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Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA Hosts Inspiring Youth Leadership Talk by Rana Mashhood in Houston



HOUSTON, TEXAS: The Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA welcomed Mr. Rana Mashhood Ahmed, Chairman of Pakistan's

Continued on page 12

Ali Sheikhani Launches Papa Mart's Free Home Delivery Service with Grand Community Celebration in Houston



HOUSTON, Texas: at Sheikhani Plaza as Ali Sheikhani Group, officially Hundreds of families gathered Sheikhani, Chairman of the

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'Netanyahu belongs in The Hague': NYC mayor Mamdani mulls whether he can order Israeli PM's arrest

New York City (NYC) Mayor Zohran Mamdani has said he was in an "active conversation" with the city's Law Department over whether he had the legal authority to order Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's arrest if he visits the city.

Continued on page 12

Climate scientists have predicted greater flooding in Texas for decades. It's happening now

One of the shocking things about the storms that hit Texas last week is that rainfall of similar devastating strength struck almost exactly a year ago in many of the same places.

That tragic repetition may be less of a surprise to those who follow

Continued on page 12

Gov. Greg Abbott orders state health agencies to crack down on 'birth tourism'

Gov. Greg Abbott has issued an executive order to crack down on the practice of "birth tourism."

The move appears to be a response to the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding birthright citizenship, despite efforts by President Donald Trump to restrict it.

Continued on page 13

Rana Mashhood Visits Constable Ali Sheikhani's Office in Houston, Receives Honorary Civilian Advisor Appointment



HOUSTON: Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashhood Ahmed, visited the official office of Fort Bend County Constable Ali Sheikhani during his visit to Houston, where he was warmly received in the presence of Consul General of Pakistan and other distinguished guests.

During the visit, Constable Ali Sheikhani provided Rana Mashhood

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US treasury secretary welcomes Pakistan's economic reforms, return to capital markets

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent met Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb a day earlier and welcomed Pakistan's progress in implementing economic reforms and laying the groundwork for a return to international capital markets, the Treasury said in a statement on Wednesday.

According to a statement, Bessent emphasised the "importance of Pakistan's work to

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The Stage That Wasn't His

There are moments that history holds inside itself forever. Moments in which sweat and tears and the exhaustion of late nights and the distance from home and injuries and failures and then years of relentless work arrive at a single point where the gold of a trophy fills the eyes and language becomes insufficient. On the night of July 19, 2026, at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, such a moment arrived. Spain had won the FIFA World Cup. They had defeated Argentina, one to nothing. And that moment — that sacred, unrepeatable moment when captain Rodri's hands were about to lift that golden cup — belonged solely and completely to the Spanish players who had consecrated their lives to this single possibility.

But perhaps this is history's oldest grief: that some people always want to remain in the frame, whether the frame belongs to them or not.

Donald Trump once said that he likes winners and not losers. And perhaps a strange echo of that philosophy appeared on the MetLife stage that night. That sentence is not merely a political slogan. It is a window into a personality and a politics in which victory is not only achieved but displayed, in which success does not remain merely success but becomes a spectacle, and in which standing at the center of that spectacle begins to feel more important than the success itself. When Spain lifted the world's most coveted trophy for the second time in the sport's history, that night was not simply the end of a match. It was the summit of years of labor. It was the fulfillment of dreams belonging to players who had surrendered enormous portions of their bodies, their time, and their youth to this game on the long road from childhood fields to the world's largest stadiums. It was the moment in which the sacrifices of mothers and fathers who drove their children to practice through rain and cold and heat were finally honored. It was the reward for coaches who taught players to stand up again after defeat. It was the joy of millions of supporters who had passed through seasons of hope and despair alongside their national team. The World Cup trophy is, technically, a thing made of gold and metal. But inside it lives the smell of sweat and the ache of defeats and the pain of injured bodies and the entire unwritten story of inexhaustible discipline. When a captain raises it toward the sky, he is not lifting an object. He is lifting his nation's hopes and his teammates' sacrifices before the eyes of history. Such moments belong, in the deepest moral sense, to those who ran the field. Whose feet were wounded. Who conquered the fear of losing. Who conserved their breath and their strength for one another. In such moments, politicians are guests. The actual protagonists of history are the players.

But on this night, the scene shifted for a while.

During the match itself, Trump remained largely in the sealed glass of a VIP suite. Alongside him sat FIFA president Gianni Infantino, Spain's King Felipe VI, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Melania Trump. On the other side of what was presumably bulletproof glass, one hundred and twenty

minutes of punishing, physically grueling football were played out. Players ran through exhaustion. With every pass, an entire nation held its breath. With every attack, thousands of hearts beat harder. When Trump's image appeared on the stadium's large screens during the match, sounds of displeasure rose from various sections. Later, when he descended from his perch and walked onto the field for the trophy ceremony, the booing was louder and more unmistakable. But the real story of that night had not yet begun.

Trump joined the other dignitaries in presenting silver medals to Argentina's players. Then gold medals to Spain's. He shook hands with each one. Offered congratulations to some, a few words to others. To this point, everything followed the recognizable protocol of a formal ceremony at a global sporting event. Then the moment arrived that Spain's players had been waiting for.

Trump and Infantino together carried the World Cup trophy across the stage and presented it to Spain's captain, Rodri, who was standing before his teammates. Infantino completed his role and stepped immediately to one side, clearing the frame so that the winning team could inhabit their moment in full. But Trump remained where he was. Rodri shook his hand and appeared, by gesture and body language, to indicate the direction Trump might move — toward the edge of the stage, away from the group. Trump took a few steps as though he might indeed move off. But he did not descend the stairs. He shook hands with a few more players. Spoke with some of them. Then stopped and stood directly alongside the group.

Infantino, who had already moved to the side, suddenly came jogging back across the stage. His movements suggested a man attempting to usher the American president out of a frame in which, in a matter of seconds, Spanish history was going to be written. He may also have understood that physically pulling the most powerful man in the world away from a stage is not a matter of protocol alone but of politics as well. He may have remembered the year before, when Chelsea's players stood impatient and exuberant and ready to lift the Club World Cup and Trump remained among them in precisely this fashion — when confusion was visible on the players' faces, when Infantino had already stepped aside but the American president stayed in place beside the celebrating team.

