing, his helpless witnesses.

America once had a phrase it used on Pakistan, after handing over its dollars like alms: do more. Today the same tongue, the same tone, the same command, is being issued by the establishment to the political parties it has itself adopted. The only difference is that once this order arrived from an outside power; today it arrives from the halls of an inner one — and the people carrying it out are the very people who once called themselves the standard-bearers of democracy and sovereignty. Democracy, once a destination, has been reduced to a word — a shell inside which the decisions are made elsewhere and only the announcement is made in the chambers. And in this decline, the politicians' own share is not small. The plunder of both major parties continues exactly where this story began — the same old rotation of power, the same old carving-up of posts and resources, the same old fraud carried out in the people's name. President Zardari, whose political skill needs no introduction, maneuvered in the final hours of the Twenty-Seventh Amendment to secure for himself the very lifetime immunity that had originally been proposed for the Chief of Defence Forces alone — a skill that may earn admiration, but never trust.



By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

And it is exactly here that cleverness failed to disguise itself as wisdom. Politicians enjoying the comforts of office, chasing short-term advantage and consumed by nothing more than their hatred of Imran Khan, gambled away the long-term gain that a living, sovereign democracy might have given them. Today they are themselves a spent horse — its reins in another's hand, its pace dictated by another's signal, alive only on the illusion that it is still running the race. In such a moment, the real question is not whether new provinces will be carved out. The real question is this: the same hands drawing the new map of the provinces are the hands that built the constitutional fortress inside which they themselves, and the child they adopted, now find shelter. The office of Chief of Defence Forces, born of this same amendment, wears a shroud of lifetime immunity; behind it stands a wall of a two-thirds majority required merely to remove him — while a sitting, elected prime minister can be sent home by a simple majority. Rank, uniform, privilege: all of it for life, meaning that as long as breath continues, so does the uniform, even should the man live past a hundred.

And when the question arises — is this the very staircase up which the uniform will once again climb to the presidency — the constitution falls silent. It says neither yes nor no. History is witness enough: both Ayub Khan and Musharraf wore the uniform into that office, and today the presidency itself, weighed on the scale of actual power, already sits lighter than the office of Chief of Defence Forces. And the court that was, in theory, supposed to keep watch over this entire architecture was itself born from the womb of this same amendment. The first chief justice and judges of the new Federal Constitutional Court are appointed by the president, on the advice of the prime minister, with no objective criteria governing the choice. Two senior judges resigned in protest; one called it a grave assault on the constitution, one that places the judiciary under the executive's thumb. That same court, which will tomorrow be asked to rule on the legality of new

provinces or a referendum, is itself a product of the very system it claims to be watching.

And it is here that the debate over new provinces reveals its true face, even as it speaks, on the surface, the language of empowerment and local government. Legal scholars point out that Article 239 of the constitution is unambiguous: a new province requires, first, a two-thirds majority in the relevant provincial assembly, and then a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament — and no referendum, whatever Article 48(6) might be made to say, can substitute for that requirement. But when that road proves too difficult, legal experts warn, a new proposal is likely to be brought to the field: amend Article 1 itself, strip out the requirement of provincial assembly consent, and hand the power to create new provinces to the federal parliament alone. Senate seats are distributed equally among provinces regardless of population. If new provinces are brought into being weak, and loyal to the establishment, the arithmetic required for a two-thirds majority will certainly grow — but so, in the same proportion, will the establishment's own votes. The result is plain: what is difficult to remove today will become nearly impossible to remove tomorrow. Provinces, offered in the name of empowerment, may in fact be another lock fastened on the last door of accountability.

And standing behind all of this are politicians who have a great deal to lose and very little left to give the people. The political strongholds they spent decades building — one party's in Punjab, another's in Sindh — could well be weakened or shattered by the creation of new provinces. This is precisely why these same politicians, so tireless in defending their own power and interests, have in fact pawned their political sovereignty to the very establishment from which they keep loudly proclaiming their desire for liberation. A handful of thoughtful voices, men like Raza Rabbani, have argued consistently that the country's troubles are not rooted in the current structure of four provinces but in the constitution's repeated suspension, the weakness of democratic institutions, and the relentless interference in the political system. But such voices, in the corridors of power, have always proven to be a cry in the wilderness.

History's greatest tragedy is not that it repeats itself. It is that in every era we ask the same question as though it had never been asked before. From the field marshal of the past to the field marshal of the present, every era has tried, in the name of reform, stability, and the national interest, to bend the constitution to its own need — and in nearly every era, politicians, sometimes out of compulsion and sometimes out of pure self-interest, have been willing participants in that bending. The only difference is that once this violence

was done to the constitution through the ordinance of martial law, and today the very same thing is accomplished through a vote in parliament, through constitutional amendment, behind the sacred curtain-language of democracy. The tragedy is not only that the struggle over power was never resolved. It is also that the major parties who came to power on the people's votes repeatedly failed to convert that trust into honesty, into transparency, into better governance. Corruption, nepotism, mismanagement, and self-interest eroded the people's confidence — and it was precisely these weaknesses that, era after era, became the pretext for the state's institutions to intervene.

And alongside this sits another bitter truth: as a nation, we have gone on fracturing. Sometimes in the name of sect, sometimes of ethnicity and language, sometimes of political party, and then further into factions within those same parties. Here a red cap, there a green one, here white or brown, here a turban, here a clan, here a caste, here a regional identity — these have become, more than our shared nationhood, our real and cherished identities. We became, less and less, Pakistanis, and more and more, guardians of our own separate selves. Nations that cannot unite around a common national interest remain forever divided against themselves, and it is exactly such nations upon whom the same style of governance keeps imposing itself, in one form or another, for seven decades running. The faces change. The slogans change. The parties change. But the architecture of power, and the deprivations of the people, remain exactly where they were.

The real question was never the new provinces. The real question is the nature of governance, the character of politics, and the maturity of a nation's conscience. Until the political leadership restores its moral credibility, its honesty, and the public's trust, and until the people themselves rise above their linguistic, ethnic, sectarian, and partisan divisions and learn to see themselves simply as Pakistanis, the characters on stage will keep changing while the story stays exactly the same. Nations are not transformed by constitutional amendments or redrawn administrative maps alone. They are transformed on the day that power is understood not as private property but as a trust held for the people, the day politics becomes another word for service, and the day citizens rise above their separate identities to become, finally, one nation. Perhaps the generations still to come will not be condemned, as we have been, to ask the same question over and over — but will instead build a system in which the constitution is no longer the wish of the powerful, but the living symbol of a people's collective covenant. On that day, perhaps, history will for the first time write a new chapter, instead of merely repeating the old one.

More Provinces Can Build a Stronger Pakistan

SYED FEROZ AHMED

Houston, Texas

As Pakistan approaches the 80th anniversary of its independence, it is time to reflect honestly on what we have achieved, what we have lost, and what reforms are needed for the future. The proposal to create more provinces or administrative units should not be turned into a political issue. Instead, it should be evaluated objectively, based on facts, experience, and the lessons of the past eight decades. Every political party should approach this debate with a positive and constructive mindset, placing Pakistan's national interest above political differences. Criticism, emotional reactions, and political point scoring will not lead to the right decisions. Only honest dialogue, evidence based thinking, and national consensus can help build a stronger, more prosperous, and better governed Pakistan.

The recent statement by Pakistan's Interior Minister, Mohsin Naqvi, supporting the creation of more provinces or administrative units has reopened an important national debate. Rather than treating this as a political issue, we should examine it with an open mind and ask one simple question. Can more provinces or administrative units help Pakistan become better governed, more developed, and more united?

The answer depends on how such reforms are designed and implemented. If they are pursued through a transparent, constitutional, and consultative process based on national interest rather than political gain, they can become an important step towards improving governance and strengthening Pakistan's federation.

Pakistan has changed significantly since 1947. Its population has grown from approximately 32 million to more than 240 million people, yet the number of provinces has remained virtually unchanged. Large populations and vast geographical areas have made governance increasingly difficult. Many remote regions continue to struggle with inadequate access to quality education, healthcare,

clean drinking water, modern infrastructure, employment opportunities, and efficient public services. These realities raise an important question, can the existing administrative structure adequately meet the needs of a rapidly growing nation?

Smaller provinces or administrative units can bring government closer to the people. When decision makers are closer to local communities, they are better able to understand local challenges and respond more quickly. Citizens also find it easier to access government offices, public services, and their elected representatives. This strengthens accountability, improves public confidence, and creates a more responsive and efficient system of governance.

Many parts of Pakistan have long complained of being neglected in terms of development. Creating new provinces can help ensure a fairer distribution of resources and promote more balanced regional development. Every region should have the opportunity to grow according to its own needs and potential. When people feel included in the country's progress, national unity is strengthened.

One of the strongest arguments for creating more provinces is that some of Pakistan's existing provinces have become too large to govern effectively. Punjab has an enormous population, Balochistan covers a vast geographical area, while Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also contain regions with distinct administrative, economic, and developmental needs. Managing such diverse and extensive areas from a single provincial capital often results in delays in decision making and uneven distribution of resources. Creating additional provinces or administrative units could bring government closer to the people, improve public service delivery, strengthen law and order, and ensure that development reaches areas that have remained neglected for decades.

Some critics argue that creating more provinces would weaken Pakistan. However, this overlooks the lessons of our own history. Since independence, Pakistan has faced administrative

challenges arising from rapid population growth, regional inequalities, and the concentration of decision-making authority. Rather than continuously modernising our administrative structure to meet changing realities, we have largely continued with the same provincial framework despite profound demographic and economic changes. The real threat to Pakistan's unity is not administrative reform; it is inequality, poor governance, and the perception among many communities that they have been left behind.

Several countries, including India and Indonesia, have reorganised their administrative structures over time to improve governance and respond to demographic and regional needs. While every country's historical, political, and constitutional circumstances are different, these experiences demonstrate that administrative restructuring can be a normal part of institutional development and should not automatically be viewed as a threat to national unity.

At the same time, creating more provinces is not a magic solution. New administrative units alone cannot eliminate corruption, improve governance, or solve economic problems. Success depends on strong institutions, transparent administration, empowered local governments, an independent judiciary, merit based appointments, and strict financial accountability. Administrative reform and institutional reform must therefore go hand in hand.

Equally important, the creation of new provinces should never be based on ethnic or narrow political considerations. It should be guided by objective criteria such as population, geographical size, administrative efficiency, economic viability, and the welfare of the people. Because the creation of new provinces requires constitutional amendments and broad political agreement, any reform must be pursued transparently, democratically, and with meaningful public consultation. The ultimate objective should be to strengthen Pakistan's federation rather than create new divisions.

Pakistan today faces many serious challenges, including economic difficulties, unemployment, security concerns, climate-related risks, and uneven regional development. These challenges require bold thinking and practical reforms. We should not reject new ideas simply because they are politically sensitive. Every proposal that has the potential to improve governance and bring relief to the people deserves serious, objective, and honest consideration.

After nearly eight decades of independence, Pakistan must ask itself, should we continue with a system that is increasingly struggling to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population, or should we adopt reforms that prepare the country for the future? Creating more provinces and administrative units is not about dividing Pakistan. It is about bringing government closer to its people, ensuring equal opportunities for every region, and building a stronger and more effective federation.

Pakistan has reached a stage where meaningful reforms can no longer be delayed. The country's future depends on strengthening institutions, upholding the Constitution and the rule of law, ensuring transparency, and making governance more efficient and people-centred. Administrative reforms should be viewed as a national investment rather than a political concession.

The real question is not whether Pakistan should preserve its current administrative structure indefinitely, but whether that structure continues to serve the needs of a nation of more than 240 million people. If carefully planned and implemented through constitutional and democratic means, administrative reform can strengthen governance, deepen national integration, promote balanced regional development, and help build a more prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and united Pakistan. History shows that nations progress not by preserving outdated administrative arrangements, but by adapting to changing realities while keeping the welfare of their people at the centre of public policy.

The growth-jobs paradox

Ishrat Husain

THE 2024 upheaval that toppled Sheikh Hasina's government in Bangladesh, alongside the youth-led protests over joblessness in India, point to a shared crisis across South Asia: strong economic growth has not translated into enough good jobs for a workforce that is more educated than ever before. As access to schooling and universities has expanded, so have people's employment expectations — expectations that a narrow job market has failed to meet, sparking widespread anger. In India, nearly 40 per cent of graduates under 25 can't find work; youth joblessness is near 29pc. Roughly four in five Indian workers depend on informal, insecure employment.

Economic theory holds that growth happens as workers shift from low-output farming to more productive factory and service jobs, and that this shift should expand labour demand and shrink joblessness. But India, Bangladesh and Pakistan complicate that story. India and Bangladesh have sustained 6-7pc annual growth for over three decades; Pakistan has managed only 3-4pc. Yet, none of the three has generated sufficient formal, productive work. Growth rate alone doesn't explain the shortfall.

Data from the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies show Indian employment expanding just 1.6pc a year from 2000 to 2012, then flat-lining from

2012 to 2019 even as GDP kept climbing. The type of growth a country experiences, not merely its speed, appears to shape how many jobs it creates. India's economic transformation makes the point vividly. Agriculture accounted for 35pc of GDP in 1990, absorbing 63pc of the workforce; by 2025, its GDP share had dropped to 16pc, yet it still employed about 42pc of workers. Agricultural productivity relative to the rest of the economy fell from 0.54 to 0.40 over this period, a sign of chronic underemployment and surplus labour stuck on the farm. Meanwhile, economy-wide productivity nearly quadrupled, ie, rising incomes came mostly from efficiency gains in industry and modern services, not new job creation. Workers haven't left agriculture at the rate that genuine structural change requires. The outcome is reflected in living standards: CLSA data put average urban household income at around \$20,000, and just \$3,600 in rural areas.

Part of the problem is that new, productivity-boosting technologies tend to displace low-skilled workers faster than emerging industries can absorb them. For instance, India's IT sector has become a world-class tech hub, pulling in over \$13 billion in venture capital each year, spawning countless start-ups and unicorns, and generating some \$300bn in annual revenue. Yet, it employs only around six million people, barely 1pc of the national workforce.

The roughly 2,000 global capability

centres set up by MNCs add only about 2m jobs. Against this, India's labour force grows by some 12m young people annually, including about 1m engineering graduates, only half of whom are considered employable in their field. Over the past decade, the IT sector has added only about 1m jobs. India may handle over 30pc of global outsourced business-process work, but this tech-driven growth has been skill-intensive, not job-intensive.

As Indian industry and services keep climbing the value chain, the need for unskilled and semi-skilled labour is set to shrink further, a trend that AI, robotics, and automation may speed up, leaving policymakers with a dilemma: how to keep India competitive in technology while generating enough jobs for millions of young people without advanced skills. As services focus on finance, IT, e-commerce, and other knowledge-heavy fields, older labour-intensive jobs in retail and community and personal services contract.

Agriculture, the fallback employer for surplus labour, offers no real cure. Modernising it would raise productivity and rural incomes, but reform efforts run into political opposition — the Modi government's three farm laws sparked mass protests and had to be repealed. Even so, nearly 480m people rely on farming, a large share of them underemployed. Here lies the central paradox: the more agriculture modernises and mechanises, the fewer workers it will

need, eroding its role as a buffer for surplus labour. Seasonal migration from poorer states like Bihar and UP to richer farming regions may also taper off as mechanisation reduces demand for hired labour. Briefly, agriculture can't continue absorbing new job-seekers indefinitely. Beyond the shifting nature of growth and its shrinking capacity to generate jobs, other structural issues compound youth unemployment: low participation by women in the workforce, premature decline of manufacturing, growing inequality, and above all, a widening gap between what education delivers and what employers need.

India has expanded higher education dramatically: gross tertiary enrolment is approaching 28pc, with some 45m students in colleges and universities. Yet this growth hasn't produced better job outcomes; millions of young people remain out of education, work, and training. From 2004 to 2023, Indian universities turned out around 5m graduates a year; only 2.8m or so found jobs annually. The mismatch between supply and demand is severe. Between 2014 and 2022, over 220m applications competed for just 72,000 central government positions.

The quality gap is worse than the quantity gap. McKinsey research found only about a quarter of Indian graduates have globally competitive skills, with another fifth meeting domestic hiring standards, leaving more than half short of what employers want. Outmoded syl-

labi, rote memorisation and scant hands-on training have left graduates credentialled but not always employable. Educated unemployment stems from higher education's disconnect with real economic needs. Students, families and institutions are fixated on degrees and scores rather than analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. Universities churn out graduates in fields with little market demand; technical and vocational roles go unfilled.

Government funding patterns deepen these imbalances. Elite schools like IITs and IIMs receive outsized public investment due to their prestige, while the overall cost of higher education keeps rising, forcing families into major financial sacrifice, often for degrees that don't pay off, as graduates face long jobless stretches or settle for work below their qualification level.

The lesson from South Asia is that rapid GDP growth by itself cannot ensure enough jobs or social stability. It needs to be more labour-absorbing, manufacturing needs new momentum, agriculture needs to enable rather than obstruct structural change, and education must build skills the modern economy actually demands. Otherwise, the gap between growth and employment will keep breeding frustration, endangering economic progress and political stability in the region.

The writer is the author of Development Pathways: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh 1947-2022.