One year later. The same stadium. The same manner of trophy presentation. The same FIFA president. The same American president. Even Spain's Marc Cucurella was present at both ceremonies — first as a Chelsea player, now as a world champion with Spain. History had not merely repeated itself but had staged a near-identical restaging, in nearly the same order.

Rodri raised the trophy into the air. Gold confetti shot from cannons and fell from above, spreading across the field. Spain's players screamed and leaped and clutched each other. A nation celebrated. But in the early photographs of that moment, Donald Trump was visible too — clapping, smiling, standing at the edge of the celebration. Then, shortly after, he was gone. He did not stay long



By Raja Zahid
Akhtar Khanzada

enough for the entire celebration to unfold in his presence. But he stayed just long enough to appear in the frame of the trophy's historic elevation. Perhaps that was exactly where the event's real meaning resided. A person is sometimes recognized not by years of politics but by a few unconsidered movements. A step that does not retreat at the right moment can become, occasionally, the symbol of an entire character.

Power has a strange property. It does not only confer the authority to make decisions. It also instills in a person the habit of light. When every door opens for you. When every person rises when you enter. When the cameras turn toward you. When a single sentence from you sets in motion the markets and the diplomacies and the news cycles of the entire world — then perhaps, gradually, a person begins to forget that some of the light is meant for someone else.

Power first brings a person onto the stage. Then it makes that person accustomed to the stage. Finally, it takes from that person even the awareness of when the stage ought to be surrendered. This is perhaps why the hardest lesson of leadership is not how to speak but when to fall silent. Not how to display strength but how to restrain it. Not how to occupy the center but how, on certain occasions, to carry oneself quietly into the background.

The world's great leaders were not great simply because they were present in every scene of history. Many of them were considered great because they knew when to make room for others. There is a form of dignity that consists precisely in recognizing another person's success without stamping it with the seal of one's own presence. In applauding quietly in someone else's moment and then stepping back.

Spain's victory contained no athletic contribution from Trump. He scored no goal. He did not stop a single dangerous attack. He did not fight a physical battle for one hundred and twenty minutes on a football field. The moral and symbolic right to that moment therefore belonged to Spain's players. The role of heads of state was to present the trophy to the winning team. It was not to become a permanent figure in the trophy's frame.

And yet this event is not only about one man. It is about the broader psychology of power that exists in some form in every society and every political system on earth. Rulers often lose the distinction between the state and their own person.

They begin to understand national success as governmental success. Then they transform governmental success into personal success. Eventually, they find it necessary to appear in the frame of every victory. This is the point at which democracy's real test begins.

Democracy is not merely the casting of votes. It is also the understanding that no individual is larger than the state. That no office is larger than the institution. That no ruler is the author of every national success. Democracy converts power from a center into a responsibility. It reminds the ruler: you are the host, not the owner. You are the custodian, not the inheritor. Your presence is for service, not for the occupation of every scene.

Trump's presence at sporting events has generated controversy before. The New York Knicks lost the only game of the NBA Finals he attended this year at Madison Square Garden, where he also received a loud round of booing. During this same World Cup, the United States crashed to a four to one defeat against Belgium in the round of sixteen, a match preceded by Trump calling Infantino to have FIFA reconsider a red card against American striker Folarin Balogun — a decision that was reversed, provoking international uproar, though the American team lost the game anyway. Earlier, at the tournament's draw in December, Infantino had presented Trump with the inaugural FIFA Peace Prize. Then at a reception at Trump Tower in Manhattan, Infantino had told the president: "You don't need people to compliment you, Mr. President, but this World Cup would not have been such an incredible success without you." The closeness between FIFA and the American president had already been generating questions before the trophy ceremony. The Rodri moment was therefore not received as a minor protocol slip. It was read against a much larger backdrop of power, proximity, and the politics of sport.

Sport has never been fully separable from politics. States use sport as an instrument of soft power. Rulers derive national image and political popularity from their presence at great competitions. Hosting a global tournament is never purely about the game. It involves economics, diplomacy, national prestige. But this is precisely why the maintenance of boundaries matters so much. A politician may present the trophy. He may not take the place of the players' celebration. The state may build the stadium. But the goal is scored by the player. The government may provide the security. But the right of victory belongs to those who earned it in the field. A civilized society understands this distinction. It knows that authority and entitlement are not the same thing. The right to be present at a ceremony does not confer the right to become that ceremony's central figure.

Some observers described what happened as a simple misunderstanding. It is possible that Trump genuinely did not know in which direction he was meant to move. It is possible that the protocol was unclear. It is possible that in the noise and the light and the crowd, Infantino's gestures did not fully register. A fair analysis cannot dismiss these possibilities. It is not right to render a final verdict on any human being from a short piece

of video footage. But when the same scene is repeated a second time in nearly the same manner, coincidence begins slowly to take the shape of habit. At that point, the question shifts from an individual's intentions to the symbolic significance of the pattern itself.

Some scenes grow larger than the intentions of their participants. They become a metaphor in the collective consciousness of those who witness them. The presence of Trump on the stage of Spain's victory became a matter of global discussion perhaps because people recognized in it an ancient desire of power — the desire to stand close to other people's triumphs and be illuminated by their light. Trump once said that he likes winners. Perhaps the gravitational pull toward winners is part of the same philosophy. Defeat creates isolation. Victory draws crowds. In defeat, people move apart from one another. In victory, many people arrive to claim their portion. But the real moral question is who, even in victory, recognizes their own limit. Who touches the trophy and steps back. Who puts a hand on the champion's shoulder without saying: let me stay in this picture too.

Life gives us many people who were absent from the entire journey toward success but arrive the moment the destination is reached and position themselves in the photograph. This sporting event became a large and global illustration of that particular human tendency.

Photographs are enormously powerful in history. They outlast language. The full detail of twenty-two players on a field, from kickoff to a captain's raised arms, can blur with time. But a single photograph survives through generations. The image of Lionel Messi in 2022 lifting the trophy while wearing a traditional Arab bisht is today the defining symbol of that World Cup. In the same way, the photographs of Spain's second world championship — in which the leader of the host nation lingers at the edge of the frame — may become part of the symbolic memory of that night. The difference is that one photograph became the symbol of a host civilization's gesture of honor, and the other photograph became the occasion for a question: did the host entirely release the champions' moment to the champions?

In leadership, presence and absence each carry their own ethics. There are moments when a leader must step forward. In crisis, the nation wants to see him. In war, he must make decisions. In catastrophe, he must stand among those who have suffered. But celebration calls for a different kind of presence. There, he must not allow his own visibility to overshadow other people's achievement. Real leadership is not the kind that demands applause for itself at every turn. It is the kind that also has the courage to applaud others.

A great leader is not one who stands at the center of every photograph. A great leader is one who knows that sometimes remaining outside the frame is itself the most dignified image of all.

Power elevates a person, certainly. But the true beauty of elevation is in the capacity to bow. The higher a person stands, the more is expected of him — that he will honor other people's rights, their space, their moment. Power

Continued on Page 04

Leadership battle in MQM Pakistan: Constitutional violation or political necessity?

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan is once again suffering from its traditional disease of internal factionalism and leadership struggle. In recent months, the gap between the party's two major groups, the Bahadurabad camp (led by Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui) and those supporting Mustafa Kamal, has been widening. This gap is not only eroding the party's unity but is also jeopardizing the party's legitimacy in the wake of the Election Commission of Pakistan's deadline for intra-party elections (October 15, 2026).

Article 13 of the MQM Pakistan constitution (which is deposited with the Election Commission of Pakistan) requires elections to be held every four years for all party positions by members' votes. The last elections were held on October 16, 2021, so the next elections should have been held on October 16, 2025. The party extended the term of the current leadership by one year through a resolution, but the Election Commission of Pakistan did not recognize it and gave a final deadline of October 2026.

As per the election procedure in Article 18 of the MQM Pakistan constitution, elections to provincial, divisional and district committees should be held through secret ballot. The convener, senior deputy conveners, deputy conveners are elected by a simple majority of the elected members of the Central Coordination Committee. While under



By Amjad Qaim Khani |
Houston

Article 13B of the MQM constitution, the Coordination Committee can decide by a two-thirds majority in case of vacancies. Under Article 14-A, the term of each office bearer is four years, and the party has to decide in a four-year meeting how many office bearers to be elected.

It is clear that the constitution emphasizes internal democracy, but in the recent controversy, allegations of its violation are being made. The election of Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui as the "Chairman" in

2024 was also criticized as a violation of the dissolution of the Coordination Committee and the constitution.

The Bahadurabad group (Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Farooq Sattar, Aminul Haq, etc.) controls the party's temporary headquarters. On the other hand, Mustafa Kamal's group (including Anees Qaimkhani, Furqan Ateeq) is raising the slogan of "new leadership" and a protest movement against the PPP's Sindh government. Since the changes in organizational officials in February 2025, protests by workers, separate press conferences and the separation of WhatsApp groups have made it clear that the party has effectively split.

Disagreements over relations with the PPP There are clear differences in the party, the division of organizational positions and the absence of any central committee meeting for a long time are also the main reasons for the differences. Mustafa Kamal's statement that "MQM is not anyone's personal estate" is a direct criticism of the current leadership. Similarly, Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui has accused those who joined the MQM after the merger of the party of being imposed on the MQM by state institutions. After which an open war has started between the two leaders.

The strict action of the Election Commission of Pakistan (return of the election symbol) against the

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf is in front of everyone. MQM Pakistan is also following the same path. The Election Commission of Pakistan has repeatedly given notices to the party, rejected the request for delay and ordered Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui to appear in person. If the intra-party elections are not held by October, the election symbol (kite) is in danger and the party's legal status may be affected.

This crisis is weakening the MQM's presence in the federal cabinet, reforms in local government institutions, missing workers and the struggle for the rights of citizens of Sindh. The Pakistan People's Party is trying hard to take advantage of this rift, while the Tehreek-e-Insaf Sindh is declaring the MQM "finished". Distrust among the workers is growing and the party's traditional vote bank in Karachi is in danger.

The internal democracy enshrined in the MQM Pakistan constitution requires that all positions be filled by votes from members. The leadership should rise above vested interests and hold transparent intra-party elections before the October deadline. Otherwise, this fight will not only further divide the party but also put the future of Muhajir politics at stake. History is witness that the MQM has gone through divisions time and again. Now the question is, will this leadership learn from this lesson?

We Are All on Our Own Odyssey

(Inspired by Christopher Nolan's film *The Odyssey*)

By A. Rehman Patel

It is often said that humanity's first migration did not take place across the geography of the earth, but within the hidden chambers of the human heart. The day mankind abandoned the eternal peace of inner contentment in favor of the restless pursuit of desire, an unavoidable journey began.

Thousands of years ago, the great blind Greek poet Homer wrote the story of a lost traveler after the epic conflict between good and evil. The Trojan War had ended. The enemy's walls had fallen. The banner of victory fluttered proudly in the wind. Yet the true tragedy was that the victorious Odysseus could not find his way home. Furious seas blocked his path, violent storms tested his character, and every new island became another illusion waiting to seduce him.

Three thousand years later, acclaimed filmmaker Christopher Nolan has brought this timeless human story to life with a new visual language and breathtaking cinematic scale. Yet the true greatness of his work lies not merely in technical brilliance, but in a profound existential question: Is humanity's greatest destination the conquest of the universe, or the return to its own authentic self?

Most people assume that *The Odyssey* is simply an ancient Greek tale or the story of one man's journey. In reality, it is far more than that. Every person alive today is living through a unique intellectual and spiritual odyssey of their own.

Modern humanity is more restless than at any other time in history. Some flee the smell of gunpowder and war. Others escape poverty. Many seek refuge from oppression, while countless parents leave their homelands simply so their children may inherit a safer and more peaceful sky.

But during this physical migration, it is not only borders that are changing. Human identities themselves are quietly migrating.

Today, migration is no longer confined to geography. People are leaving behind ancestral professions, drifting away from their native languages, becoming strangers to their own cultures and values, and, in

many cases, even migrating away from themselves.