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Perilous peaks

THE deaths of 10 climbers in an avalanche on Broad Peak is a sad reminder of the perils that many mountaineers face in their quest to scale the tallest peaks. Among the latest victims was Nepal's Nirmal Purja, the first person to summit the world's 14 8,000m peaks and the Seven Summits — the highest mountains in each of the seven continents — both with and without supplemental oxygen. Purja's body

was found three days after the avalanche on the 8,051m Broad Peak. In fact, Nepal is mourning the loss of one of the most accomplished generation of mountaineers it has produced. In total, it mourned six deaths in the tragedy, the others being Pur Bahadur Gurung, Kili Pemba Sherpa, Nima Sherpa, Nawang Thendu Sherpa and Gyaljen Sherpa. Pakistani climber Sohail Sakhi was also part of the ill-

fated 10-member expedition. Others included Nathira Al Harthy of Oman, American Mallory Geis and China's Wang Zhong. When the avalanche struck on Thursday, theirs was the only expedition on Broad Peak that had stayed behind after the others had retreated due to heavy snowfall. Pakistan immediately launched a search-and-rescue mission after contact was lost, with army helicopters scouring the area.

But all hopes were dashed on Friday when the bodies of two climbers were discovered. Inclement weather made matters difficult for the rescuers. Three more bodies were found on Saturday, including Purja's.

In recent years, Pakistan has seen an uptick in the number of climbers who dare to scale its challenging peaks. However, the remoteness of the region makes it

difficult to launch rescue missions. The deaths on Broad Peak are a painful reminder of all that these climbers had put on the line to scale the world's tallest peaks. More importantly, they reflect the courage and devotion of these men and women who aspire to reach heights that only a few in the world have attained. That is their way of living out their passion and doing things beyond the ordinary.

Youth's rebellion in India

Modi government was preoccupied dealing with the problems created for the domestic economy by the war in Iran

Shahid Javed Burki

Although in recent years the rate of growth of India's population has slowed down which means that it is ageing, the proportion of older people — those above the age of 25 — has increased. Notwithstanding that, the youth still account for a sizeable proportion of the population. India's young population — 367 million between ages 15 and 29 — is the largest Generation Z cohort in the world. If the youth are restive as they are at this time, it means serious political problem for the country. The youth, not seeing a good economic future for themselves, have taken to the streets of major cities and are protesting. Young adults, especially those who have attended colleges and earned degrees, are frustrated. Nearly 40 per cent are unemployed, according to the State of Working India 2026 report published by the Azim Premji University.

The anger of the protesting students intensified after the July 20 show of force by the police, who were called to the student assembly points by the government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The youth had come out to protest the way entrance examinations were being held. Under the Indian education system, entrance into institutions of higher learning is by passing of entrance examinations take by hundreds of thousands of young people.

While the Modi government

was preoccupied dealing with the problems created for the domestic economy by the war in Iran, it emerged that the questions to a national medical college examination had been leaked and sold to the students who had the resources to buy them. Not passing the entrance examination meant unemployment for those anxious to enter the well-paid workforce. At the forefront of the protest is the Cockroach Janta Party, CJP, a movement that takes its name from an insult made by the chief justice of India who called the young people of India, "cockroaches". The CJP was founded just after the government ordered millions of students to retake the entrance examination. The CJP took up the cause of the agitating youth in India.

Amit Basole, an economist and lead author of the State of Working India report, noted that the young in India have always been disproportionately unemployed. But their number has greatly increased in recent years along with the debt their families have incurred by borrowing to pay for their education. "It's a systematic failure. If the government is not responsible, who is?" asked a 22-year old business graduate protesting in Delhi. Agitation by the unhappy youth had spread to other large cities. The students demanded that Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resign immediately. This he did on July 25 saying that he was deeply pained by the demands

of the youth agitating against the education policies of the administration of which he was a part.

Pradhan is an important member of the coalition that governs India. Before resigning, he was dismissive of the protests. In a social media post, he accused opposition parties of exploiting students to "manufacture disruption", and in a June interview he referred to the student protesters as "the B-team of terrorists". That comment only strengthened the resolve to remove him from the cabinet headed by Modi. According to two journalists writing for The New York Times, "The students' victory could motivate them to push their demands further. Aside from education, the CJP is also asking the government to consider its far more sweeping agenda, including judicial reforms and gender quotes for Parliament." The demand for increasing the presence of women in the legislature would please an important segment of the large Indian population.

This is not the first time that the Modi government has had to confront a popular movement. The first time was when the Sikh farmers marched on New Delhi, the Indian capital, to protest the government's move to allow capital from outside the state of Punjab to buy properties in the state. The farmers feared job losses if capital came from outside the predominantly Sikh state to buy properties

in their area. They feared commercialising the state's economy. The Sikh peasants got politically organised and marched towards the Indian capital. The government, headed even then by Modi, removed the law that would have permitted outside capital to invest in Punjab. A popular movement then succeeded — and has seen another success in July 2026.

And even though students' street protests ended with the resignation of the education minister, the rage against the country's education system is one of the most serious challenges yet to the 12-year leadership of Prime Minister Modi. The trajectory of India's swelling youth population is projected to slow by 2030 which means that the country has short time to take advantage of its demographic dividend. Access to education system remains unequal. There is an exodus from government schools into private institutions which the poor can't afford.

The success of popular movements outside the established political system raises questions about the durability of the structure of politics in the country. Bhartiya Janata Party, the BJP, headed by Modi, a Hindu nationalist, is currently engaged in making India a Hindu country, disregarding the fact that the country has the world's third largest Muslim population, after Indonesia and Pakistan. India's 200 million Muslims are deeply concerned

about the government decision to make them second class citizens.

The BJP is considering changing the name of the country from India to Bharat. India was given that name by the country's British rulers who used the name of the Indus River which was then the longest river in the country they governed. Partitioning India in the states of India and Pakistan left the Indus River in Pakistan. It made sense to drop that name from the country the BJP now governs. However, changing the country's name to Bharat would not solve what the British called their "Musalmán problem". India not only has a large Muslim population, two of its immediate neighbours are majority Muslim countries — Pakistan and Bangladesh. It has poor relations with both. It played an important role in creating the state of Bangladesh in December 1971 by splitting Pakistan's two wings, East and West Pakistan, into two countries, but now it has uneasy relations with Bangladesh. At this time, it is engaged in pushing back the citizens of Bangladesh back to their country. They had smuggled themselves into India in search of jobs that were not available in their country. India is also hosting Sheikh Hasina, the deposed Bangladeshi prime minister, who was given the death sentence by her country's court for permitting the military to fire on protesting students.

Who are Karachi's parks for?

As commercial attractions increase, residents wonder if green spaces are still meant for them

By Nabil Tahir |

By late afternoon, children had begun gathering on a dusty patch of ground inside one of Karachi's public parks. Some chased a football across the uneven surface, while younger children waited beside swings that had seen better days. A short distance away, behind fencing and under bright floodlights, a newly developed padel court stood ready for its evening bookings.

The contrast captures the changing face of Karachi's public parks.

Across the city, spaces once defined largely by lawns, swings, walking paths and open playgrounds are being reshaped through new sports facilities, electronic rides, cafés and other revenue-generating activities. The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) says these changes are part of an effort to revive neglected parks, improve security, attract families and generate funds for their maintenance.

For a city where open public spaces are already scarce, investment in parks is difficult to oppose. New facilities can bring activity back to spaces that had become neglected, unsafe or underused. Yet the transformation has also raised questions among residents, planners and park users about accessibility, consultation and the priorities guiding these developments.

Are commercial facilities helping restore public parks, or are they beginning to occupy the spaces and resources meant for children, walkers and families who cannot afford to pay? And when communities try to restore neglected parks themselves, do city institutions support them or stand in their way?

Visits to public parks across Karachi reveal a city attempting to reinvent its recreational spaces, but also struggling to ensure that improvements are shared equally across the park, and across the population it is meant to serve.

A changing public space

For years, Karachi's public parks were seen as simple neighbourhood spaces where children gathered around swings, families spent evenings on benches, and residents found a rare patch of greenery amid the city's growing concrete landscape. Today, many of those same parks are taking on a different character. Alongside jogging tracks and landscaped lawns, visitors are increasingly finding fenced padel and pickleball courts, electronic rides, cafés and other commercial activities occupying spaces that were once freely accessible to everyone.

The transformation is part of the KMC's wider effort to revive public parks that had long suffered from neglect, encroachment and poor maintenance. According to Director General Parks Junaid Ullah Khan, the city has planted hundreds of thousands of trees, removed boundary walls to improve visibility and security, and introduced public-private partnerships to develop sports facilities that would attract more visitors while generating revenue for park maintenance. Khan said the objective behind introducing new recreational facilities was to encourage families to return to public parks, arguing that neglected spaces would continue to lose visitors unless they evolved with the city's changing recreational needs.

Karachi's public parks are managed by two tiers of local government. KMC oversees the city's 53 major parks—generally those spread over more than two acres—while hundreds of neighbourhood parks fall under the jurisdiction of the respective Town Municipal Corporations (TMC). Although KMC occasionally assists with the restoration of local parks, their day-to-day upkeep remains the responsibility of the TMCs.

On the ground, however, the experience of many park users is more complex.

A resident of Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Ahsan Ghaffar, who regularly takes his children to public parks, said the issue is not the introduction of new sports but the gradual disappearance of the facilities that ordinary families have relied on for decades.

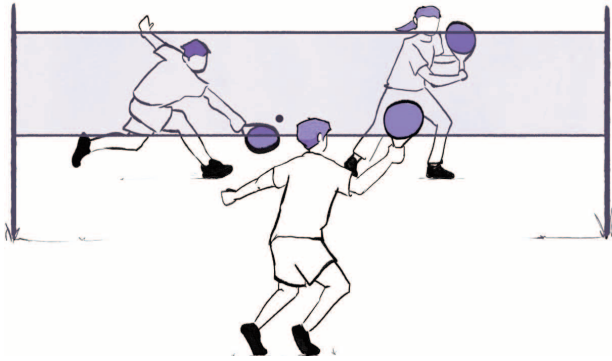
"The areas where children used to play are now being occupied by different commercial activities, whether it's electronic rides given on contract or other businesses," he said. "Public parks and playgrounds are vanishing in Karachi."

He said many neighbourhood parks remain poorly maintained, with broken swings, little greenery and no proper jogging tracks, forcing families to travel to parks inside gated communities where facilities are better maintained. Even there, access is often restricted.

For him, the growing number of paid facilities also raises questions about accessibility.

"If these courts are being built inside public parks, they should be available for all citizens instead of catering to a specific segment," he said, arguing that many families simply cannot afford them. "These are expensive activities, and in some public parks, access around the courts also appears restricted."

KMC maintains that such projects are introduced only after consulting residents, particularly in neighbourhood parks where commercial sports facilities may affect nearby communities. Khan said while it is impossible to satisfy everyone, decisions are taken after meetings with residents and reflect the views of the majority. He argued that these developments have replaced spaces once associated with drug use and other illegal activities with cleaner, safer environments that attract families back to public parks.



Residents living next to some of these parks, however, dispute that process. One resident from PECHS, whose apartment directly overlooks a park where padel courts have been built, said those most affected by the development were never consulted before construction began.

"We're now trying to live with this reality," the resident said. "We have to bear the noise every night, with games continuing until late and cars parked outside our homes. The people living right in front of the park, the ones most affected, were never asked."

Rather than questioning the popularity of newer sports, residents interviewed for this story repeatedly returned to a broader concern: whether the transformation of public parks is taking place in a way that preserves their original purpose as free, inclusive spaces for children, families and the wider community.

When residents become caretakers

A year ago, the first trees went into the ground.

There were no government grants or official restoration projects behind the effort. Instead, around 20 to 25 residents of Landhi began contributing between Rs10,000 and Rs15,000 every month to reclaim a neighbourhood park that many had long written off as abandoned. Together, they planted trees and grass, repaired damaged sections, arranged water for irrigation and slowly transformed the neglected space into a functioning family park.

For Ahsan Kazmi, one of the residents leading the initiative, the motivation was simple. "We weren't trying to create something extraordinary," he said. "We just wanted our children to have a safe place to play. A park is supposed to belong to the community, so instead of waiting for someone else, we decided to take responsibility ourselves."

The change, he says, was gradual but visible.

Children who once had nowhere to spend their evenings now return to the park to play while parents walk along its pathways, walking tracks or sit together in the shade. Families that had stopped visiting because of safety concerns have returned, and the space has once again become part of the neighbourhood's daily life.

"When we started, many people criticised us and doubted whether we could maintain it," Kazmi said. "Today, even those same families bring their children here. Women, children and entire families have started coming back because they now see it as a safe and green environment."

Ironically, the idea of community ownership closely mirrors KMC's own vision for public parks. The DG Parks Khan said the department has established 'Baghban' committees, comprising local residents, to help preserve and maintain parks across the city. He said involving communities creates a sense of ownership, discourages illegal activities and helps protect public spaces in ways that government alone cannot.

The Landhi park restored by Kazmi and other residents falls under the jurisdiction of the relevant TMC rather than KMC. While KMC says it supports community stewardship through initiatives such as its 'Baghban' committees and may assist TMCs with restoration work, routine management of neighbourhood parks remains the responsibility of the local town administration.

Kazmi agrees with the principle but questions how consistently it is applied. While volunteers in Landhi restored the park through community donations and local effort, Kazmi alleges that they have not always received support from the local Parks Directorate. Instead of encouraging residents who were investing their own time and money into improving a public space, he says, they were at times met with indirect resistance.

"If the government wants people to take ownership of parks, then it should support those who are already doing exactly that," he said. "Communities can look after these spaces, but only if the institutions responsible for them become partners instead of obstacles."

The Director Parks, Landhi, could not be reached for comment.

The experience in Landhi reveals a gap between a policy articulated at the city level and its implementation within individual districts. While KMC describes community stewardship as an important part of its strategy for restoring public parks, residents behind this grassroots effort say such participation still depends heavily on whether local officials are willing to support it.

The park on paper and the park on the ground

KMC has a clear vision for what its parks should become. According to DG Parks, Khan, only around 10 to 15 per cent of a park is allocated for commercial activities such as padel and pickleball courts, while 50 per cent reserved for greenery, 20 per cent for children's play areas and rest

for walking and cycling tracks. Revenue generated through public-private partnerships, he said, is reinvested into park maintenance and development.

A visit by The Express Tribune to nine public parks across Karachi—some managed by KMC and others by the city's TMCs—found that this vision is yet to be reflected consistently on the ground.

From Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Park at Boat Basin and Bagh-e-Macca in Clifton to Hill Park, Bagh Ibn-e-Qasim, Kidney Hill, Ahmed Raza Park and Landhi Model Park in Landhi, and public parks in Shah Faisal, conditions varied widely. While some parks showed signs of recent improvement, many continued to struggle with the very issues KMC says it is working to address. Many of the parks found to be in poorer condition were neighbourhood parks managed by the TMC.

Broken swings remained a common sight. In several parks, children's play areas had only been partially restored, while jogging tracks consisted of little more than worn sandy paths. Cycling tracks, which KMC says form part of its broader development strategy, were absent from most of the parks visited. Green spaces, where they existed, were often poorly maintained, with dry patches replacing lawns and vegetation left unattended.

Perhaps the most striking contrast was in the upkeep of commercial facilities compared to the rest of the park.

Padel and pickleball courts were generally well maintained, brightly lit and actively used, while only a few metres away children attempted to play football across uneven and dusty patches where grass had long disappeared. In some parks, overflowing bins and litter scattered across open spaces stood in contrast to the cleaner, better-managed commercial sections.

Urban planner Muhammad Toheed believes these differences reflect a broader planning challenge rather than simply a maintenance issue. "A public park is first and foremost a public commons," he said. "It should remain a place where children can play freely, older people can walk, families can gather and communities can interact. New recreational facilities can certainly be introduced, but they should complement these functions rather than gradually replacing them."

He argues that the debate is not about whether sports such as padel or pickleball belong in public parks. Instead, it is about ensuring that the introduction of commercial activities does not outpace the provision of the facilities that serve everyone, regardless of age or income.

For now, that balance remains a work in progress. KMC's plans envision greener parks, better play areas and improved recreational facilities, but across much of the city, many neighbourhood parks are still waiting for that vision to become reality.

KMC says its plans for Karachi's parks extend beyond the facilities that already exist.

According to DG Parks, Khan, the department is working on developing an urban forest on the former Aladdin Park site, where tens of thousands of trees are planned over the coming years. He also said KMC hopes to introduce more family-oriented attractions, including small zoos, cafés and barbecue areas, while continuing to expand children's play areas, jogging tracks and cycling facilities. The aim, he said, is to encourage more people to use public parks while generating the revenue needed to maintain them.

Whether those plans translate into better neighbourhood parks, however, will ultimately depend not only on future projects but also on how consistently the city's existing commitments are delivered.

The future of public parks

There is little disagreement that Karachi's public parks need investment. Years of neglect, encroachment, weak maintenance and limited public funding have left many neighbourhoods without the green and recreational spaces their residents need. New sports facilities, private investment and community participation can all form part of the solution.

But a public park cannot be judged only by the number of visitors it attracts, the revenue it generates or the new facilities built within it. Its success also lies in whether a child can play without paying, whether an older resident has a safe track to walk on, whether families can find shade and greenery, and whether nearby communities have a say in how their shared spaces are transformed.