At this pivotal moment in human history, another extraordinary traveler has joined our journey: Artificial Intelligence.

For the first time in history, humanity has created an intelligence capable of writing beside us, thinking in our style, producing art, and participating in intellectual and emotional decisions that were once uniquely human.

The possibilities are astonishing, but they are equally unsettling.

The real question is not how intelligent Artificial Intelligence will become.

The deeper question is: After this technological revolution, how much humanity will remain within human beings?

We have taught machines to learn, but have we abandoned the discipline of thinking for ourselves?

We have created oceans of information, but have we allowed the ancient springs of wisdom within us to dry up?

We have entered an age where the entire world fits inside the palm of our hand, yet many have lost the home that matters most: the human heart.

As our networks expand, our relationships grow weaker.

As material prosperity rises, inner peace declines.

As our screens become brighter, our faces grow dimmer.

We have gained extraordinary speed, but we have forgotten our direction.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of *The Odyssey* is that every age creates its own monsters.

In Homer's world, it was the one-eyed Cyclops who imprisoned travelers inside his cave.

Today, that modern Cyclops may well be the glowing eye of the smartphone screen that sits in our pockets, drawing humanity into the dark cave of algorithms.

This single unblinking eye steadily consumes our attention, our imagination, and our capacity for independent thought.

The tragedy is not merely that we use technology. It is that our preferences, opinions, beliefs, and even our perception of reality are increasingly shaped by algorithms rather than by our own conscience.

Our creative spirit risks becoming dormant.

Our ability to think deeply risks becoming outsourced.

Yesterday's storms were raging oceans.

Today's storms are fake news, manipulative politics, ruthless algorithms, war-driven economies, and limitless corporate greed.

Yesterday's enchanted islands trapped travelers through magical illusion.

Today's illusions are digital glamour, endless consumption, and material success that quietly exile us from our own conscience.

That is why the greatest battle of our time is no longer for territory.

It is for the preservation of conscience.

The greatest migration today is not from one country to another.

It is the migration away from our values.

Perhaps this is why every human being is living through an odyssey of their own.

The real question is not how far we have traveled.

The real question is whether, when this journey finally ends, we will find our way home—or discover that somewhere along the road, we lost ourselves.

For every true odyssey ultimately ends not at a harbor, but within the human soul.

And on the Day of Judgment, we will not be asked how many places we traveled in this world. We will be asked how close we remained to our Creator, and how truthful we remained to our own souls.

Highly Recommended: If you seek more than entertainment in cinema if you look for philosophy, reflection, and timeless questions about the human condition—Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* is a film not to be missed.

The Stage That Wasn't His

Continued From Page 03

that cannot govern itself is no longer greatness. It becomes performance.

The foundational principle of democratic civilization is precisely this: that rulers too are bound by limits. They are not above the law. They are not larger than the institutions. They are not the authors of every national success. Sometimes all they are required to do is sign the edge of a page and then hand the book over to the people who

actually wrote it.

Spain's victory was won by players. Rodri lifted the trophy. Ferran Torres scored the decisive goal. The entire team had spent themselves on the field. Their coaches had designed the strategy. Their supporters had maintained the faith. Politicians had neither run those distances nor endured that pressure. And so when the confetti rose into the air, the moral right to stand beneath it belonged most fully to those whose uniforms were soaked in sweat.

Perhaps the distance of just a few steps is all that stands between power and dignity. Perhaps descending from the stage one moment sooner might have said something about a leader's char-

acter that a thousand speeches could not. Perhaps this is why that video caused people across the world to stop and think.

The problem was not that Trump was there. As president of one of the three host nations, his presence was entirely natural. The problem was when he left. Many of the conflicts in life arise not from where we arrive but from when we go. People usually know where they need to be. The awareness of when to leave is far rarer.

Perhaps this is the hardest lesson that power ever teaches. To arrive on time is discipline. To leave on time is wisdom.

Trophies are not won by politics. They are won by players. Governments build stadiums, but

history is written on the field. Presidents present trophies, but the victory belongs to the hands that earned it. The greatness of leadership does not lie in associating itself with every success. The greatness of leadership lies in allowing other people's successes to remain, permanently and completely, under other people's names.

On that night, Spain won the World Cup. But that stage offered the world another lesson as well — about what power looks like when it forgets, even briefly, that some of the light belongs to someone else.

Because stepping off the stage is not always a defeat. Sometimes it is the greatest victory a character can achieve.

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Three-front challenge

The arc of Pakistan's security threats keeps expanding.

Malecha Lodhi

PAKISTAN'S ruling elites have long regarded the country's geographical location as a strategic asset enabling it to project itself as a significant regional player and bolster its geopolitical position. But location cuts both ways. It has also been a liability.

Few countries have faced the headwinds from their geography as Pakistan. An overbearing and hostile eastern neighbour, contested borders inherited from colonialism, unresolved Kashmir dispute, volatile neighbourhood and a western neighbour roiled by strife and foreign interventions, all combined to create a permanent security dilemma. That dilemma drove the country's enduring search for stability. Pakistan's long-standing strategic nightmare was having to confront two 'hot fronts' simultaneously. The imperative to avert this shaped its strategic thinking, security policy and strategy.

The tyranny of geography always weighed heavily on the country. That has not changed. What has changed is the scale and gravity of the threat. Pakistan now faces a three-front security challenge — from India on its eastern frontier, from cross-border terror attacks emanating from Afghanistan and unrest, terrorism and militant violence at home.

The most troubling aspect of the internal security situation is that never before have two of Pakistan's provinces been so destabilised at the same time. In the past,

both saw violence. But it was localised, confined to specific areas, not province-wide. Never before did Azad Jammu and Kashmir erupt with violent public protests as being witnessed today. The use of coercion and strong-arm official actions have only worsened the situation.

The spike in militant attacks across KP and Balochistan continues. In the first six months of 2026 there were over 200 terrorist attacks almost entirely by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan in KP, with 300 people killed. The areas of attacks have expanded, which shows a worrying increase in the outlawed group's reach. Balochistan saw more than 100 attacks in the same period, mostly by the Balochistan Liberation Army. The militant, separatist group has also demonstrated greater reach and diversified its targets. They range from railway tracks, gas pipelines, state buildings and foreign investment projects to the non-Baloch settler population. Meanwhile, the rising number of TTP attacks in the Pakhtun areas of Balochistan indicates its theatre of operations has expanded much beyond KP — even as far as Karachi as the recent attack on the Rangers headquarters reveals.

Balochistan has for decades been in crisis and stricken by insurgencies. But the cumulative effect of the failure to address its troubles has left the province completely alienated from the centre. Balochistan's problem is fundamentally political. People have

long felt disenfranchised, with their basic demands ignored. Anger among youth at the province's exclusion, lack of a legitimate political process and the state's constant branding of Baloch nationalists and non-violent dissident groups as traitors have all played into the crisis. This has provided fertile ground for outside interference, which has increased in recent years. Instead of pursuing political solutions, the state's managers have relied mostly on military operations and use of force to deal with the unrest. This has only deepened public disaffection and driven more people into the arms of extremist forces.

In KP, governed by the opposition PTI, the security challenge is compounded by the fact that the federal and provincial governments are at loggerheads. They also diverge on how to deal with militancy. The mistrust between the local population and security forces remains a major impediment in the fight against terrorism. The response to militant violence is predicated primarily on kinetic means absent meaningful efforts to win community support. Yet effective counter-insurgency rests heavily on trust.

AJK is facing unrest and a virtual public revolt, with the region paralysed by violent protests. This political crisis had been brewing for the past several years. Alienation grew with a governance system run from Islamabad, which also failed to address AJK's economic problems including youth

joblessness. Resultantly, a broad-based coalition of civil society and political groups, the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) emerged to press its economic and political demands.

Despite the authorities' earlier accommodation of some economic grievances, they later banned the committee and used force to deal with the situation. They failed to see the serious implications of losing Kashmiri hearts and minds for Pakistan's position on India-occupied Kashmir. Already prominent leaders from occupied Kashmir are voicing concern over the loss of life in AJK. The stand-off continues between protesters and law enforcers with no end in sight to the crisis. The issue of reserved refugee seats lies at the heart of the protests. JAAC demands their abolition as they are manipulated by the powers that be to make and unmake governments. With elections looming, there is no resolution yet.

The threats to Pakistan's security from its two external fronts remain clear and present. In the east, Pakistan faces an Indian government that routinely hurls threats. Having suspended the Indus Waters Treaty last year, it says it will not allow a single drop from 'India's rivers' to enter Pakistan. Other than weaponising water, India is significantly upgrading its military capabilities and has embarked on a major rearmament programme. More alarmingly, India is now putting its nuclear arsenal in deployment mode. It has mated 12 nuclear

warheads to missiles and operationally deployed them, according to the Swedish think tank SIPRI. This is a dangerous departure from the posture of recessed deterrence adopted by India and Pakistan, by which they keep warheads and launchers in separate locations. This aims to ensure a long fuse in a crisis. The undeclared shift in India's nuclear policy will have destabilising consequences for strategic stability, forcing Pakistan to respond to this emerging threat.

The western frontier remains exceedingly unstable. Relations with Afghanistan are frozen while the border has been closed and trade suspended since October 2025 when deadly clashes took place between the two neighbours. Hostilities erupt from time to time with Pakistan launching air strikes against militant targets across the border. Islamabad has sought to mount pressure and raise the costs for Kabul for its unwillingness to move against the TTP. But so far, this has not produced the outcome Pakistan wants.

Over the decades evolving security dilemmas pushed Pakistan to become a security state, prioritising defence over economic development, social services, democracy and other policy concerns. Despite the trade-off, it still struggles to secure itself. From hot borders to insurgencies at home, the arc of Pakistan's security threats continues to widen.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK and UN.

GSP gains and challenges

Both general elections since the status was granted have been mired in controversy

Pakistan's relationship with the European Union under the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) has been nothing short of transformative. As the scheme's largest beneficiary, Pakistan recorded 7.5 billion in GSP+ eligible exports to the EU in 2024, with tariff exemptions worth approximately 732 million. The EU now accounts for 28% of Pakistan's total exports, making this prefer-

ential market access a lifeline for our economy. And the GSP+ arrangement has not only delivered on its promise of increasing trade and creating jobs, it has also placed pressure on the government to improve its governance and human rights records.

It is true that our compliance record with GSP+ conditions has been patchy. Both general elections since the status was granted have been mired in controversy.

Our human rights record remains less than sterling, and personal freedoms, including media freedom, are still a long way from ideal. However, there has been legislation and groundwork to improve in many areas, including minority rights and the use of torture and other inhuman punishments. Unfortunately, some critics of the government - both at home and abroad - have been expending massive amounts of

time, energy and money to paint a picture of Pakistan that is so divorced from reality that it could be laughable, if not for the fact that their propaganda could put thousands of Pakistanis' livelihoods at risk.

The government certainly has to up its game if it is to maintain compliance with the revised GSP framework that takes effect on January 1, 2027. Most of the requirements are unquestionably

good, not just for the EU, but for the people of Pakistan. Coming into compliance and then exceeding the benchmarks is a win-win. But change will invariably be incremental. In the meantime, critics need to look beyond their myopic political goals and focus on what is good for the country. Trying to undermine the whole economy for political ends is not the wise path forward for anybody who wants Pakistan to succeed.

Trapped by the river

Despite promises of embankments, thousands of families remain on the Ravi's floodplains

By Asif Mehmood |

As the monsoon rains begin, water levels in the Ravi River are rising once again, reviving fears among thousands of families living along its banks. Many residents who lost their homes, belongings and livelihoods in last year's floods still live in the same low-lying settlements that government agencies themselves have classified as highly vulnerable to flooding. While the government says flood protection embankments are being built and affordable housing programmes being expanded, the question of permanently relocating these communities to safer ground remains unresolved.

Last year's flooding along the Ravi caused widespread destruction in Shahdara, Farrukhabad, Millat Park, Qaim Theme Park and other low-lying neighbourhoods. Floodwaters inundated hundreds of homes, collapsed walls, swept away livestock and destroyed small businesses. Residents say they received emergency assistance, but many have yet to recover financially a year later.