KMC's plans suggest an ambitious future: urban forests, restored playgrounds, jogging and cycling tracks, family attractions and better-maintained parks. Community initiatives such as the one in Landhi demonstrate that residents are also willing to contribute their time, money and effort when they feel a park truly belongs to them.

The challenge is bringing those two visions together.

Commercial development does not necessarily have to come at the expense of public access, nor should community ownership replace the responsibility of government. Both can coexist, provided that development remains transparent, proportionate and rooted in the needs of the people who use these spaces every day.

For Karachi, the question is therefore not simply whether its parks should change. They inevitably will. The more important question is whether, after all the new courts, cafés, attractions and partnerships, they will still remain public in more than name.

Democratic candidate Gina Hinojosa calls Texas governor race ‘most important in America’ at Houston rally

inojosa is trying to overcome a significant fundraising disadvantage against incumbent Gov. Greg Abbott, the Republican seeking a record fourth term.

Speaking at a campaign event in Houston on Wednesday evening, Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gina Hinojosa called her race against Republican incumbent Gov. Greg Abbott the "most important" race in America.

Her comments came during a speech in South Houston commemorating the 61st anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was signed into law by then-President Lyndon B. Johnson on Aug. 6 of that year.

Hinojosa, an Austin state representative, reflected on her participation in last year's efforts by Texas Democrats to break quorum in the state legislature to try to deny state Republicans the opportunity to pass a controversial mid-decade redistricting map. Texas Republicans ultimately succeeded in their efforts, passing a new congressional map at the behest of President Donald Trump that could help their party potentially secure five additional seats in the U.S. House during the November election.

On Wednesday, Hinojosa said



Texas Democratic gubernatorial candidate Gina Hinojosa speaks to members of the press in South Houston on Aug. 5, 2026.

she believed Republicans would continue to gerrymander Texas to the point of blocking Democrats from ever regaining a majority in Congress.

"Next year, they will slice and dice Texas, drawing new maps to eliminate five Democrats in Congress," she said. "Two years later, Texas will gain another five seats in

Congress through the census — because we are growing faster than the other states. ... When that happens, if the same Austin Republicans are still in power, they will redraw those seats for themselves."

Hinojosa said that if she's elected as the next governor of Texas, she would veto any further attempts at partisan redistricting.

"When an election is decided before a single ballot is cast, no matter which party you belong to, we all lose. We are no longer America," she said. "But a rigged map still has to make its way to the governor's desk. ... That makes this office the last line standing between one party and permanent control of Congress, and it makes this race the most important in America."

According to several recent polls compiled by the Texas Politics Project, Hinojosa is trailing Abbott by an average of 6 percentage points across six polls in the past two months. However, one of those polls, conducted by Fox News late last month, showed Hinojosa down by 1 point with a margin of error of +/-3%.

Texas hasn't elected a Democrat to the state's highest office in more than 30 years, since Ann Richards won in 1990.

Abbott, seeking a record fourth term as governor, has also outraised Hinojosa by a wide margin, according to the Dallas Morning News, which reported Abbott took in over \$25 million

from March to June while Hinojosa received just over \$6 million.

Hinojosa told reporters after her speech Wednesday that money alone does not win elections. She referred to Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's defeat of incumbent Sen. John Cornyn in this year's GOP Senate primary.

"We see again and again in this state and in this country that all the money in the world can't buy you an election," Hinojosa said. "We saw it in fact in Ken Paxton's race where he was outspent 10 to 1. So Greg Abbott's problem is that what you use campaign money for is to tell people who you are and what you're about. People know who he is and what he's about. They want change and it's why he can't break 50% in any poll."

Abbott has recently taken on the rapid expansion of data centers in Texas, ordering a pause on the construction of new facilities until they are audited by state energy regulators over their water and electricity usage.

Texas doesn't grow by accident. It grows because of builders, leaders, and problem solvers; many of them immigrants who create something that lasts.

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Daniel leads with honest, transparent leadership every single day

“

I'm not a politician. I'm a businessman who built Tolunay Wong Engineers from the ground up. Texas gave me everything, now I'm ready to give back to the place I call home: Fort Bend County.

”



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PPP Houston Welcomes Sindh Government Spokesperson Sumeta Afzal Syed, Showcases Vision for a Progressive Pakistan

During a well-attended reception in Sugar Land, Sumeta Afzal Syed, MPA and Spokesperson for the Sindh Government, highlighted the PPP-led Sindh Government's key development initiatives and shared Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's vision for a progressive, inclusive, and prosperous Pakistan. The evening also featured a cake-cutting ceremony celebrating President Asif Ali Zardari's birthday, bringing together community leaders and PPP supporters from across the Greater Houston area.



World Food Warehouse Reopens with Big Crowds, Discounts, and Future Expansion Plans

A strong community turnout marked the grand reopening of World Food Warehouse, highlighting the store's renewed focus on value, quality, and customer service.



Houston Celebrates the Sweet Taste of Pakistan as Famous Foods Hosts Grand Mango Festival

Hosted by Mr. Wahid Lala (Famous Food) and family with Quaid e Azam Foundation, the celebration featured Pakistan's finest mango varieties—including Chaunsa, Sindhri, and Anwar Ratol—and brought together community leaders, diplomats, and distinguished guests to promote Pakistan's agricultural heritage and strengthen cultural ties in Houston.



Harris County launches 'Priority Pass' in an effort to streamline vehicle registration

Continued from front page

Assessor-Collector's Office launched an online vehicle registration service, called "Priority Pass," earlier this week.

The new online service is designed to speed up vehicle registration for Harris County residents by reducing tax office wait times.

According to the tax assessor-collector's office, Priority Pass allows residents to submit their documents online for automatic verification before going to the tax office in person. After submitting their documents online, residents will receive a barcode. The barcode can then be taken to the tax office, allowing the resident to bypass paperwork that can often result in longer wait times.

The new Priority Pass service is available via MyHarrisCountyTax, which was launched by the office last year as the county's online property tax payment platform. MyHarrisCountyTax also allows residents to set up a property tax prepayment plan.

"Priority Pass is the next step in bringing the full range of tax office service onto one platform," the office said in a news release announcing the new program.

According to the tax assessor-collector's office, when residents create a <https://myharriscountytax.com/> profile, they can receive due date reminders via email, pay taxes for multiple properties at once, apply for recurring payments, see their bill history and save their payment methods, receipts and documents.

U.S. Makes Visa Bond Permanent: What It Means for Pakistani Families and Visitors

Continued from front page

consular officers the authority to require financial guarantees of up to \$20,000 for certain business and tourism (B1/B2) visa applicants.

Announced via a federal notice, the updated rule builds upon a 2025 pilot program by raising the maximum bond limit from \$15,000 to \$20,000. State Department officials state that the policy is designed to reduce visa overstays and ensure compliance with immigration laws. While the rule applies broadly to dozens of countries—with a heavy concentration in Africa—community leaders and immigration advocates are watching closely to see how consular posts handle implementation globally.

Impact on Community Connections

For the Pakistani-American community, where family ties, weddings, and business visits often require bringing aging parents, relatives, or business partners to the U.S., the rule introduces significant new financial hurdles:

Steep Financial Barriers: Requiring a refundable bond of \$5,000, \$10,000, or up to \$20,000 upfront can make hosting family members financially prohibitive for many middle-class households.

Concerns Over Fairness: Immigration advocates warn that these discretionary bonds risk unfairly penalizing legitimate travelers who have no intention of overstaying their visas, potentially straining international family ties.

While the administration defends the measure as a necessary tool for border control and national security, critics argue that aggressive financial screening places an undue burden on legal immigration and tourism, making it harder for loved ones to visit legally.

CDF Munir discusses enhancement of defence, security cooperation with Somalia: ISPR

Continued from front page

According to a press release by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), a high-level defence delegation from Somalia called on the CDF at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The delegation was led by Somalia's Defence Minister Ahmed Moallim Fiqi, the ISPR said.

CDF Munir reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to "supporting Somalia in strengthening its security apparatus and fostering enduring peace in the region", the statement added.

During the meeting, "matters of mutual interest, regional security dynamics, and measures to further enhance bilateral defence and security cooperation were discussed", it said, adding that both sides underscored the importance of "deepening military-to-military ties and capacity building initiatives to counter common security challenges".

The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's steadfast support and the professional role played by the Pakistan Armed Forces in promoting regional peace and stability, the ISPR said.

The previous day, the naval and air force chiefs reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to strengthening defence ties with Somalia and supporting institutional cooperation with its air force in separate meetings with the Somali delegation, the military's media wing said on Wednesday.

At the meeting at Naval Headquarters with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf, the leaders discussed "key matters of mutual professional interest, regional maritime security and bilateral defence collaboration", according to the statement. The naval chief reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening defence ties with Somalia.

Meanwhile, in a meeting with Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu at Air Headquarters, discussions focused on bilateral defence cooperation, professional collaboration and capacity building, the statement said.

The Somali defence minister lauded the Pakistan Navy's contributions to regional maritime security, alongside PAF's professionalism and

operational capabilities.

Pakistan and Somalia agreed in January to strengthen collaboration in training, border management, disaster management and the adoption of a joint strategy against terrorism to deepen cooperation in internal security.

The agreement was reached as Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met a high-level Somali delegation led by Somalia's Interior Minister Ali Yusuf at the Ministry of Interior.

World Food Warehouse Celebrates Grand Reopening Under New Management

Continued from front page

diverse multicultural community.

Speaking during the event, Hisham Qaddura, who is leading the newly managed World Food Warehouse, shared his vision of transforming the grocery store into a premier destination for international foods while offering exceptional value, quality, and customer service.

Qaddura said the overwhelming turnout exceeded expectations, creating the challenge of keeping shelves fully stocked as customers rushed to take advantage of the grand opening specials. He noted that his team has been working around the clock to replenish inventory and ensure a positive shopping experience for every visitor.

"Our goal is to provide families with quality products at affordable prices while creating a shopping experience that reflects the needs of Houston's diverse communities," Qaddura said.

Under the new management, World Food Warehouse aims to strengthen its selection of international groceries, fresh produce, premium halal meats, frozen foods, spices, snacks, beverages, and household essentials, catering to customers from Pakistani, Indian, Middle Eastern, Persian, Afghan, African, and many other cultural backgrounds.

The grand reopening featured significant storewide discounts and exciting giveaways, drawing shoppers from across the Greater Houston area. Customers also learned about future enhancements planned for the store, including the addition of a new in-house bakery expected to open within the next six months, offering freshly baked breads and other specialty items.

The grand reopening attracted a strong turnout throughout the evening, with shoppers taking advantage of special promotions, exploring the store's expanded product selection, and participating in promotional giveaways. The enthusiastic response reflected the community's interest in the newly managed international grocery destination.

Qaddura expressed his appreciation to the community for its overwhelming support and invited residents to continue visiting the store as more promotions, new products, and expanded services are introduced in the months ahead.

The Grand reopening marks a fresh beginning for World Food Warehouse, reinforcing its commit-

ment to becoming one of Houston's leading destinations for international grocery shopping and halal food products while continuing to serve the city's diverse communities.

Proposed Hormuz passage deal not feasible for shipping industry, sources say

Continued from front page

in Iran, the narrow waterway between the Gulf and the Indian Ocean was the main route for about a fifth of world oil supplies and other vital goods. It was freely open to all ships with no fees.

Control of the strait has been the biggest sticking point in efforts to end the conflict.

Under the latest proposal, Tehran would be able to intervene if necessary with any inbound traffic, while outbound traffic would follow a route between Iran and Oman, with exit clearance granted through Oman after notifying Iran, a senior Iranian source told Reuters this week.

The ability of merchant ships to navigate international waterways "safely, predictably and without unnecessary impediment is fundamental to resilient supply chains, economic stability and energy security," the world's leading shipping associations said in an open letter this week.

'A toll in all but name'

Introducing compulsory charges through the strait for transit or service fees was "a toll in all but name", the letter said, which was sent to the UN's shipping agency.

"It would establish a precedent that could undermine the internationally recognised legal framework governing straits used for international navigation and transit passage."

What is known as a two-way traffic separation scheme was adopted by the UN's shipping agency in 1968 with the agreement of countries in the region. It created the current ship routing system that split sailing corridors through Iranian and Omani waters.

Iran is seeking fees of between 5% and 7% of the price of cargoes from ships using the strait, according to the senior Iranian official. Oman is discussing fees of around 3%, while Washington wants no fees at all.

The UN's International Maritime Organization said it could not comment on reports of the proposals.

In July the agency's governing council said countries around the strait should guarantee the "non-discriminatory and unimpeded right of transit passage of all ships" through the traffic separation scheme and that passage should remain free of any tolls and charges.

Fees would create compliance issues

For shipping companies and oil traders, any imposition of fees creates major compliance issues given the US has imposed sanctions on the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, which Iran set up in May to operate the waterway.

The US Treasury has also pro-

hibited US persons from receiving services from Iran's government related to a "guarantee of safe passage".

Any payment could lead to asset freezes, the industry sources said. They declined to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

A further complication is the introduction in late July by Lloyd's Market Association of a clause for use by war underwriters that terminates insurance cover for a vessel if it has paid a transit fee, toll or other charge for passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Ships sailing through the strait need to pay an additional war risk premium to ensure they have insurance if their ship is damaged during transit.

"Under the clause, insurers have no liability to indemnify any such payment and, where such a payment has been made, are discharged from obligations in respect of the relevant vessel," the LMA said in July.

The LMA represents the interests of all underwriting businesses in the Lloyd's of London insurance market.

Shipping companies were in a "catch 22" situation, one insurance industry source said, as the LMA wording prohibits insurers from covering shipowners who pay, while Iran aims to charge a toll.

Senate minority leader criticizes Trump's proposed 'Golden Fleet' battleships as costly 'vanity' project

Continued from front page

prioritising a costly personal project over the economic struggles facing American families.

"While American families can't even keep their heads above water, Donald Trump is spending his time building himself a 'Golden Fleet' of battleships the Navy doesn't want," Schumer said on the Senate floor.

His remarks came after a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis estimated that Trump's proposed new class of battleships, intended to form the backbone of the Navy's "Golden Fleet," could cost \$275 billion.

The CBO report said the first vessel in the proposed class, the USS Defiant, is projected to cost \$23.4 billion to construct, while each additional ship could cost \$18 billion. The plan envisions 15 battleships.

Schumer argued that the proposed fleet reflected what he called another example of Trump's "vanity projects," claiming the president was more interested in attaching his name to expensive military programs than addressing domestic concerns.

"Having his name on a bunch of battleships, expensive battleships, is all he cares about," Schumer said, adding that Trump was seeking to build "15 Trump-class battleships" as part of the initiative.

The senator also questioned the cost of the plan, saying Trump was prioritising a massive defence expenditure while Americans faced rising costs.

"He'd rather feed his own ego than feed the American people by putting his name on a \$275 billion 15-battleship outlay," he added.

Amnesty International: True Scale of Indian Arms Flow to Israel Vastly Undercounted, Implicating Indian State Directly

Continued from front page

investigation, Amnesty International has told Muslim Network TV — and the involvement of state-owned Indian companies means the Indian government itself, not just private firms, bears legal responsibility.

Responding to questions submitted to the network, Amnesty International elaborated on the findings of its report *Made in India: The Supply of Weapons and Ammunition to Israel*, published on July 30. Its answers, attributable to Amnesty International USA, go considerably further than the report itself in describing both the likely scale of the trade and the legal exposure of the Indian state.

'A floor, not a ceiling'

Amnesty was unambiguous that the 2,596 shipments documented in the report represent a conservative minimum rather than the full picture. The transfers the organisation focused on were only those for which it had documented evidence confirming the content was for military purposes.

It said it had been "extremely conservative" in its analysis to ensure full confidence in its findings — and, crucially, that it had excluded many transfers for which civilian end-use could not be completely ruled out. As a result, Amnesty said, it is likely that the volume of weapons, ammunition, parts, and components exported to the Israeli military's suppliers is "much larger" than what the report claims, and that "a much larger number of Indian companies are involved in Israel's defense supply chains" than those named.

That characterisation reframes the report's already substantial figures:

At least 390,516 small-arms parts
564,970 components of explosive ordnance

298 military-vehicle components

This forms a documented floor beneath a considerably larger, and still partly hidden, trade.

Why the state itself is on the hook

The most legally significant of Amnesty's answers concerned the role of India's state-owned arms manufacturers — and why their involvement changes the nature of the case.

The report documented that Munitions India Limited, a wholly government-owned company, supplied one shipment of 1,000 155mm artillery rounds to Elbit Systems, the largest supplier of such rounds to the Israeli military. Amnesty explained that when Munitions India Limited — along with India Optel Limited and Advanced Weapons and Equipment India Limited, both also wholly government-owned — transfers arms to Israel, they do so as state entities.

> "The Indian state transfers arms to Israel, and India's obligations under international law are engaged as a manufacturer and not only as a regulator of arms exports by private companies."

That distinction is central. It means India's exposure does not rest solely on a failure to police private exporters, but on the state's own direct participation in the supply chain. Amnesty added that the government's responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law includes its obligation to regulate private companies — and that it "bears responsibility for transfers that support Israel's genocide even if those transfers are facilitated by private companies."

The organisation also warned that corporate actors themselves "may also be criminally responsible" if they facilitate transfers while aware that their weapons are likely to be used to commit international crimes.

Amnesty confirmed that between June 23 and July 10, 2026, it wrote to every company documented in the report as having transferred weapons or weapon parts to Israel, as well as to their joint-venture partners and parent companies. By the time of publication, it had received no written responses.

How the picture was assembled

Amnesty explained the methodology behind an investigation built largely from publicly available records — the reason, in part, that the trade had gone unexamined for so long despite the data being commercially accessible.

The organisation said it relied primarily on shipment-level trade data drawn from two separate commercial providers, analysing goods classified under the internationally recognised Harmonized System, the standardised coding framework used worldwide to categorise traded goods for customs and trade statistics.

Codes 9301 to 9307: Cover most categories of arms and ammunition.

Code 8710: Covers tanks and other motorised armoured vehicles for military use.

Both providers were consulted across both sets of codes. It was precisely because the analysis was so rigorous and conservative, Amnesty reiterated, that it believes the real volume of the trade is very likely much larger than the report documents.

What accountability could look like

Asked what concrete legal avenues exist for accountability — given that India's Supreme Court dismissed a petition seeking to halt arms exports to Israel in 2024 — Amnesty framed the responsibility as a global one rather than confining it to Indian courts.

Any state or government that continues to do business with the named companies, it noted, risks complicity in Israel's human rights violations. The organisation stressed that the transfers do not affect only Israel and India: the companies involved are international actors with ties around the world, and India itself is a significant player in multilateral forums.

It said it was incumbent on all governments to call out the abuses and to insist that India — and the Indian companies supplying weapons, ammunition, parts, or components — immediately cease all such transfers to Israeli firms.

Reporting under pressure

Finally, Amnesty was asked how the 2020 shutdown of Amnesty International India — forced to halt operations after its bank accounts

were frozen — had shaped the organisation's ability to produce the report, and what it is now asking of the Indian government.

Amnesty framed that shutdown as part of a far broader assault on civil society carried out by Narendra Modi's government over a period of years — one designed to chill political opposition, silence dissent, and in some cases enrich the state by defunding or confiscating the assets of NGOs. It pointed to what it described as the government's ongoing attempt to claim millions of dollars intended for Indian civil society, funds it said the Modi administration has now frozen.

That oppression, Amnesty said, has made activism, journalism, advocacy, and human rights research more difficult and more dangerous — which is precisely its purpose, with the government hoping to operate with impunity.

However, the organisation cast the report itself as a rebuttal to that strategy. No amount of government oppression, it stated, can erase evidence of the government's complicity, crimes, and violations of human rights.

The bigger picture

Amnesty's responses sharpen the central claim of the *Made in India* investigation at a moment when the sources of Israel's weaponry are under intensifying international scrutiny.

Where the report established that Indian arms and components reached Israeli manufacturers throughout the assault on Gaza, the organisation's answers make three things explicit:

1. What has been documented is a deliberate undercount.
2. The involvement of state-owned firms places legal responsibility directly on the Indian government.
3. The duty to act extends to every government that continues to do business with the companies named.

India has long presented itself as a historic supporter of Palestinian statehood. Amnesty's account of its arms trade — assembled, the organisation notes, in spite of a sustained effort to shut down independent scrutiny within India itself — poses a direct challenge to that self-image, and one that, on the evidence of the companies' silence so far, New Delhi appears in no hurry to answer.

India's Modi turns to Instagram to woo young voters after Gen Z protest

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to Instagram recently with selfie-style videos shot after hours in a bid to win over young voters following Gen Z protests that highlighted growing frustration over a lack of job and education opportunities.

From clips showing the prime minister in a biker jacket and sunglasses against a rap soundtrack, to others that borrow the theme song from the sitcom *Friends* to signal his dependability, the messaging of Modi's party has pivoted towards the young.

A vertically shot clip posted on July 31 featuring Modi uttering a casual greeting, "Hi, friends" was the latest in his digital charm offensive

that aims to win over 400 million Gen Z voters ahead of general elections in 2029.

"They are platforms where you broadcast a well-rehearsed and disciplined political message to millions of followers in a top-down manner," said Delhi-based political columnist Asim Ali.

The pivot to youth-focused social media follows protests last month that led to the resignation of the education minister after tens of thousands of students and job seekers took to the streets.

The outcry was triggered by a leaked examination paper in a country where such tests are seen as opening the gates to professional careers and eventual financial security.

Ministers, government departments issue clips

Modi's videos have spurred cabinet ministers and government departments to issue a stream of short, lightly edited clips online over the past 10 days, with the foreign ministry becoming the latest on Thursday, saying it will take to Snapchat.

Since sweeping to power in 2014, Modi has been credited with transforming political communication in India, using digital platforms to build a direct connection with voters.

Analysts say his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) also developed a highly effective communications network across television news channels and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and X.

But platforms such as Instagram reward spontaneity, humour and authenticity over tightly scripted messaging, said Ali.

That is where the protesters scored, amplifying their message with Instagram reels and short videos that challenged Modi's carefully cultivated image of political invincibility and his government's command of the public narrative.

The BJP's earlier digital outreach felt too manicured to attract young audiences who preferred raw and unedited content instead, other analysts said.

"Content that feels too carefully curated, where the words are measured, the look is staid and the background feels staged, is less likely to be appealing," said Joyojeet Pal, a professor at Michigan University's information school.

Eye on 2029 general election

Experts say the BJP's renewed outreach reflects the growing political importance of younger voters.

More than half of India's population of 1.4 billion consists of those younger than 35, and Gen Z is expected to form one of the largest voting blocs by the time the general election is held in 2029, which could give Modi a fourth term in office.

Amit Malviya, the BJP's social media chief, declined to comment and queries sent to four national party spokespersons went unanswered.

The party is also stepping up efforts beyond social media, with plans for an address on Thursday to about 2,000 students in the financial capital of Mumbai by Mohan Bhagwat, the chief of its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

That represents one of the parent group's biggest efforts to engage with the Gen Z young.

At a cabinet meeting after the

protests, Modi urged ministers to be more active on platforms popular with the young and make sure their videos appeared less polished.

"Earlier, there were a lot more static posts tailored to X or Facebook," said a member of the communications team of a BJP minister, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"But now the ask is for more reels, preferably with minimal editing and some rawness."

Posters of Gen Z pledges

Posters proclaiming "I am Gen Z" have sprung up across Mumbai, bearing pledges attributed to Gen Z, from promises to respect the police, the army and Modi, as well as support students.

It is unclear if the strategy will succeed, however.

"The internet has its own language and culture," said author and podcaster Anurag Minus Verma.

"Serious political messaging, packaged as reels, can still be trolled. There will be more focus on Instagram, but it remains to be seen if Gen Z buys into that."

Imran Khan's sons voice fears over his health on third jail anniversary

Former prime minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan's sons, Kasim Khan and Sulaiman Khan, have expressed concern over their father's health, telling CNN that authorities have prevented family members, lawyers and doctors from visiting the jailed former premier for months.

Imran has been imprisoned since August 2023, currently serving a sentence at Adiala Jail in a £190 million corruption case. He also faces pending trials under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) related to the protests of May 9, 2023.

The brothers have not seen their father since November 2022 after he survived an assassination attempt. They said they applied for visas in January of this year but have yet to receive a response.

Speaking to CNN in London on the third anniversary of Khan's imprisonment, the brothers said they had received no recent updates about their father's condition because "his family, doctors [and] lawyers have not been allowed to see him for seven months."

"We're trying, we'd like to go, but nothing's coming through," Kasim said, claiming administrative issues had prevented the pair from travelling to Pakistan. He added there was "no reason" they should be prevented from entering the country.

The brothers alleged that each time they spoke publicly about their father's incarceration, it became increasingly difficult for them to secure the necessary documentation to visit him.

In response, the Ministry of Information rejected the allegations, telling CNN that both Kasim and Sulaiman possess National Identity Cards for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP), allowing them to enter the country without visas.

The ministry described the brothers' claims as "misleading" and accused them of turning an administrative matter into "political point-scoring."

However, the brothers maintained that their identity cards had expired and had not been renewed, a claim that CNN said was "not addressed by the ministry".

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 ambience 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 thali – 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.

Three Houston-area moms sue over Ten Commandments in schools. They say it violates Texas' own laws



A sculpture with the Ten Commandments is pictured on the grounds on Thursday, June 26, 2025, in Austin.

When Houston ISD students return to school on Aug. 10, it could be the first time students and teachers will have the Ten Commandments displayed in classrooms, after the district was embroiled in lawsuits over a Texas law requiring their display and it was upheld in the spring by a federal appeals court.

But now, three Houston-area mothers are trying to stop the 2025 law from a new legal perspective: Rather than rely on the U.S. Constitution's protections for freedom of religion, they argue the display of the Ten Commandments violates Texas' own laws.

In a new lawsuit filed Thursday in Harris County, those three mothers — Sanjam Kaur Sohal, Dr. Audrey Rosa Nath and Emily Roth — are suing the state as well as Houston ISD, Cy-Fair ISD and Spring Branch ISD over that argument.

In 1999, the Texas legislature passed a bill, signed into

The Ten Commandments

I AM the LORD thy God.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven images.

Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill.

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Thou shalt not steal.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

Donated posters displaying the Ten Commandments are required to be posted in Texas school classrooms under a 2025 law that is again being challenged in court.

law by then-Gov. George W. Bush, which prohibited the state government and public entities from "substantially burden[ing] a person's free exercise of religion." That provision, known as the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act, has been cited as recently as 2021, when Attorney General Ken Paxton used it as evidence that governments could not close places of worship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It cannot be something that is only done when it advances a Christian agenda, to the exclusion of every other religious background of the citizens and students of Texas," Vanessa D. Gilmore, a former district court judge and one of the plaintiffs' lawyers, told Houston Public Media.

Sohal, Nath and Roth argue the same standard should hold for, as they say, imposing the Ten Commandments on their children. The version of the commandments required to be displayed, if schools receive them as a donation, is the Protestant version from the King James Bible.

The plaintiffs also argue that displaying the Ten Commandments in schools violates a recent amendment to the Texas Constitution — passed by state lawmakers last spring and then by voters in November — that affirms parents' rights related to their children's education.

"There's that commandment saying you shouldn't have imagery or statues or whatever and no other gods than me," Nath, whose family adheres to Jainism, Hinduism, Judaism and Quakerism, told Houston Public Media. "That's telling my son that there's something wrong with him for celebrating his grandpa's Hinduism. And it's not just my son, but for all the other kids who come from such a diversity of religions in my kids' classes."

Representatives from the Office of Attorney General, the Texas Education Agency, Houston ISD, Cy-Fair ISD and Spring Branch ISD, all of which are defendants in the lawsuit, did not immediately return requests for comment.

Prior lawsuits over the Texas law had focused on federal precedent for freedom of religion, rather than state-level laws. Earlier this year, the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the law did not violate the U.S. Constitution.

The lawsuit filed Thursday does not have a hearing scheduled. The plaintiffs are asking for a temporary restraining order against the three districts from displaying the Ten Commandments before their school years begin next month.

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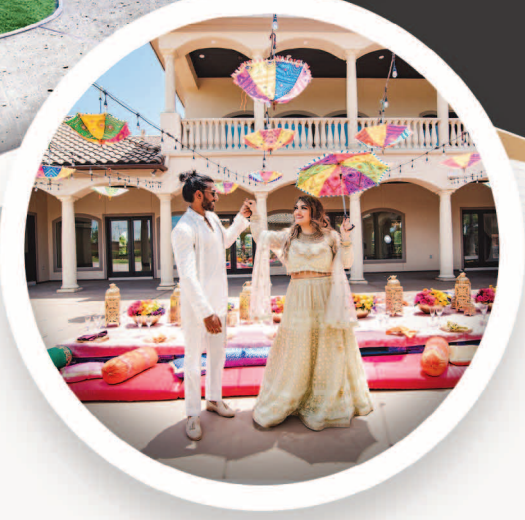
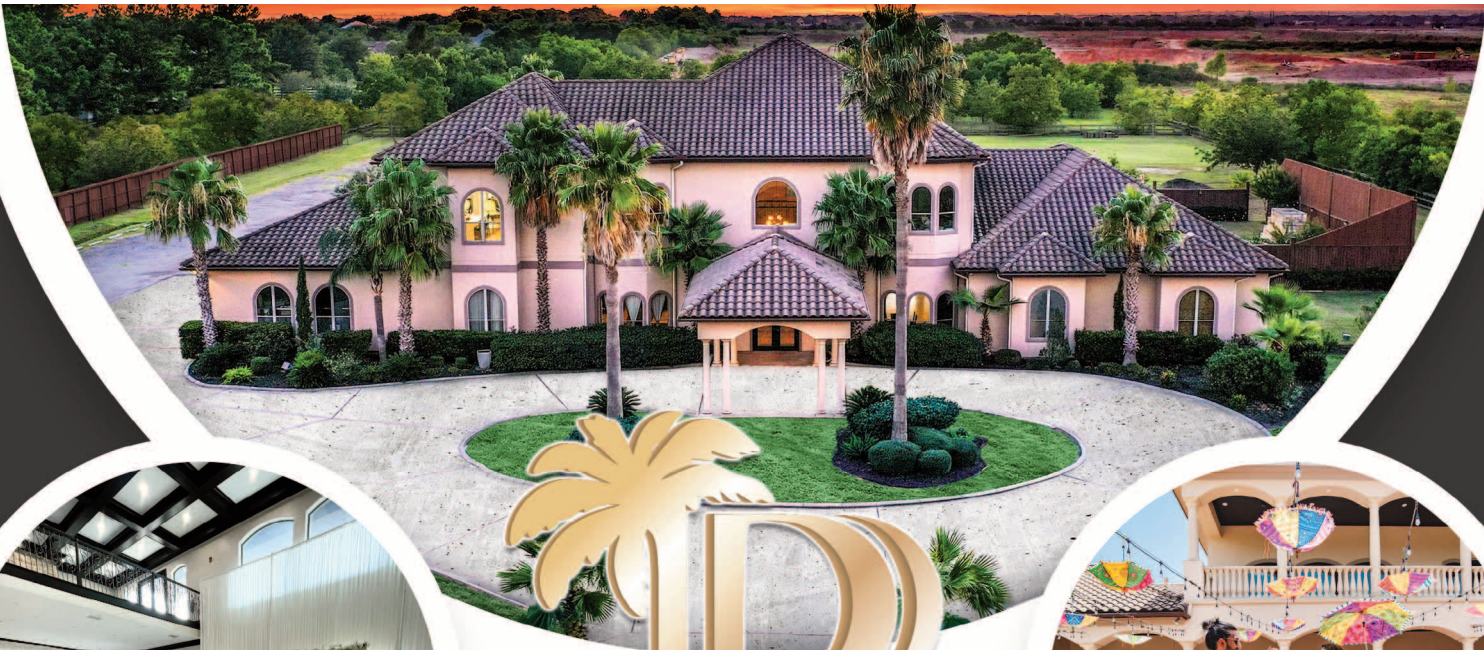


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PPP Houston Hosts Grand Reception for Sindh Government Spokesperson Sumeta Afzal Syed



The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Houston Chapter hosted a warm reception in honor of Sumeta Afzal Syed, Member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly (MPA), Spokesperson for the Sindh Government, and Head of PPP Digital Karachi, during a special gathering held at Mai

Continued on page 28

Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong Honors Arwa Coffee House with Official Proclamation



HOUSTON, Texas: Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong presented an official proclamation to Arwa Coffee House on West Airport Road during a well-attended community gathering, recognizing the establishment for its contributions to the local community and its role in bringing residents together.

Continued on page 28

Houston's Pakistani-American Urdu-Speaking Community Calls for MQM Unity

By Amjad Qaimkhani

The recent tensions between different MQM factions have also resonated thousands of miles away in Houston, Texas, home to one of the largest Pakistani-American communities in the United States. Many members of the Urdu-speaking diaspora have expressed concern that continued political divisions within the MQM movement risk weakening the collective voice that has historically championed the constitutional and democratic rights of Karachi's urban population.

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Continued on page 28

Sweet Success: Pakistan Consulate's Houston Mango Festival Drives Trade as U.S. Imports Nearly Double

Farm Fresh's Zulfikar Momin: Demand for Pakistani Mangoes Continues to Rise Across America



HOUSTON, Texas — Pakistan's world-renowned mangoes took center stage at the annual Pakistan Mango Festival hosted by the Consulate General of Pakistan in Houston, where elected officials, diplomats, business leaders, and members of the Pakistani-American community gathered to celebrate one of the country's most prized agricultural exports while promoting stronger trade and cultural relations between Pakistan and the United States.

Held in partnership with Farm Fresh, the festival featured a vibrant display and tasting of Pakistan's premium mango varieties, including Sindhri, Chaunsa, and Anwar Ratol, allowing guests to experience the exceptional sweetness, aroma, and flavor that have earned Pakistani mangoes an international reputation.

Addressing the gathering, Consul General Aftab Chaudhry announced that Pakistan exported 190,000 boxes of mangoes to the United States this year, nearly doubling last year's exports—a milestone that reflects

exceptional sweetness, aroma, and flavor that have earned Pakistani mangoes an international reputation.