Standing beside the flood marks still visible on the walls of his home, Muhammad Iqbal, a resident of Farrukhabad, recalls how the water reached the neighbourhood within hours. His family had to move their children to the roof while their refrigerator, furniture, bedding and other household belongings were ruined. He said they are still repairing the house with borrowed money and that the financial assistance they received covered only a fraction of their losses.

For Shamim Bibi, a resident of Millat Park, the night of last year's flood remains a source of trauma. She said her children's books, clothes and dowry items were destroyed by floodwater. Although relief supplies and food assistance arrived, they were not enough to rebuild the household. Every monsoon, she said, her family relives the fear that floodwaters will once again reach their doorstep and inundate their belongings and lives.

Residents acknowledge that their neighbourhoods face recurring flood risks, but say

they simply cannot afford to move elsewhere. Many have rebuilt their homes by taking loans, selling jewellery or exhausting years of savings, making another relocation financially impossible.

Muhammad Ashraf, another resident of Farrukhabad, said floodwaters rose several feet last year, destroying almost everything inside his home. While authorities organised temporary evacuations, he said no meaningful arrangements were made for permanent resettlement, forcing families to return within days.

Nasreen Bibi, who lives near Theme Park, said many families are already burdened with debt and would struggle to absorb another disaster.

According to official figures, floods in 2025 affected more than 1,400 villages and settlements across Punjab and damaged over 213,000 homes. Experts say the figures demonstrate that emergency relief alone is insufficient. Long-term recovery requires sustained investment in livelihoods, safe housing, psychological support and disaster-risk reduction.

Following the floods, several government agencies also raised concerns about development along the Ravi. The Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) declared 44 housing schemes along the river illegal, while Pakistan's National Flood Protection Plan recommended discouraging permanent construction on floodplains and in high-risk areas through stronger legislation.

Yet the situation on the ground tells a different story. A visit to the affected communities found that not only have damaged homes been rebuilt, but new construction is in process at some locations. More than a year after the floods, no major flood-affected settlement has been permanently relocated.

According to official sources, the government initially considered relocating vulnerable communities living on both sides of the river. However, the plan was shelved because of its multibillion-rupee cost. Instead, authorities shifted their focus to constructing protective embankments and removing encroachments

within the river corridor.

As part of this effort, RUDA is building embankments on both sides of the Ravi under its river channelisation project. Project Director Rao Intizar Ali said a 46-kilometre embankment stretching from Ravi Siphon to Mohlanwal is being built in three phases. The first phase, covering 15 kilometres from Ravi Siphon to the railway bridge, is largely complete, with 13 kilometres already finished. The remaining phases will extend the embankment towards the motorway and Mohlanwal.

Ali said the project was launched to protect areas including Millat Park, Theme Park and nearby settlements that were badly affected last year. He added that the construction of a permanent embankment near Bakkanwal village has already shifted the river's course by about 500 metres. The redesigned channel, he said, will be capable of carrying around 580,000 cusecs of water, compared with the peak flow of roughly 230,000 cusecs recorded during last year's floods.

Meanwhile, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has accelerated preparations for the monsoon by identifying vulnerable locations, pre-positioning relief supplies, deploying rescue boats and preparing evacuation plans. Officials say that in recent years, Rs50 billion has been distributed among flood-affected families, while a separate Rs48 billion programme is funding projects to reduce urban flooding and riverbank erosion. Satellite mapping of settlements along rivers is also underway to improve future land-use planning in high-risk areas.

Urban planning expert Sani Zahra said the return of people to flood-prone settlements reflects not only economic hardship but also policy failures. She argued that the government must provide safe, affordable housing for low-income families while protecting natural waterways and floodplains from development. She suggested that public land could be used for affordable housing schemes, following successful models adopted in other countries.

Urban planner Erum Ashfaq said Pakistan's lack of a comprehensive national urban policy

has allowed housing developments to spread into river corridors and environmentally sensitive areas for decades, increasing disaster losses. She said stronger urban planning and stricter enforcement against construction in high-risk zones could substantially reduce future damage.

At the same time, the Punjab government is expanding housing initiatives for low-income and homeless families. According to official figures, more than 180,000 interest-free housing loans have been approved under the Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar and Apni Zameen, Apna Ghar programmes launched on the instructions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, while more than 170,000 families have already received loan disbursements.

The government says the schemes have so far provided more than Rs217.8 billion in financial assistance, resulting in the completion of 134,343 homes, while another 27,500 houses are in the final stages of construction. More than 1.278 million applications have been received.

Under the first phase of the Apni Zameen, Apna Ghar programme, 2,000 eligible families in 23 districts have also received free three-marla residential plots. Interest-free loans are being offered to help beneficiaries build homes on those plots.

Although officials describe these initiatives as a significant step towards addressing Punjab's housing shortage, residents living along the Ravi say their immediate priority is permanent relocation to safe ground. They argue that unless vulnerable communities are moved out of high-risk areas, alternative housing is provided and illegal construction is effectively curbed, every monsoon will continue to bring renewed uncertainty.

The visible scars of last year's floods may have faded from the walls of homes along the Ravi, but the economic hardship, anxiety and uncertainty remain. As another monsoon gathers strength, families living beside the river are asking the same question they faced a year ago: if the water rises again, will their homes survive this time?

Chosen for what? The moral burden of Abrahamic communities

Few narratives illustrate this better than the Quranic account of Bani Israel in Surah Al-Baqarah

Human beings have always been fascinated by the idea of being chosen. Nations seek it, civilisations claim it, and religious communities often find comfort in believing that they occupy a special place in the Divine plan. Yet one of the most profound lessons of the Quran is that being chosen is not a privilege to be celebrated; it is a responsibility to be fulfilled.

Few narratives illustrate this better than the Quranic account of Bani Israel in Surah Al-Baqarah. The Quran repeatedly reminds them of the extraordinary favours bestowed upon them: liberation from Pharaoh's tyranny, divine revelation, and a position of moral leadership among nations. "I preferred you above all peoples," the Quran declares. But what follows is not a celebration of superiority. Instead, it is a sobering catalogue of moral failings.