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Continued on page 28

Famous Foods with Quaid e Azam Foundation Showcases Pakistan's Finest Mangoes at Houston Community Celebration

Consul General, Community Leaders Celebrate Pakistan's World-Famous Mangoes in Houston



HOUSTON, Texas: The rich flavors and unmatched sweetness of Pakistan's world-renowned mangoes delighted hundreds of guests as Famous Foods, a leading household brand of Pakistani and Indian food products in the United States in Collaboration with Quaid e Azam

Famous Foods, a leading household brand of Pakistani and Indian food products in the United States in Collaboration with Quaid e Azam

Foundation, hosted a grand mango celebration in Houston. Organized by Mr. Wahid Lala and family and

State finds some registered Texas voters were wrongly flagged as potential noncitizens

The secretary of state told counties to immediately reinstate any Texans who were removed from the voter roll despite showing DPS proof of citizenship.

Election officials across the state should immediately reinstate some voters who were incorrectly flagged as potential noncitizens through a federal program, the Texas Secretary of State's Office told county officials. Christina Adkins, the state elec-

tions director, told county officials the state had reviewed Texas Department of Public Safety records confirming the citizenship of some of the 2,724 registered voters who were flagged as potential noncitizens, according to an audio recording of

her comments obtained by Votebeat and The Texas Tribune, as well as election officials who heard them. The voters were flagged after the state checked its voter roll through a federal program called Systematic

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Realpolitik or ideological alignment

India's unconditional embrace of Israel raises questions about shifts in its foreign policy and positioning

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Both Modi and Netanyahu are driven by strong ideological leanings, which are also reflected in their respective countries. There are strands of Islamophobia within the dominant political forces in both countries — whether the BJP, backed by the RSS, or Netanyahu's coalition — manifesting in anti-Muslim and particularly anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian positions

By Naveed Hussain

“Israel is Fatherland, and India is Motherland.”

This line from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's February 2026 speech at the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, did more than raise eyebrows. It sparked a debate about identity, ideology, and the direction of India's foreign policy.

Critics were quick to seize on the phrase, calling it diplomatically awkward, unnecessary, and even revealing. For them, it wasn't rhetorical flourish but ideological signaling — an attempt, they argue, to cultivate a civilisational affinity between India and Israel.

As the debate heated up, opposition leaders jumped into the fray. Congress MP Rajiv Shukla accused Modi of “lowering the standard of public discourse.” He said the speech marked a departure from India's traditional foreign policy. Fellow Congress leader Pawan Khera was more scathing. He said Modi's style of diplomacy has invited “ridicule on the international stage.”

Supporters, however, dismissed the outrage as semantic overreach. They argued the remark was purely metaphorical — a rhetorical gesture meant to convey diplomatic warmth.

But to reduce the debate to mere wordplay is to miss the larger point.

Shared ideology

Modi's remark wasn't an isolated slip or a rhetorical device. It was an instinctive expression of a shared worldview. The Indian prime minister and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu have several similarities. The most striking is their strong ideological alignment characterised by racial supremacism, ruthless state control, and expansionist geopolitical ambitions. Modi's approach in occupied Kashmir mirrors the strategy long employed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories.

“The Modi-Netanyahu bonhomie is shaped by three factors: a shared strongman affinity, overlapping strategic interests, particularly in countering Pakistan, and a broader geopolitical alignment. And this alignment acts as a collective pivot against Muslim populations regionally and globally, reflecting both leaders' policies and ideological orientations,” says security and defence analyst Maj Gen (retd) Inam Ul Haq.

Deepening ties

Modi's Knesset speech left little doubt. He received several standing ovations from MPs and later accepted the “Speaker of the Knesset Medal”, Israel's highest parliamentary honour. It was a powerful display of the increasingly close relationship between New Delhi and Tel Aviv — or, more precisely, between Modi and Netanyahu.

The unprecedented diplomatic sojourn marked a clear departure from India's traditional policy of supporting the Palestinian cause and their right to statehood.

“We are looking at two aspects: a strong personal bond between Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu marked by shared views, and an India-Israel partnership. Traditionally balanced between Israel and Palestine, India signalled a shift under Modi — evident in his Israel visit which skipped a Ramallah stopover, indicating a clear tilt. Ties have since evolved into a ‘special strategic partnership,’ covering defence, economic, and agricultural cooperation,” says former ambassador Sardar Masood Khan.

Strategic misstep

Tellingly, Modi's visit to Tel Aviv came just 48 hours before the US-Israel war on Iran began. While Delhi downplayed it as mere coincidence, analysts questioned the timing.

“When the United States and Israel attacked Iran 48 hours after Modi's visit, he likely expected an easy victory and calculated that closer ties with Israel would yield strategic gains,” says air commodore (retd) Khalid Chishti. “However, this turned out to be a miscalculation, as the resolve and resilience of the Iranian people were underestimated, straining Iran's long-standing ties with India.”

The India-Israel ties have not always been this close. For decades, Delhi strongly backed Palestine. It opposed the 1947 UN partition plan, recognised the PLO in 1974, and the state of Palestine in 1988. While Delhi recognised Israel in 1950, full diplomatic relations began only in 1992 and remained low-key for years. However, by October 27, 2023, India indicated a shift, abstaining from a UN resolution calling for a humanitarian truce in Gaza.

Breaking tradition

“Historically, Indian leaders had resisted external pressure to back

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The Modi-Netanyahu partnership extends beyond rhetoric. Latest revelations suggest India actively abetted Israeli's genocidal military campaign in Gaza. On July 30, the Amnesty International reported that Indian state-owned and private companies shipped at least 2,596 consignments to Israel during the Gaza genocide

controversial wars. Indira Gandhi declined to support the US during the Vietnam war, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee refused to endorse the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, both calling them unjustified,” says Chishti.

“India maintained steady support for Palestine, from recognising the PLO under Yasser Arafat to backing the Oslo Accords (1993-95), which promised a two-state solution,” he adds. “However, the current leadership appears to signal a shift. During his Tel Aviv visit, Modi said, ‘the pain of Israelis is the pain of Indians,’ a statement that reflects a move away from India's balanced position on Palestine.”

A recent report laid bare the scale of the partnership between the two countries. Released by Amnesty International last week, the report suggested that India had actively abetted Israel's genocidal military campaign in Gaza. Indian state-owned and private companies shipped at least 2,596 consignments to Israel during the conflict, the report states. The shipments — sent between 7 October 2023 and 30 November 2025 — included machine-gun components, 155mm high-explosive artillery shells supplied to Elbit Systems, explosive warheads for SkyStriker “kamikaze” drones, and armoured vehicle components destined for major suppliers to the Israeli military.

Expansionist visions

What has driven this radical shift in India's policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Analysts point to the supremacist and exclusionary ideologies of Modi and Netanyahu. “The current tilt towards Israel appears driven largely by the BJP's ideological orientation and the influence of the RSS,” says Inam.

Khan agrees, but places more stress on their shared expansionist ambitions.

“I think both Modi and Netanyahu are driven by strong ideological leanings, which are also reflected in their respective countries. There are strands of Islamophobia within the dominant political forces in both countries — whether the BJP, backed by the RSS, or Netanyahu's coalition — manifesting in anti-Muslim and particularly anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian positions,” he says.

“Beyond this, both are influenced by expansionist or irredentist ideas, such as ‘Akhand Bharat’ in India and ‘Greater Israel.’ These shared ideological roots and ambitions bring the two countries closer.”

Modi's India has increasingly adopted the “Israeli playbook.” Its spy agency, RAW, has carried out extrajudicial killings on foreign soil. Security forces have imposed collective punishment in occupied Kashmir, while the government has pursued demographic changes by settling non-locals in the disputed region. These actions mirror Israel's approach under Netanyahu, particularly Mossad-linked assassinations in Iran and the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Kashmir-Gaza parallel

“There are strong parallels between Palestine and Kashmir. Both disputes date back to 1948 and remain unresolved, with neither population having exercised its right to self-determination — blocked, respectively, by Israel and India. In both cases, we see militarisation, settler-colonial practices, and widespread human suffering,” says ambassador Masood Khan, who has also served as the President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

He argues that the revocation of Kashmir's constitutional autonomy by the Modi administration in August 2019 and subsequent attempts at demographic changes reflect Israel's actions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including large-scale violence and expanding settlements.

Inam, meanwhile, says the conflicts are historically similar but differ in objectives and dynamics. “In Gaza, Israel is widely seen as entrenching control while resisting a two-state solution and exerting pressure that could displace Palestinians. In Kashmir, India, particularly after revoking Article 370, has moved to integrate the region more fully into the Union, altering its demographic and political landscape,” he adds.

Defence ties

Under Modi, the Tel Aviv-Delhi relationship has evolved into a multifaceted alliance covering defence, intelligence, technology, and political coordination. Israel has emerged as one of India's key defence suppliers, providing advanced military technologies that, according to analysts, have enhanced its operational capabilities, particularly in sensitive regions like Kashmir.

“Historically, India has lagged behind Pakistan in drone and surveillance capabilities, triggering criticism from retired Indian military officials after the events of May 2025. Since then, Israel has supplied India with platforms such as the IAI Harpy drones and related technologies,” Chishti says referring to last year's brief military confrontation between Pakistan and India.

Drone warfare

Intelligence-sharing and joint strategic planning have also become important components of their defence relationship. “During the May 7-

9 hostilities, Indian drones reportedly entered Pakistan and struck select targets — operations that, according to some assessments, may have involved active Israeli support. These systems combine strike capability with surveillance, mapping, intelligence gathering and communications monitoring, and are increasingly being used by India to enhance operational awareness, particularly in Kashmir.”

Echoing Chishti, Inam says defence cooperation between the two countries also includes advisory support and joint production. He cites recent reports that point to Israeli advisory input during Operation Sindoor, alongside a wider strategic partnership focused on defence manufacturing.

The two countries jointly produce key systems, including UAVs and missile platforms such as the Barak-8, with collaboration between entities like DRDO, Israel Aerospace Industries, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, and private firms, including Adani Group and Elbit Systems. They also cooperate on systems like AWACS and the SPYDER air defence platform.

“India remains the largest buyer of Israeli military hardware, with defence imports reaching nearly \$3.9 billion in 2025-26, alongside ongoing technology transfer and joint development programmes. Cooperation further extends to cyber capabilities, with initiatives such as a joint centre of excellence for cyber warfare,” adds Inam.

Destabilising impact

Analysts warn that the deepening Modi-Netanyahu partnership could prove destabilising not only for their respective regions but also for the wider world, citing their exclusionary ideologies, disregard for international law and expansionist agendas.

“Not just in South Asia, but in the broader Asia-Pacific region, India has been a destabilising factor. Israel too operates through a kind of anarchy and disorder in its neighbourhood. It divides nations and has made examples of countries such as Syria, Libya, and Tunisia. At its instigation, the United States attacked Iraq and has also fought a prolonged war in Syria,” says Khan. “Both countries, therefore, are contributing to regional instability and are becoming increasingly isolated in their neighbourhoods.”

Pakistan factor

In South Asia, Indian and Israeli strategic interests also converge, as both view Pakistan as an adversary. Delhi faced humiliation in the May 2025 conflict with Pakistan, while Tel Aviv has become growingly isolated over its Gaza campaign. And this has brought the two countries even closer. At the same time, Pakistan has gained international relevance through its mediation in the ongoing Iran-United States conflict, showing its ability to contribute to regional stability and facilitate dialogue.

“I believe India has not accepted this shift, which is contributing to closer India-Israel ties and to efforts to destabilise Pakistan through proxies and militant activity, particularly in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan,” Chishti says, referring to the latest surge in terrorist violence in the two volatile provinces.

Some analysts, however, do not see the Modi-Netanyahu partnership lasting long, given India's demographic diversity, communal tensions, and a huge Muslim minority. They believe much will depend on the next elections in both countries — Israel's scheduled for September 2026 and India's in 2029.

“India has de-hyphenated Israel from the Palestine issue, but this policy may not be sustainable in the long run given the country's internal ethnic diversity and sizable Muslim population,” says Inam. “The ideological affinity between the BJP and Israel is also unlikely to endure, as it continues to draw criticism for both Israel and its principal supporter, the United States. Overall, I feel this approach runs against the broader grain of Indian politics and may not support a lasting alignment with Israel.”

Global concerns

Experts argue that ideological alignment, majoritarian political narratives — Hindu nationalism in India and Zionist nationalism in Israel — apartheid treatment of Muslim minorities, and demographic changes in disputed regions, cannot be mere coincidence. This growing convergence of strategic interests and racial superiority-based ideologies has raised alarm globally.

Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Genocide Watch, along with international observers, have drawn comparisons between Kashmir and Gaza. Critics argue that these parallels point to broader concerns about governance, human rights and the treatment of civilian populations in the two territories. Proponents, however, claim the India-Israel partnership is rooted in shared strategic interests amid growing global volatility, rather than ideology.

The trajectory of India-Israel ties reflects a complex interplay of strategic interests, ideological affinities, and evolving geopolitical realignments. While the partnership has yielded tangible outcomes in defence and technology, it has also drawn criticism over the exclusionary and expansionist ideologies of Modi and Netanyahu, as well as its broader implications for regional stability. Whether this alignment endures will depend not only on leadership choices but also on domestic political dynamics and international pressures.

The conflict with Iran won't stay in Iran

Ripple effects of the war can be felt beyond the region and more in some of the vulnerable parts of the world

“Ending the war requires diplomacy, but not diplomacy conducted with a bomb on the table and an ultimatum attached

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ

If any event has come close to causing the kind of global disruption seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, it is the ongoing US-Iran conflict. Despite periodic pauses and promises of peace, there is little indication that the confrontation is moving toward a lasting resolution. A recent World Bank forecast has warned that the conflict is already weighing on global growth and that, if prolonged, it could push dozens of developing economies into years of stagnation. A few months ago, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) echoed similar concerns, warning that if the conflict continued to push oil prices toward \$100 per barrel for the rest of the year, it could further destabilise the global economy.

The cost is already mounting for Washington, with the bill crossing \$37 billion, according to Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth's latest testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, nearly \$8 billion more than the previous estimate in May. According to a BBC report, the Trump administration has asked lawmakers to approve an additional \$87 billion in Pentagon funding, including \$67 billion for operations in the Middle East. But that is only the official cost borne by US taxpayers for a conflict whose consequences have spread far and beyond, disrupting the energy supplies and so much more.

While President Trump has dismissed concerns about the economic fallout at home by arguing that the war is in the best interest of Americans, the conflict has clearly taken a global toll — particularly in the Global South, where the effects are already being felt and are pinching every pocket. From New Delhi to Bangkok, Istanbul to Islamabad, people have been bracing for a new wave of inflation driven by disruptions in the world's most important energy corridor, the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has shut in retaliation for US strikes on its infrastructure and leadership.

I sat down with Ashok Swain, professor of peace and conflict research at Uppsala University, to discuss what has become one of the most consequential conflicts of our time, a war whose impact continues to extend far beyond the battlefield, threatening global stability, energy markets and millions of lives. Here is what he had to say:

QUESTION: Beyond the battlefield, what are the short-term and long-term consequences of the US-Iran conflict?

AS: President Trump's war with Iran is harming the world far beyond the battlefield. In the short term, disruption around the Strait of Hormuz has raised oil, gas, transport and insurance costs, while attacks near the Suez Canal and the Red Sea threaten another vital trade route. The result is higher inflation, disrupted flights, falling tourism and greater uncertainty for businesses and households. The IMF describes the closure of Hormuz as the largest disruption in the history of the global oil market, effectively imposing a sudden additional cost on energy-importing countries. But in the longer term, the damage is political as well as economic. The US administration has shown that negotiations can be abandoned for bombing and ceasefires treated as temporary pauses for rearmament. That destroys trust in diplomacy, encourages Iran and other states to seek stronger military deterrence, and accelerates the decline of an already weakened international order. Military superiority may win individual battles, but it cannot create legitimacy, cooperation or lasting security. Trump entered this conflict promising control and quick victory, but he has produced a wider war, strengthened hardliners in Tehran and made the world more insecure.

QUESTION: Given the existing vulnerabilities across the Global South, how is this war affecting the weakest economies?

AS: The poorest countries are paying for a war they neither started nor can influence. For rich states, higher oil prices are an inconvenience, for fuel-importing countries in Africa, South Asia and elsewhere, they become a national emergency. Governments already burdened by debt are forced to draw down scarce foreign currency reserves to pay for fuel, fertilizer and food imports, leaving fewer resources for health, education and climate adaptation. Transport costs then raise the price of almost everything, especially basic food. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and many African economies are particularly exposed because they combine energy dependence with limited fiscal space and large low-income populations. Wealthier governments can subsidize fuel or release reserves, but weaker governments must borrow, cut public spending or allow prices to rise. The result is hunger, unemployment, currency depreciation and political unrest. The cruel inequality of this war is therefore clear — decisions made in Washington and Tel Aviv are being felt in markets and at kitchen tables thousands of kilometres away. Pressure on one

“The cruel inequality of this war is therefore clear — decisions made in Washington and Tel Aviv are being felt in markets and at kitchen tables thousands of kilometres away

country can quickly become an economic shock for many others because global markets do not respect borders. The consequences travel downward until they reach those least able to absorb them.

QUESTION: As a scholar of peace and conflict, what are the most important ethical questions this conflict raises?

AS: The first ethical question is what authority President Trump had to impose such enormous human and economic costs without presenting a clear, achievable and legally defensible political objective. Preventing nuclear proliferation is a legitimate concern, but killing civilians, attacking infrastructure and destabilizing an entire region cannot be treated as morally acceptable merely because Washington possesses the military capacity to do so. There are also serious questions about legality, congressional authorization, proportionality and the protection of civilian facilities. A second concern is the unequal value assigned to human life. Iranian civilians often appear in political language as collateral damage, while the suffering of people in countries affected by inflation, food shortages and displacement is barely counted at all. A third question concerns responsibility for creating the crisis. Trump withdrew from the nuclear agreement that had placed verifiable restrictions on Tehran, replaced it with a policy of maximum pressure and later escalated confrontation into open conflict. He cannot erase that history and present each new escalation as an unavoidable response to Iranian actions. I would say that academics must also scrutinise Iran's repression and attacks on civilian targets, but moral consistency requires us to examine the stronger party most closely because it has the greatest ability to choose a different course.

QUESTION: In March, President Trump claimed multiple times that he had won the war. How can a conflict continue in phases after a declared victory? What do the competing narratives from Washington and Tehran tell us about the nature of this war?

AS: Trump's repeated declarations of victory in March reveal the distance between political messaging and military reality. A war has not been won simply because a president repeats the word “victory.” Victory must mean that clearly stated political objectives have been achieved and can be sustained without a return to combat. Yet Iranian attacks continued, Hormuz remained contested, negotiations repeatedly stalled and American forces carried out new strikes in July. The war keeps returning in episodes because ending a conflict requires political compromises that are often harder than winning individual battles. Washington's narrative emphasizes destroyed targets, weakened Iranian capabilities and American military superiority. Tehran's narrative emphasizes survival, resistance and its ability to impose costs on the United States and its allies in the region. Both sides exaggerate, but they are not measuring or fighting the same war. America counts the targets it destroys, Iran counts its survival and continuing capacity to retaliate. Trump can win battles while failing to produce a stable political outcome. Iran can suffer destruction while claiming that preventing regime collapse constitutes victory. These competing narratives sustain the conflict because each government needs a story that makes compromise look unnecessary and renewed violence appear justified.

QUESTION: In this war between the US and Iran, who do you think, apart from the people of Iran, are suffering the most?

AS: Apart from the people of Iran, those suffering most are ordinary people across the Gulf and in fragile energy importing countries. A number of countries across the region face missile and drone attacks, damaged infrastructure, disrupted water and food supplies, lost tourism and the realization that hosting American military bases may make them targets rather than guarantee their protection. Migrant workers are especially vulnerable because they have little political protection, limited savings and few opportunities to leave. Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen risk becoming secondary battlefields even though their populations have already endured years of conflict and economic collapse. Beyond the region, poor households in South Asia and Africa suffer through higher fuel, fertilizer and food prices. There is also a generational cost. Children displaced from schools, families pushed into poverty and young people drawn toward armed groups will continue to bear the consequences long after leaders announce another ceasefire. Even American families are losing soldiers and paying higher prices for a war that around two thirds of US adults now consider not worth fighting. The pattern is familiar: political leaders claim strategic gains, military contractors and energy companies profit, while civilians, workers and future generations pay the bill.

“

The poorest countries are paying for a war they neither started nor can influence. For rich states, higher oil prices are an inconvenience, for fuel-importing countries in Africa, South Asia and elsewhere, they become a national emergency

Ashok Swain

QUESTION: What role should developed countries play in preventing this conflict from becoming a forever war?

AS: Developed countries should be using their economic and diplomatic power to restrain the belligerents, the US and Israel, protect shipping, support mediation and ensure that any agreement is backed by credible monitoring and sanctions relief. They should also provide emergency assistance to poorer countries facing food, fuel and debt crises. Instead, most have played either a limited or contradictory role. European states have called for restraint while continuing military cooperation with Washington and Tel Aviv and offering little meaningful resistance to Trump's escalation. Some have treated the conflict primarily as an energy supply problem rather than a war that requires political intervention. Others have defended themselves against Iranian missiles without seriously challenging the policies that widened the confrontation. China and Russia have criticized American power, but have done very little to stop the conflict. What is missing is an independent coalition prepared to say that neither American nor Israeli bombing can establish a sustainable order. Developed democracies have institutions, financial leverage and diplomatic networks that could support such an effort. Their failure to use them shows how weak multilateralism has become. The world is already multipolar, but it lacks a functioning order capable of restraining powerful states.

QUESTION: Have we crossed the point where this conflict could have been prevented from becoming a forever war?

AS: We have not crossed the point at which a forever war is inevitable, but we have passed many easier opportunities to prevent it. The withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, the failure of later negotiations, the turn to regime change rhetoric and the repeated violation or manipulation of ceasefires have created a deep trust deficit. Ending the conflict now will therefore be far harder and more expensive than preventing it would have been. If it becomes permanent, the region will suffer several kinds of loss: thousands more deaths, destroyed infrastructure, displaced populations, weakened economies and another generation shaped by fear and revenge. Gulf states will lose their image as safe centers of investment and commerce. Iran may become more authoritarian and more determined to acquire a nuclear deterrent. Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen may face renewed proxy warfare. In the end, I believe that the United States will lose credibility, resources and influence, while China and Russia will gain opportunities without necessarily providing stability. The deepest loss, however, will be political imagination. A region that spends years preparing for the next attack gradually stops believing that coexistence is possible. Forever wars do not continue because they are impossible to end, they continue because leaders discover that engaging in conflict is politically easier than making the compromises required for peace.

QUESTION: Is diplomacy still a realistic path forward?

AS: Ending the war requires diplomacy, but not diplomacy conducted with a bomb on the table and an ultimatum attached. There must first be a durable and monitored ceasefire covering attacks by the United States, Iran, Israel and aligned armed groups. That must be followed by phased arrangements on Iran's nuclear programme, missile deployments, sanctions relief, maritime security, and the reopening of Hormuz. Regional states, particularly Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, need a central role because they have both influence and a direct interest in preventing a forever war. But agreements alone will not be enough. The central problem is trust, especially after Trump withdrew from the earlier nuclear deal and later escalated confrontation while negotiations remained possible. Iran will demand guarantees that Washington cannot simply abandon another agreement after a change of administration or political calculations. Washington must also accept that Tehran cannot be forced into unconditional surrender without an occupation that would be disastrous for everyone. Lastly, this conflict will end only when both sides exchange maximalist ambitions for limited, verifiable objectives. In my view, peace requires restraint, institutions and a regional security framework that can survive beyond the leaders who negotiate it.

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From Pakistan during the Cold War to present-day Rwanda and Türkiye, refugee hosting has evolved into a global political economy driven by foreign aid and strategic interests

Saeed Husain

In modern history, Pakistan became one of the earliest laboratories for global refugee externalisation, serving as a major destination for the West to “hide away” the human cost of its armed interventions — the millions of people displaced by war.

While the United States and Soviet Union fought over territories thousands of miles from their own capitals during the Cold War, Pakistan, which has never had any constitutional refugee framework nor held the administrative capacity to manage its own population, hosted millions of Afghans fleeing destruction.

Who gained the most from the millions who entered Pakistan? As interests in Islamabad and Washington aligned, both the Pakistani state and its non-governmental organisations (NGOs) — which mushroomed overnight — benefitted tremendously from the unchecked aid that flowed to the country.

This is the global refugee market: a political economy in which wealthy states transfer the costs of refugee protection to poorer countries through aid, trade concessions, security partnerships and diplomatic favours. Refugee hosting has now become a global export industry.

THE COLD WAR PROTOTYPE

Pakistan’s historically aid-dependent economy was so strong in the 1980s that, within three weeks of the Soviet Union entering Afghanistan, President Gen Ziaul Haq refused \$400 million (today \$1.2 billion) in January 1980 from the US, calling it “peanuts”. Gen Zia would then go on to receive billions of dollars, both in military assistance and those meant to go to those affected by war.

This aid inflow did two things. The first was bringing in cash to prop up Pakistan’s economy, and the second was that, in order to keep aid flowing, Pakistan had strong incentives to maintain an open refugee policy.

At its peak in 1999, there were four million Afghans in Pakistan which, at that time, was 2.5 percent of the country’s population. Despite the aid being earmarked for Afghans fleeing destruction, barely any reached the communities that needed it the most.

Despite the social and demographic changes that Pakistani communities



were facing locally, and with little assistance in both funds and planning from the government itself, Pakistan’s commitment to Afghans was tied to monetary terms with the West. Today, the US and European nations increasingly outsource refugee protection and migration control to third countries, under similar economic conditions.

BUYING DISTANCE

As unstable economies and wars have continued to displace people in the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and South America, many have sought asylum in the countries that helped shape these conditions. Rather than absorb them, Western governments have increasingly paid other countries to keep refugees at a distance from their own borders.

In July 2025, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) posted on X (formerly Twitter) that a deportee plane had landed in the landlocked African nation of Eswatini, carrying five individuals convicted of violent crimes. Until then, news of the deportation planes had not been widespread.

A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request later revealed that the US had agreed to pay \$5.1 million (Rs1.4 billion) to Eswatini for accepting 160 deportees, nearly \$32,000 (Rs8.9 million) per person. As of July 2026, 30 deportees had arrived in Eswatini.

Ultimately, US President Donald Trump signed 27 bilateral agreements

with “third countries” to house deportees, all currently at various levels of fulfilment. In February 2026, the US Committee on Foreign Relations (CFR) released a report discussing the cost of these deportations to the five countries that had taken in deportees so far.

One of the biggest beneficiaries of these agreements has been Rwanda, which received \$7.5 million (Rs2.1 billion) for a quota of 250 people from the US. So far, seven deportees have arrived in Rwanda, which means the country received \$1.1 million (Rs306 million) per deportee.

Rwanda, however, had already shown its willingness to be a part of the global refugee market.

The United Kingdom faced sharp criticism when it announced that they were going to fly those seeking asylum to Rwanda. In June 2022, a dramatic last-minute ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) meant that a plane on the tarmac, ready to take-off for Kigali, remained grounded at London Heathrow.

Then there was the cost of those flights as well. Quoting a UK government source, The Guardian reported that the single chartered flight stopped in June 2022, which had seven asylum seekers on it, had cost half a million pounds (Rs185 million).

For its services, Rwanda received GBP290 million (Rs107 billion) in a plan that saw four people sent there, and when the plan was scrapped by former

Prime Minister Keir Starmer in 2024, the country sued the British government for GBP100 million (Rs37 billion) in The Hague’s Permanent Court of Arbitration, citing a breach of the contract they had signed with former Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

THE BUSINESS OF CONTAINMENT

While deporting is one method the West has used to keep refugees at a distance from itself, there has also been a flow of cash to keep refugees from entering in the first place.

One of the beneficiaries of this has been Türkiye. Türkiye became a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention in 1961, and introduced its own legislation for asylum seekers in 2014. Two years later, the European Union (EU) signed a deal with Türkiye, which meant that any asylum-seeker who reached the Greek islands just off the coast of Türkiye, could be sent back.

Since 2016, under this deal, Türkiye has received €12 billion (Rs3.9 trillion) from the EU in various tranches. In the short-term, this has decreased the number of migrants crossing over into Europe from the islands.

However, as Swedish anthropologist Ruben Andersson, author of *Illegality Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*, has explained: when one route closes, migrants who are desperate to escape poor conditions back home find other

ways to reach Europe.

Closing one route simply redirected migrants into more dangerous corridors, where outsourced security apparatuses have led to harrowing examples. A 2023 Al Jazeera investigation found that Frontex, the EU’s border control agency, was sharing migrant boat GPS coordinates with the Libyan militia known as the Tareq Bin Zeyad (TBZ) Brigade. The TBZ Brigade then pulled migrants from European waters and tortured them in Libyan jails, with Pakistanis and Bangladeshis facing the worst abuse.

THE COST OF THE MARKET

The global refugee market today not only operates solely through aid and has also been tied into trade agreements. Pakistan tenuously enjoys the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status with the EU, which gives it preferential access. However, the GSP+ status is contingent on compliance with human rights and, in the 2026 EU assessment of Pakistan’s human rights compliance, the country’s lack of protection safeguards for vulnerable Afghan refugee populations was directly reported.

The mechanism for outsourcing the human cost has changed, but the idea has remained principally consistent. For comparison, Gen Zia accepted refugees for Cold War aid, Türkiye for both EU financing and goodwill, and Rwanda and Eswatini for direct payments and diplomatic ties with the US. All of these methods have been costly, both financially and in terms of social upheaval.

Refugee outsourcing is today an enduring feature of global politics. Pakistan continues to regulate refugees under the colonial-era Foreigners Act of 1946. A Refugee Bill, introduced by North Waziristan’s representative Mohsin Dawar in 2023, was never debated in parliament. This decision has been detrimental not only to the refugees but also the communities hosting them.

Facing economic stress fuelled by wars and climate change, humans will continue to be on the move. The question is whether Pakistan and similar economies will continue to be part of a marketplace where powerful countries purchase distance from displacement, or become a country with a refugee policy grounded not by geopolitics, but by its own laws.

'Ainak Wala Jin' creator Hafeez Tahir slams AI remake of his popular 1993 TV series

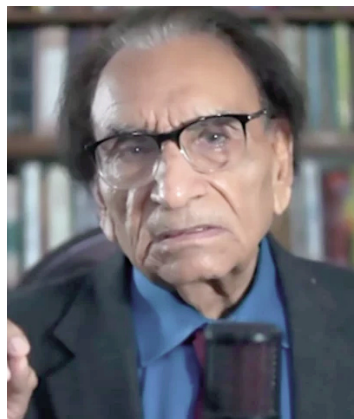
Hafeez Tahir, the creator of the iconic TV series *Ainak Wala Jin*, criticised the producers behind the AI-generated film adaptation, which was released in cinemas this July, alleging that his work was used without his permission.

In a video posted to his Instagram, Tahir urged the public to spread awareness about what he described in the caption as a “day-light robbery.”

In the video, he said he created

the original concept, title and story for *Ainak Wala Jin*, directed the series in 1993, and believed that the new AI-generated film stripped away the essence of his original work through AI-generated visuals, music and altered character designs.

“Today I am very angry because my life’s work, *Ainak Wala Jin*, is being taken and its name is being used in an AI-generated film that has been released in



theatres. I’d like to tell you all that this is my idea, my concept, my creation,” he said.

“I am the concept writer. I created the name, I directed it and made a quality serial,” Tahir said, adding that he later sold the rights to a private television channel, which, according to him, has continued to earn millions of views from the series on YouTube.

The veteran creator also alleged that the new film was

released without the filmmaker consulting or seeking permission from him. “Neither the filmmaker nor the cinema that released the film sought my permission,” he said.

Originally aired in 1993, *Ainak Wala Jin* ran for 152 episodes. The fantasy series followed the adventures of Nastoor Jin, played by Shahzad Qaiser, a genie who travels to the human world in search of a cure for his weak eyesight.

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Fort Bend County Recognizes Arwa Coffee House for Community Engagement

Arwa Coffee House was honored with an official proclamation from Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong in recognition of its role as a vibrant community gathering place. Hosted by Faheem Akhoond, the event brought together local residents, business leaders, and public officials for meaningful discussions on community issues and county initiatives.



Community Celebrates Nahaar Mirza’s Academic Excellence and Admission to Caltech

HOUSTON, TX: A graduation celebration honoring Nahaar Mirza was held at Shahi Darbar Banquets in Missouri City, bringing together family, friends, and prominent members of Houston’s South Asian community to celebrate his outstanding academic achievements and future journey.

The evening was MCed by Haani Mirza, who guided the program as guests shared their congratulations and best wishes for Nahaar.

Nahaar was recognized for graduating with an exceptional 4.7 GPA and earning

admission to the prestigious California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in Pasadena, California. His achievements and involvement with NASA MIT and other institutions, along with his passion for science, research, and technology, were also highlighted during the celebration.

Among those who spoke on the occasion were Sitara-e-Khidmat recipient and President of the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association Saeed Sheikh; PAGH President Siraj Narsi; PAGH General Secretary Amir

Zaidi; renowned poet and TV host Majeed Akhtar; and community leaders Captain Nasir Abbasi, Syed Feroz Ahmed, Azam Akhtar, G. M. Chishti, Tazeen Zahida, Farah Asad, and Rubab Khan.

The speakers praised Nahaar’s dedication, academic excellence, and accomplishments, while encouraging him to continue pursuing excellence as he begins the next chapter of his education at Caltech. They also expressed their appreciation for young students whose achievements bring pride to their families and

the wider community.

Noureen and Zeeshan Mirza, along with the entire family, expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the community leaders, friends, and well-wishers who attended and shared their blessings and encouragement with Nahaar.

The evening concluded on a warm and celebratory note, marking not only Nahaar’s graduation but the beginning of a promising new journey at one of the world’s leading institutions for science and technology.



Consulate General of Pakistan Showcases Record Mango Exports at Houston Mango Festival

Hosted by the Consulate General of Pakistan in Houston and supported by Farm Fresh, the festival showcased Pakistan's globally acclaimed mangoes while Consul General Aftab Chaudhry announced a record 190,000 boxes exported to the United States this year. The event also highlighted the growing popularity of Pakistani mangoes, strengthened business partnerships, and reinforced Houston's role as a key gateway for Pakistan-U.S. trade and cultural engagement.