One may wonder why the Quran dwells so extensively on these shortcomings. The answer lies in the distinction between ordinary failure and leadership failure. Bani Israel were not judged against the standards of an average com-

munity. They were expected to embody the highest ideals of truth, justice, gratitude, humility, and obedience to God.

The Quran recounts episodes of ingratitude despite abundant blessings, reluctance to uphold divine commandments, concealment of truth, selective obedience, factionalism, hypocrisy, and the gradual hardening of hearts. These were not merely personal sins. They represented the breakdown of a community entrusted with moral leadership. Yet the deeper significance of these narratives is often missed. The Quran is not inviting Muslims to look down upon followers of another faith. Rather, it is presenting a timeless warning to them as the "chosen" community.

This lesson is particularly relevant today. Humanity is living through a period of profound uncertainty. Wars continue to devastate entire populations. Economic inequality has reached alarming levels. Political polarisation is tearing societies apart. Environmental degradation threatens future generations. Many institutions

that once commanded trust are struggling to inspire confidence.

Against this backdrop, the three Abrahamic traditions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - carry a unique responsibility. Together, they represent billions of believers and trace their spiritual heritage to Prophet Ibrahim (AS) - a figure revered as an exemplar of faith, courage, and submission to God. Despite their theological differences, all three traditions uphold remarkably similar moral principles: the sanctity of truth, the necessity of justice, the dignity of human beings, and the obligation to show compassion to others.

The challenge is not whether these values exist in sacred texts, but whether their followers embody them. The Quranic critique of Bani Israel serves as a warning against the temptation to confuse religious identity with moral excellence. A community may possess scripture yet neglect its spirit. It may preserve rituals while abandoning justice. It may defend doctrine while overlooking compassion. It may claim closeness to God while distancing itself from the suffering

of fellow human beings.

If the Abrahamic communities wish to remain relevant in the 21st century, they must move beyond the politics of identity and return to the ethics of responsibility. Their success will not be measured by the size of their institutions or the number of their followers, but by their ability to defend truth in an age of misinformation, uphold justice in a world of power imbalances, and demonstrate kindness in societies increasingly marked by division and indifference.

Perhaps this is the enduring message of Surah Al-Baqarah. God does not elevate communities so that they may feel superior to others. He entrusts them with a mission. The higher the calling, the greater the accountability. The story of Bani Israel is not simply a story about the past. It is a challenge to the present and a warning to the future. For all who claim the legacy of Ibrahim (AS), the question is whether they are worthy of the trust that chosenness demands.

Rana Mashhood Addresses Pakistani-American Community at Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA Event in Houston

Hosted by Founders Tanweer Ahmed and Dr. Asif Riaz Qadeer of the Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA, the Foundation welcomed Rana Mashhood Ahmed, Chairman of Pakistan's Prime Minister's Youth Programme, for a special address at the Jinnah Library in Houston. The event brought together Pakistani-American community leaders, professionals, and youth to discuss leadership, education, and opportunities for young Pakistanis. Tahir Bhatti also joined in welcoming the distinguished guest as the Foundation reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening ties between Pakistan and the overseas Pakistani community through youth empowerment, education, and community service.



Papa Mart's Free Home Delivery Begins as Ali Sheikhan Hosts PAPAFEST in Houston

Houston's Sheikhan Plaza came alive as Ali Sheikhan officially launched Papa Mart's free home delivery service, welcoming Chairman of Pakistan's Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashood Ahmed and the Consul General of Pakistan. The family-focused celebration featured a toy drive, community festivities, and marked a major milestone for the growing Indo-Pak grocery chain.



West Coast Sourdough Celebrates Grand Opening in Webster

West Coast Sourdough officially marked the grand opening of its newest location in Webster, Texas, on July 18, welcoming customers with complimentary sandwiches, family-friendly festivities, and the announcement of its Texas franchise expansion. Community members gathered to celebrate the brand's arrival and enjoy its signature handcrafted sourdough sandwiches.



UN's moment of reckoning

Conflicts in Gulf, Gaza and Ukraine, and institutional paralysis, force rethink of the Western-led global order

By Naveed Hussain

Global governance, in its current form, is facing a crisis of legitimacy and confidence. The United Nations, while not obsolete, is increasingly seen as little more than a talk-shop — with its reins in the hands of powerful states. The post-World War II global order, founded on sovereign equality and collective security, appears to be losing credibility as wars, geopolitical rivalries, and institutional paralysis cast shadows on its relevance in the 21st century.

More than eight decades ago, the United Nations was established to prevent conflict, ensure justice, and provide a platform where all nations — big and small — could be heard. But today, the organisation is struggling to live up to its founding ideals. In practice, it appears to be a forum where all members are equal, but some are clearly more equal than others.

The P5 problem

Nowhere is this imbalance more evident than in the UN Security Council. The five veto-wielding powers (P5) decide outcomes, often based on their competing geopolitical interests. While the UN Charter promises sovereign equality, decision-making remains concentrated among the P5, which frequently leads to deadlock at critical moments.

“The United Nations was established to promote multilateralism, yet its principles are increasingly being sidelined by unilateral actions in global conflicts,” says former ambassador Masood Khalid. “The international order shaped after World War II — and reinforced in the post-Cold War era — is now visibly fragmenting, a reality widely recognised in contemporary geopolitics,” he adds.

Aiza Azam, Director Strategic Affairs at StrafAsia, offers a more critical view. She argues that the United Nations was structured in a way that ultimately serves the interests of major powers.

“The way the UN Security Council is designed, particularly the veto powers held by the P5, it was never intended to enforce peace or decisions that run counter to their interests,” she says. “In that sense, the P5 countries have, since the organisation's inception, consistently advanced agendas aligned with their own strategic priorities.”

Global law, selective application

Ongoing conflicts have further exposed the UN's diminishing authority. In Gaza, Israel faces allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity, carried out in full global view. The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister Yoav Gallant, obligating its 125 member states to detain them if they enter their jurisdictions — yet compliance remains elusive.