A life-saving skill out of reach: The rising cost of learning to swim

Sociologists warn economic inequality, privatization and social barriers have turned basic survival skill into luxury for many

By Akhtar Pathan

KARACHI, Pakistan — Every year, drowning claims more than 300,000 lives worldwide, making it one of the leading causes of preventable death. Public health experts say the overwhelming majority of those deaths could be avoided if more people knew how to swim, practiced water safety and were trained to rescue and resuscitate victims.

To highlight that reality, the United Nations observes ‘World Drowning Prevention Day’ every July 25, urging governments, communities and families to recognize drowning as a preventable public health crisis and to invest in life-saving skills that too often remain inaccessible.

For Muslims, the call to protect life carries an additional moral and spiritual dimension.

While virtually every religion and system of ethics regards human life as sacred, Islam places exceptional emphasis on preserving it. The responsibility extends beyond governments and emergency responders to families, communities and individuals, all of whom are expected to take reasonable steps to prevent avoidable deaths.

Learning to swim, therefore, is more than acquiring a practical skill. In Islamic thought, when that knowledge is used to save or protect another person, it becomes an act of worship that carries continuing spiritual reward. Parents, scholars say, should regard teaching their children to swim as part of their broader responsibility to safeguard life.

At the same time, sociologists argue that swimming has gradually shifted from being a widely accessible survival skill to one increasingly shaped by wealth, geography and social inequality.

‘Acquiring life-saving skills is a noble endeavor’

Islamic scholar Irfan Adil says Islam’s view of the sanctity of life is reflected in one of the Quran’s best-known verses.

“Whoever kills a soul unless for a soul or for spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves one, it is as if he has saved all mankind.” (Quran 5:32)

The verse, he says, establishes the immense value Islam places on saving human life. “Any skill through which human life can be protected is a noble endeavor,” Adil says.

He argues that governments carry a responsibility to provide opportunities for citizens to acquire such skills, while parents and individuals have an equally important obligation to ensure that they and their children learn abilities capable of protecting themselves and others.

Islamic tradition, he notes, has long encouraged Muslims to learn swimming, archery and horse riding.

Many contemporary scholars, Adil says, interpret those teachings through the lens of modern society. Archery may now encompass learning to use equipment and technology required for protection and emergency response, while horse riding can reasonably include modern transportation such as driving.

The underlying principle remains unchanged: acquiring practical skills that

enable people to protect life during emergencies, disasters and accidents.

‘The Prophet encouraged learning to swim’

According to Adil, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) encouraged Muslims to learn swimming even though many of the earliest Muslim communities had little direct interaction with seas or large bodies of water.

Some scholars, he says, have interpreted that encouragement primarily in terms of physical health and fitness. Today, however, swimming serves purposes that extend far beyond exercise.

Millions of people depend on seas, rivers and lakes for their livelihoods. International commerce still relies heavily on maritime transport. At the same time, floods, storms and other water-related disasters continue to claim thousands of lives every year.

Climate change has only intensified those risks by increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, while rapid urbanization and increasingly sedentary lifestyles have left many people without basic survival skills.

Against that backdrop, Adil says, the Prophet’s guidance appears more relevant than ever.

Learning to swim is not merely a recreational activity or a practical necessity. When undertaken with the sincere intention of protecting others, it becomes an act of virtue that reinforces Islam’s broader emphasis on preserving human life.

He believes those who deliberately neglect opportunities to acquire life-saving skills bear a degree of personal responsibility, while governments share responsibility for ensuring citizens have access to swimming instruction and water safety education.

World Drowning Prevention Day, he says, should serve as a reminder that protecting life requires collective action by individuals, communities and governments alike.

What sociologists say about the decline in swimming

For sociologist Dr. Munazza Madani, associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Karachi, the decline in swimming proficiency has little to do with individual choice.

Instead, she says, it reflects the interaction of three structural forces: economic inequality, historical exclusion and changing cultural and environmental conditions.

The first is economic access.

As publicly funded municipal pools have disappeared in many places, swimming instruction has increasingly shifted to private clubs and commercial fitness centers, placing lessons beyond the reach of many lower-income households.

The result is that those who often face the greatest risks are also those least likely to receive formal swimming instruction.

Historical exclusion compounds the problem.

Swimming is frequently a skill transmitted from one generation to the next. Communities whose parents and grandparents lacked access to swimming facilities often pass along fear of water rather than confidence, creating a cycle of unfamiliarity that persists across generations.

Urbanization has introduced another

obstacle.

Natural places where previous generations learned to swim — such as rivers, lakes and ponds — have become less accessible or less safe, while many public facilities fail to accommodate privacy expectations associated with cultural or religious modesty, discouraging participation among some communities.

Madani says these factors demonstrate that inability to swim rarely reflects individual preference.

Rather, it is shaped by structural inequalities that require structural solutions.

A public survival skill becomes a luxury

According to Madani, commercialization has steadily transformed swimming from a public survival skill into what increasingly resembles an affluent luxury.

As governments reduced investment in municipal pools, many facilities either closed or shifted into private hands.

Private swimming academies operate on commercial business models that rely on relatively small class sizes and recurring monthly fees, making instruction prohibitively expensive for many middle- and lower-income families.

Commercial operators also tend to establish facilities in wealthier neighborhoods, creating what Madani describes as “aquatic deserts” across poorer communities where safe, supervised swimming facilities are largely absent.

Competitive youth swimming has undergone a similar transformation.

Affordable community leagues have increasingly given way to year-round private clubs requiring substantial financial commitment.

The result, she argues, is that access to a basic survival skill has become increasingly determined by household income.

Poor communities face the greatest risk

Madani says higher drowning rates among disadvantaged communities are rooted in systemic inequalities rather than individual behavior.

Families living in poverty often face hidden costs associated with swimming lessons, including transportation, equipment and time away from work.

Schools serving wealthier communities are more likely to maintain swimming programs, while underfunded districts have eliminated pools and water safety education because of budget constraints.

Limited public investment further leaves many lower-income neighborhoods without safe swimming facilities, forcing children and young people to seek recreation in unsupervised rivers, canals, quarries and other hazardous bodies of water.

How to transform swimming into an essential life skill

Madani says reversing these trends requires coordinated action in three areas.

Governments should classify municipal swimming pools as essential public health infrastructure rather than optional recreational amenities, while investing in life-guard training and securing hazardous water sites.

Education systems should treat water competency as a basic educational outcome by incorporating swimming and water safety

into primary school curricula. Where schools lack pools, partnerships with nearby aquatic facilities can fill the gap.

Communities, meanwhile, should promote more inclusive access by accommodating cultural preferences through measures such as gender-segregated swimming sessions and acceptance of modest swimwear.

WHO’s ‘PROTECT’ framework against drowning

Despite causing hundreds of thousands of deaths annually, drowning remains one of the world’s most neglected public health challenges.

To coincide with World Drowning Prevention Day, the World Health Organization released its latest ‘PROTECT’ technical package, offering governments a practical framework for reducing drowning deaths through evidence-based interventions.

The recommendations include supervised childcare away from open water, stronger regulation of boats and ferries, improved flood-risk management, survival swimming instruction for school-age children, physical barriers around dangerous water hazards and widespread public training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and safe rescue techniques.

Together, WHO says, these measures provide governments with a comprehensive blueprint for preventing avoidable deaths.

Men and children face the highest risk

According to the WHO Global Status Report on Drowning Prevention, children under five remain the most vulnerable group, while more than 90% of drowning deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, particularly across Asia and Africa.

Globally, males are about twice as likely to drown as females because they are more frequently exposed to open water and engage in riskier behavior.

Rapid urbanization, dependence on water transport and climate-related flooding continue to increase those risks.

The United Nations and global health authorities are urging governments to establish dedicated national leadership on drowning prevention, integrate swimming, water safety and first-aid instruction into school curricula, strengthen flood-warning systems and improve safety standards for commercial vessels.

Experts also emphasize the role of families.

Parents are encouraged to maintain constant, close supervision of children around water, remembering that drowning is often silent and may occur without splashing or cries for help.

Individuals are urged to learn swimming, safe rescue techniques and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, wear life jackets while boating and avoid intoxicants during water-related activities.

For Islamic scholars, public health experts and sociologists alike, the conclusion is remarkably similar.

Swimming is not simply a sport or leisure activity.

It is a life-saving skill that protects families, strengthens communities and, when used in the service of others, can become an enduring act of compassion and faith.

Houston's Pakistani-American Urdu-Speaking Community Calls for MQM Unity

Continued from page 17

Community members who have long supported various MQM factions believe that internal differences should never overshadow the larger mission of safeguarding the interests of the Urdu-speaking community. They argue that while political organizations may evolve and leadership may change, the fundamental issues facing Karachi—including local government empowerment, fair resource allocation, transparent census figures, equitable constituency delimitation, and sustainable urban development—remain unresolved and require a united political effort.

Several Pakistani-American community members in Houston have urged leaders from MQM-Pakistan, MQM-London, and Syed Mustafa Kamal's political camp to engage in dialogue and reduce political polarization. Their view is that, regardless of organizational differences, all factions share a common historical responsibility to advocate for the rights and aspirations of the Mohajir and Urdu-speaking community.

Members of the diaspora also note that Karachi is not only Pakistan's commercial capital but the economic lifeline of the country. They believe that prolonged political fragmentation ultimately weakens advocacy for the city's development and distracts from pressing issues such as deteriorating infrastructure, water shortages, unemployment, public transportation, healthcare, education, and local government reforms.

Houston has remained an active center of political engagement for Pakistanis from diverse backgrounds. Over the years, various MQM groups have organized peaceful gatherings, demonstrations, and community events in the city to raise awareness about issues affecting Karachi, the Mohajir community, and Pakistan's democratic process.

Prominent voices within the Pakistani-American Urdu-speaking community say the time has come to move beyond factional politics and embrace a broader vision of cooperation. They believe that a united approach—whether through organizational reconciliation or issue-based collaboration—would strengthen advocacy for Karachi's future and restore confidence among supporters both in Pakistan and abroad.

Their message is simple: political differences should not come at the expense of the millions of Urdu-speaking Pakistanis who continue to look toward MQM's various factions for representation. They urge all MQM leaders to place the interests of Karachi and its people above personal or organizational rivalries and work collectively toward democratic reforms, empowered local governments, constitutional rights, and a prosperous future for Pakistan's largest city.

Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong Honors Arwa Coffee House with Official Proclamation

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The proclamation was received by Rabail and Usama on behalf of Arwa

Coffee House, with community members, business leaders, and local residents joining the event to celebrate the recognition.

Addressing the audience, Judge Wong praised the importance of businesses that foster community engagement and highlighted the value of partnerships between local government and neighborhood organizations. During his remarks, he spoke about his responsibilities as Fort Bend County Judge, current county priorities, and his vision for the county's continued growth and development.

The event also featured an interactive question-and-answer session, giving attendees an opportunity to discuss issues affecting their communities directly with Judge Wong. Participants raised concerns, exchanged ideas, and learned more about county initiatives in an open and welcoming environment.

Guests described the gathering as both informative and engaging, noting that the proclamation ceremony reflected the strong relationship between Fort Bend County's leadership and the diverse communities it serves.

The event was organized by Faheem Akhoond, who thanked Judge Daniel Wong for attending and recognizing Arwa Coffee House. He also expressed appreciation to all guests and supporters who participated in the ceremony, with special thanks to Mr. Mohammad Beg for his support in making the event a success.

The evening concluded with networking among attendees, reinforcing Arwa Coffee House's growing reputation as a community hub where civic engagement, cultural exchange, and local leadership come together.

Sweet Success: Pakistan Consulate's Houston Mango Festival Drives Trade as U.S. Imports Nearly Double

Continued from page 17

the growing demand for Pakistani produce in the American market.

"The increasing demand for Pakistani mangoes in the United States reflects their exceptional quality and growing popularity," Chaudhry said. He reaffirmed the Consulate's commitment to promoting Pakistan's agricultural products, expanding export opportunities, and strengthening commercial ties with American businesses and consumers.

The Consul General noted that Pakistani mangoes remain among the country's most valuable agricultural products and expressed confidence that continued collaboration between exporters, importers, and trade organizations would further enhance Pakistan's presence in international markets.

Farm Fresh owner Zulfiqar Momin told American Chronicle that the overwhelming response to the festival demonstrates the growing appreciation for Pakistani mangoes among American consumers. He said Farm Fresh is proud to partner with the Consulate General of Pakistan in bringing the country's finest mango varieties to the Houston market. "Pakistani mangoes are unmatched in taste, aroma, and quality," Momin said. "Every year we see increasing demand from not only the Pakistani-American community but also from customers of many different backgrounds who have discovered the unique flavor of Sindhri, Chaunsa, and Anwar Ratol. We remain

committed to making these premium mangoes more widely available across the United States."

Among the distinguished guests was Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong, who praised Pakistani mangoes as "the best mangoes in the world."

Judge Wong said their unmatched sweetness, rich flavor, and distinctive aroma set them apart from mangoes produced anywhere else, adding that their growing popularity reflects the strong cultural and economic connections between Pakistan and the Houston region.

Prominent Pakistani-American community leader Imran Tahir, originally from Multan—widely regarded as the heartland of Pakistan's mango industry—also praised the country's signature fruit.

"There is simply no match for the taste of Pakistani mangoes," Tahir said. "They are the sweetest and finest mangoes in the world, and every Pakistani takes pride in sharing them with others."

Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, President of the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association, highlighted the long-standing appreciation for Pakistani mangoes among prominent American leaders.

He noted that former U.S. President George W. Bush and Texas Governor Greg Abbott have both enjoyed Pakistan's famous mangoes over the years. Sheikh also recognized Houston businessman Syed Javed Anwar for continuing the tradition of presenting Pakistani mangoes as gifts to influential American leaders, helping showcase Pakistan's agricultural excellence while strengthening goodwill and people-to-people ties.

Representing the business community, Salman Razaqi of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce emphasized the tremendous growth potential of Pakistan's mango industry.

"If the Pakistani government provides stronger support through export-friendly policies, international marketing, and trade facilitation, Pakistan's mango industry has the potential to become a \$1 billion export sector," Razaqi said.

The festival drew a large audience of elected officials, diplomats, entrepreneurs, importers, community leaders, and families from across the Greater Houston area. Guests enjoyed fresh mango tastings while learning about Pakistan's expanding agricultural exports and the opportunities for greater bilateral trade.

Beyond celebrating one of Pakistan's most cherished fruits, the Pakistan Mango Festival served as an important platform for promoting economic cooperation, encouraging agricultural trade, and introducing more American consumers to the premium quality of Pakistani mangoes.

With exports to the United States continuing to grow and international demand reaching new heights, organizers said the festival underscored Pakistan's expanding role in global agricultural markets and reinforced the country's reputation as a leading producer of some of the finest mangoes in the world.

PPP Houston Hosts Grand Reception for Sindh Government Spokesperson Sumeta Afzal Syed

Continued from page 17

Colachi Restaurant in Sugar Land. The event brought together party members, community leaders, and supporters for an evening of interaction, dis-

cussion, and celebration. During her address, Sumeta Afzal Syed highlighted the key initiatives and development programs undertaken by the PPP-led Sindh Government, emphasizing its commitment to improving public services, expanding social welfare, and promoting inclusive development across the province.

She also shared PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's vision for building a progressive, inclusive, and prosperous Pakistan, stressing the importance of democratic values, public service, and continued engagement with Pakistanis living abroad.

A cake-cutting ceremony was also held to celebrate the birthday of Asif Ali Zardari, adding a festive spirit to the occasion. Participants extended their best wishes to the President and reaffirmed their support for the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party.

Expressing her appreciation, Sumeta Afzal Syed thanked the PPP USA Houston Chapter and the Houston Action Committee for the warm hospitality and the memorable celebration. She commended the dedication of the organizers, volunteers, and party workers whose efforts made the event a success.

The gathering reflected the unity, commitment, and growing strength of the Pakistan Peoples Party's supporters in the United States, while reinforcing the party's connection with the Pakistani-American community.

Speaking on the occasion, Riaz Hussain Kakakhel thanked all attendees for their participation and support, noting that such gatherings help strengthen community ties and promote constructive dialogue between overseas Pakistanis and the party's leadership.

The evening concluded with fellowship among attendees, reaffirming PPP Houston's commitment to engaging the Pakistani-American community and supporting the party's vision for Pakistan's future.

Famous Foods with Quaid e Azam Foundation...

Continued from page 17

founding members of Quaid e Azam Foundation Dr. Asaf Riaz Qadeer, the event showcased Pakistan's premium mango varieties, including Chaunsa, Sindhri, and Anwar Ratol, highlighting the country's agricultural excellence and vibrant cultural heritage.

The celebration was attended by Consul General of Pakistan Aftab Chaudhry, Pakistan Association of Greater Houston (PAGH) President Siraj Narsi, M. J. Khan, Judge Daniel Wong, Dr. Riyaz Qadeer, Tahir Bhatti, prominent business leaders, community members, and mango enthusiasts from across the Greater Houston area.

Guests enjoyed tasting Pakistan's finest mangoes, celebrated globally for their exceptional sweetness, aroma, and quality. The event served not only as a culinary experience but also as a platform to promote Pakistan's growing agricultural exports and strengthen cultural and commercial ties between Pakistan and the United States.

Speaking during the gathering, the hosts welcomed attendees and expressed their commitment to bringing authentic Pakistani and Indian food products to American consumers. They noted that Famous Foods has become a trusted household name across the United States by providing high-quality South Asian

grocery products while preserving the authentic taste and traditions of the region.

Community leaders praised the initiative for showcasing one of Pakistan's most celebrated agricultural products and for bringing people of diverse backgrounds together through food and culture. The event also underscored the increasing popularity of Pakistani mangoes in North America, where the arrival of the mango season is eagerly anticipated each year.

The festive atmosphere featured family-friendly activities, networking, and conversations celebrating Pakistan's rich agricultural heritage. Guests sampled the distinctive flavors of Chaunsa, Sindhri, and Anwar Ratol—each renowned for its unique sweetness and texture—while learning more about Pakistan's contribution to the global mango market.

The successful celebration reaffirmed Houston's strong Pakistani-American community and demonstrated how cultural events centered around food continue to strengthen community bonds while promoting Pakistan's finest products to a wider audience.

State finds some registered Texas voters were wrongly flagged as potential noncitizens

Continued from page 17

Alien Verification for Entitlements, or SAVE, used to verify the citizenship of people registered to vote.

Adkins said the state is still working through the data and that she couldn't yet say how many of the 2,724 people had provided proof of citizenship to DPS and should thus be reinstated if they were already removed from the voter roll. She characterized SAVE as having "some inaccurate information" but added that "most of the data that we got out of SAVE was consistent with what DPS had."

According to election officials, the secretary of state's office said it plans in the coming days to send voter registrars additional information from DPS showing some of the flagged registered voters had in fact provided proof of citizenship to DPS while registering to vote or obtaining a driver's license or state ID.

There isn't yet an exact number of how many U.S. citizens' registrations were actually canceled or how many were canceled in total by counties after being flagged by SAVE, said Kristin Miles, the Bastrop County elections administrator and president of the Texas Association of County Election Officials.

"Counties are following appropriate list maintenance procedures under Texas law, and will ensure eligible voters whose registrations were cancelled are reinstated, and that only U.S. citizens remain on the voter rolls," Miles said in an emailed statement.

The Texas Secretary of State's Office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

According to the audio recording of the meeting with election officials, Adkins told election officials that once they receive the new information and review it, the state believes reinstating voters who had provided proof is "a very important thing to do to make sure that these individuals are not further impacted now that we have more information at our disposal."

When walking away is the only option

Behind every khula petition is a woman choosing to leave a marriage that had already broken down

Divorce has historically been underreported in Pakistan. Many marriages that ended informally—through separation, abandonment or families arranging a private resolution—never entered official records

By Faiza Shah

Every working day, Pakistan's family courts bear quiet witness to the unravelling of marriages. Long before the judge takes the bench, courthouse corridors begin to fill with women waiting alongside lawyers, parents and siblings, their files tucked under their arms. Inside those files are marriage certificates, identity cards and petitions seeking khula—the legal dissolution of marriage initiated by a wife under the Pakistani court of law.

Some women seek divorce after having endured years of physical violence. Others describe emotional neglect, infidelity, financial abandonment or relationships that slowly collapsed under the weight of incompatible expectations. The stories may be different, but they converge at the same place: the courtroom. When their husbands can no longer offer them safety and protection, women turn to the law in hopes to reclaim the right to decide the course of their own lives.

For generations, marriage in Pakistan was treated as a lifelong commitment that women were expected to preserve, often at considerable personal cost. A very dark axiom was repeated by parents upon marrying off their daughters: only your corpse should be returned to us now that you are leaving." Divorce, although legally permissible, carried a stigma so heavy that many women remained silent even when marriages became unbearable. The fear of being labelled a "divorcee," of bringing shame to the family, or of losing financial and social security often outweighed the desire to leave.

Today, that equation appears to be changing.

Across Pakistan's urban centres, more women are approaching family courts to seek khula, prompting renewed debate about what the increase actually represents. Is it a sign that marriages are becoming weaker? Or does it indicate that women are finally able to exercise a legal right that existed for decades but was often

inaccessible because of economic dependence, social pressure and deeply rooted gender expectations?

A complicated question in a society like ours. The answer to it is equally complicated.

The growing number of women seeking judicial divorce does not necessarily mean Pakistani women are rejecting marriage. For many, it represents a willingness to reject marriages that they believe have become unsafe, emotionally damaging or impossible to sustain. A 2025 qualitative study on women-initiated divorce in Lahore found that women often pursued khula as a last resort after attempts at reconciliation failed, with experiences of violence, incompatibility, neglect and deteriorating relationships among the key reasons cited.

At the centre of this shift is a legal mechanism that has existed for decades but is now being used more openly.

A legal exit

Under Pakistani family law, a Muslim woman can seek dissolution of marriage through khula by approaching a family court. The process is governed primarily by the Family Courts Act, 1964, alongside principles derived from Islamic jurisprudence and subsequent judicial interpretations. Unlike talaq, where a husband can initiate divorce through a legally prescribed process, khula allows a woman to ask the court to dissolve the marriage when she no longer wishes to continue the relationship. Traditionally, courts may require the return or waiver of haq mehr—the dower promised by the husband at marriage—although the treatment of financial rights has evolved through case law.

Recent judicial developments have reinforced that women's consent remains central to the process. In 2025, the Supreme Court of Pakistan held that family courts cannot automatically convert a failed cruelty claim into a khula decree without obtaining the woman's clear and voluntary consent, particularly where finan-

A 2025 qualitative study on women-initiated divorce in Lahore found that women often pursued khula as a last resort after attempts at reconciliation failed, with experiences of violence, incompatibility, neglect and deteriorating relationships

cial rights such as dower are involved.

For lawyers working in family courts, the change is visible not only in the number of cases but in the confidence with which women approach the legal system.

"There is more awareness of the law in urban centres," says Abdul Shakoor, a family lawyer who has been practising for 15 years. "In rural areas, marriages continue in the same [traditional] pattern, even if there is domestic violence or mental suffering."

Shakoor believes that for many women, divorce provides a necessary escape from situations where they feel trapped. "These laws are meant to end your pain," he says. "If a woman is scared for her safety, she should avail legal help."

However, he cautions against viewing every divorce petition through a single lens. "I have seen genuine cases where women were abused emotionally or physically by their husbands," he says. "But many cases are also based on emotions." He points to younger couples who marry against family wishes and later discover that their relationship cannot withstand everyday pressures. "If love marriages are not successful, sometimes couples want a divorce after six or eight months," he says.

He stressed that the challenge lies in balancing access to justice with the realities of changing relationships. "The divorce laws are essentially good for women," he says. "Initially after divorce, problems increase—custody issues, social issues, financial issues—but genuine cases deserve legal relief."

Not a sudden decision

Behind every petition filed in a family court is usually a much longer story.

Maria's marriage did not end because she wanted it to. She says she spent years trying to hold it together.

One Eidul Azha, her husband dropped her and their two-year-old daughter at her parents' home. He said he would return after the holidays. The visit that was sup-

posed to last a few days became permanent.

Two years later, he sent divorce papers.

Maria says the marriage had been marked by violence and humiliation. She recalls being blamed even during the traumatic birth of their daughter, when complications required an emergency Caesarean section after the baby's umbilical cord became wrapped around her neck.

"He blamed me for everything," she says.

She had not entered a marriage built on romance or familiarity. "It was not a love marriage," she says. "I had never even seen his face."

Even after years of suffering, she says divorce was not what she wanted. "I told my mother-in-law, if you want your son to marry again, that is fine. But let me live in your house with my daughter. I just did not want my child to be separated from either parent."

Her request was refused.

Maria's daughter is now 13. She says her former in-laws have never contacted the child.

Her story reflects one of the contradictions at the heart of Pakistan's divorce debate. Leaving a marriage may represent legal freedom, but it does not erase the emotional, financial and social consequences that follow.

Are more women seeking justice?

The phrase "rising divorce rates" has become increasingly common in discussions about changing marriages in Pakistan. Yet the reality is more complicated than the headlines suggest.

Pakistan does not currently have a single, comprehensive national database that tracks divorces across all provinces, making it difficult to determine the exact national divorce rate. Available figures often come from family courts, Union Councils and local government records rather than a centralised system. These numbers show an increase in divorce-related cases in several urban centres, but they do not necessarily mean that marriages are collapsing at an unpreced-

ed rate.

They may also indicate that more women are choosing to formally end marriages that previous generations might have endured silently.

In Lahore, for example, reports based on Union Council records have shown a significant increase in khula certificates issued in recent years. Lawyers and family court practitioners have also pointed to growing numbers of women approaching courts for dissolution of marriage. Researchers say that increased reporting can reflect improved awareness, easier access to legal remedies and greater willingness to register marital breakdowns rather than a simple decline in the institution of marriage.

This distinction is important because divorce has historically been underreported in Pakistan. Many marriages that ended informally—through separation, abandonment or families arranging a private resolution—never entered official records.

A woman who walks into a courtroom may now represent not only a marriage that ended, but also a social change—the decision to seek recognition and legal protection.

A changing idea of marriage

The reasons women seek divorce are varied. Domestic violence remains one of the most frequently cited factors, but lawyers and researchers say marital breakdown is rarely caused by a single issue. For some women, the problem is abuse. For others, it is years of emotional neglect, financial disputes, addiction, infidelity or interference from extended families.

Increasingly, however, women are also questioning marriages that lack emotional compatibility. This reflects a broader transformation in how marriage itself is understood.

For previous generations, marriage was often viewed primarily as a social and family institution. Compatibility, companionship and personal fulfillment were important, but they were frequently secondary to considerations of family reputation, economic security and social stability. Younger generations increasingly approach marriage differently. Many expect emotional support, mutual respect and partnership alongside traditional responsibilities. When those expectations are not met, some women are less willing to accept lifelong unhappiness as an unavoidable part of marriage.

Education and economic

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When walking away is the only option

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independence have played a significant role in this shift. A woman with her own income, professional identity or educational qualifications may have greater ability to leave an unhealthy marriage than someone who depends entirely on her husband or family for financial support.

This does not mean financially independent women divorce more often simply because they can. Rather, economic security can remove one of the strongest barriers that has historically kept women in difficult marriages. For decades, the question facing many women was not whether they wanted to leave. It was whether they could afford to.

If Maria represents women who have already crossed that threshold, another woman in her early 30s—who asked not to be identified—illustrates why many others remain. Married with two children, she says her relationship has long since broken down. She continues to live under the same roof with her cheating husband, but largely for the sake of their children. "He is not my priority anymore but my children are," she says.

In recent months, she has been trying to return to work after years away from employment. The decision, she says, is not driven by ambition alone. It is about ensuring that if she eventually chooses divorce, she can provide for her children without depending on anyone else. Work has also given her something she had long been missing: a sense of purpose beyond a marriage overshadowed by her husband's infidelity.

Her experience highlights a reality that lawyers and researchers repeatedly point to: legal rights alone do not guarantee

freedom. Economic independence often determines whether those rights can actually be exercised.

The stigma survives the law

While the law may provide a pathway out, social acceptance has been slower to change.

Divorced women in Pakistan continue to face a level of scrutiny that divorced men often do not. A divorced man may be described as someone whose marriage did not work out. A divorced woman is still frequently judged through assumptions about her character, behaviour or ability to maintain a household. The label itself carries social weight.

Women often describe being blamed for their marriages ending regardless of the circumstances. Some face questions about why they could not "adjust". Others worry about the impact of divorce on their children, future relationships or standing within their families.

For many, the hardest battle begins after the court issues the divorce decree. "There are custody problems, social issues and financial problems," says Abdul Shakoor. "When husbands are hurt sometimes their ego comes into play and they make things difficult."

Child custody remains one of the most emotionally charged aspects of divorce proceedings. Although Pakistani law prioritises the welfare of the child, custody disputes can become prolonged and deeply painful for both parents.

Women who leave abusive marriages may also find themselves facing economic uncertainty. If they have been out of the workforce for years, rebuilding financial independence can be challenging. This reality explains why many women contin-

ue to tolerate unhappy marriages despite having legal options.

Is society becoming more accepting? There are signs of change.

Conversations around domestic violence, mental health and women's rights have become more visible in Pakistan's public discourse. Younger Pakistanis are increasingly willing to discuss issues that previous generations considered private family matters.

Women are also finding communities of support through advocacy groups, online networks and legal awareness campaigns. But acceptance remains uneven. Urban, educated families may increasingly view divorce as a difficult but legitimate life decision. In many other communities, particularly where economic dependence and traditional expectations remain stronger, divorced women continue to face exclusion and suspicion.

The experience of divorce also varies significantly depending on class. A financially secure woman living in a major city may have access to lawyers, employment opportunities and social support networks. A woman in a rural area or from a lower-income household may face far greater obstacles. For her, leaving a marriage can mean losing housing, financial support and family protection. This is why legal empowerment alone cannot address the challenges women face. Access to justice must be accompanied by economic opportunities, social support systems and effective enforcement of rights.

A question of agency

The debate around divorce in Pakistan often becomes framed as a question of whether society is becoming more "modern" or whether traditional values are

being weakened. But for many women seeking divorce, the issue is far more personal. Without rejecting marriage, they are asking whether marriage can exist without dignity, safety and mutual respect.

A rise in women seeking judicial divorce may therefore represent two realities at once. It may reflect the persistence of marital problems that were previously hidden. But it may also represent progress: women becoming more aware of their rights and more willing to use the legal system when those rights are violated.

The law cannot guarantee a happy marriage. It cannot repair relationships that have broken down. It cannot remove the stigma that follows divorced women. But it can provide something that was historically denied to many women—the ability to leave. And that is what matters. Because empowerment is not measured by how many women choose divorce. It is measured by whether women have the freedom to make that choice at all.

For Maria, the court documents that ended her marriage did not erase years of hurt. They did not restore the relationship between her daughter and her former in-laws. They did not remove the questions society continues to ask divorced women. She wishes to remarry. However, the legal system recognised that her life did not have to remain defined by a marriage that had already ended.

The growing number of women seeking divorce in Pakistan is therefore not simply a story about marriages ending. It is a story about women renegotiating the boundaries of what they are expected to endure—and what they are entitled to leave behind.

As Europe burns, a climate coverup continues

Even as the crisis escalates, the UK Labour government is sidestepping the climate emergency

By Mark Hertsgaard

"To cover up one high level report ... looks odd," remarked Caroline Lucas, the former leader of the UK's Green Party. "To cover up two looks like a pattern." Lucas was commenting on reporting in the Guardian revealing that the Labour government was again burying an explosive report by UK military and intelligence leaders warning that the global collapse of ecosystems poses grave threats to the UK's security and food supply within as little as five years.

The UK "has no future" if it cannot "restore the natural world on which we rely for our food, water, and clean air," said Chris Hinchliff, who is among the members of parliament pressing the government to release the full report, rather than a shorter, redacted version. Even that version, which was obtained by The Guardian's Fiona Harvey, "paints a devastating picture of severe food shortages, price rises, migration, political destabilisation, and possible war, resulting from the collapse of ecosystems, fuelled by the human-induced climate crisis and over-exploitation," Harvey wrote.

Meanwhile, massive wildfires in France and Spain have been forcing hundreds of thousands of people to evacuate — and prompting forthright counter measures from governments. In Spain, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said the fires were effects of the "climate emer-

gency." For the second year in a row, the prime minister responded to ferocious wildfires by calling on political parties across the ideological spectrum "to reach an agreement, a State pact, to address the climate emergency."

As if to validate the UK spy chiefs' report in real time, food production in Europe is already suffering from the extreme heat of recent weeks, which has been "sucking soils dry." France's maize harvest is the lowest in 50 years; across Europe, nine million tons of grain have been lost. Such losses are of particular concern for the UK, which imports much of its food.

The UK report is notable for highlighting not only climate change but the related problem of biodiversity loss and collapsing ecosystems. For example, scientists have warned that continued logging and high temperatures are pushing the Amazon rainforest toward an irreversible shift into a savannah. That would drive further climate chaos as the Amazon transforms from an absorber into an emitter of carbon.

Aides to former Labour prime minister Keir Starmer twice quashed plans to release the UK report, Harvey reported, allegedly for fear that the climate denying Reform UK Party would attack Labour for putting climate concerns ahead of the cost of living. Climate denial persists in the UK media as well: Even as wildfires scorched Europe, the front

page of the Rupert Murdoch-owned Times (of London) featured a rant against the net-zero emissions goal that scientists say is essential to preserving a livable planet. And across Europe, most news outlets are still not reporting that climate change is what is driving these fires and heatwaves, even as the outlets illustrate their stories with "fun in the sun" images of people at the beach. "The pictures do not convey the severity of the moment Europe finds itself in," observed Al Jazeera English.

Andy Burnham, who replaced Starmer as prime minister on July 20, has yet to speak publicly about the buried report or climate change in general. He has said, however, that he is open to approving increased drilling for oil and gas off Britain's coast in the North Sea. This, as the smoke from wildfires in France and Spain — and in Scotland in the UK — is estimated to cause "well over 100,000 excess deaths globally," according to Dr. Theodore Keeping of Imperial College London.

Covering Climate Now's 89 Percent Project spotlights the reality that 80 to 89% of the world's people want their governments to take stronger climate action. In this summer of smoke and fire, the public is waiting for their politicians and their press to respond. "Voters are much more tuned into this than most of our [elected] representatives are," author George Monbiot said on the UK's Channel 4. "And indeed than most of the media is."



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