“The United States has repeatedly used its veto in support of Israel during the Gaza conflict, illustrating how the veto power continues to shape, and constrain, the functioning of the Security Council,” says Khalid, a career diplomat with four decades of service in the Foreign Service.

As of late 2025, the US had used its



veto power at least six times to block draft resolutions calling for immediate and unconditional ceasefires, hostage releases, and unhindered humanitarian aid in Gaza. This is the latest example of how the UN's erosion is directly linked to the indiscriminate use of veto power by the P5 to protect their geostrategic and geopolitical interests.

“The veto power has repeatedly paralysed collective action at the United Nations. Russia has blocked resolutions on Ukraine, while US vetoes on Gaza have stalled humanitarian measures,” says defence analyst and author Sultan Mehmood Hali.

“These cases show how the will of over 190 member states can be overridden by a single permanent member, creating a hierarchy of sovereignty where a few states wield disproportionate influence over global decision-making,” he adds.

Circumventing the system

With the United Nations struggling to assert itself on Gaza, US President Donald Trump introduced his own 20-point plan to end the conflict. Although initially negotiated with Arab partners and endorsed by the UN Security Council, the body is now being managed by a US-led “Board of Peace,” which analysts say bypasses the UN.

Meanwhile, the Ukraine war, which started four years ago, has reshaped geopolitical alignments, with unilateral sanctions, financial restrictions and economic tools increasingly used by the Collective West as instruments of power. Analysts say these developments show a broader shift in how global influence is exercised — often outside traditional multilateral frameworks.

“The frequency with which states bypass UN platforms has increased, evident in conflicts such as Ukraine and the Middle East,” says Aiza. “For many, especially great and middle powers, it is often easier to operate through alternative coalitions and multilateral groupings that offer greater flexibility and allow them to pursue their own strategic interests,” she adds.

The return of power politics

If anything, the ongoing conflict in the Persian Gulf has laid bare the fragility of the existing international order. The US-Israel unilateral aggression against Iran — widely viewed as a clear violation of international law — has highlighted the inability of global institutions to rein in powerful nations as the world edges closer to a “law of the jungle” dynamic. UN deliberations once again resulted in stalemate, reinforcing perceptions of institutional paralysis.

“The United Nations was created to promote multilateralism, but today we are witnessing open and flagrant viola-

tions of that principle. Instead, there is an increasing resort to unilateralism in different conflicts and wars, with the principles of the United Nations being set aside,” says ambassador Khalid.

The ripple effects of these conflicts have been felt worldwide. Energy markets have fluctuated sharply and economic uncertainty has deepened. For many, these developments mark a turning point, suggesting that the global governance system is no longer quietly struggling but facing an overt crisis of credibility.

“The current international system leaves little incentive for meaningful reform — something even their own leaders acknowledge. While political will can drive incremental improvements, national interests ultimately prevail over broader collective gains,” says Aiza. “Looking ahead, minilateralism is likely to gain traction, offering states of all sizes greater flexibility to advance their interests,” she adds.

Reimagining global governance

Amid this backdrop, alternative frameworks and proposals are gaining ground. At the 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin, China's President Xi Jinping unveiled the Global Governance Initiative (GGI), aimed at reforming the international governance system to make it more equitable, inclusive, and representative of developing nations.

At the centre of this initiative is a call to return to foundational principles such as sovereign equality, arguing that all nations should have an equal voice in global decision-making. In sharp contrast to the American approach that “if you're not at the table, you're on the menu,” the GGI proposes that “all nations should have a seat at the table.” It also calls for an end to selective application of international law, challenging what proponents describe as double standards in the current system.

“The Global Governance Initiative (GGI) proposes five core principles: sovereign equality, adherence to international law, multilateralism, a people-centered approach, and practical action,” says Hali, who has written extensively on China's rise. “While the initiative continues to evolve, it places the United Nations at the centre of global governance and emphasises respect for the UN's role.”

Back to first principles

Contrary to claims by some Western critics, the GGI does not seek to dismantle or replace the existing system. Rather, it presents itself as an effort to reform and strengthen it. “At a rhetorical level, the Global Governance Initiative closely mirrors the United Nations in its emphasis on sovereignty,

respect for international law, and cooperation for mutual benefit. In many ways, its principles align with the broader aspirations of the existing international system,” says Aiza.

Rather than signalling a decisive shift in global power, it reflects the aspirations of many countries, particularly in the Global South and among smaller powers, seeking a more equitable framework to assert their rights and safeguard their interests within the international community, she adds.

The GGI's emphasis on “genuine multilateralism” — advocating cooperation over bloc politics and coercion — may prove appealing to many states, as it envisions a more inclusive global order where participation is universal rather than shaped by alliances or entrenched power structures.

And moving forward, experts believe the world is likely to see an increase in these forms of multilateral cooperation, with regions across the world increasingly recognising the value of working together while relying less on extra-regional actors.

GGI – part of larger framework

The GGI is not alone. It connects with a larger framework proposed by President Xi that includes Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilisation Initiative (GCI). Together, these initiatives form a comprehensive blueprint for a more balanced and cooperative international system.

China has introduced these initiatives as an alternative model to adapt to new realities and make adjustments to the international political and financial architecture.

“The GDI promotes sustainable development aligned with the UN SDGs. The GSI upholds indivisible security — every country's sovereign right to self-security, free from foreign interference. And the GGI seeks to reform the post-WWII international financial and political order, which no longer reflects current global realities,” says ambassador Khalid, who is known as one of the longest serving diplomats in Pakistan's Foreign Service.

Similarly, through the BRI, China has supported institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). “However, AIIB is not intended to replace the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund but to complement them, reflecting China's view that the existing Bretton Woods system requires additional support and reform,” adds Hali, the author of ‘The Road to Leadership: Xi Jinping.’

Supporters and skeptics

Critics have described these initiatives as ambitious, interpreting them as

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If anything, the ongoing conflict in the Persian Gulf has laid bare the fragility of the existing international order. The US-Israel unilateral aggression against Iran — widely viewed as a violation of international law — has highlighted the inability of global institutions to rein in powerful nations

a strategic attempt to reshape global order. Others argue that the existing system — despite its flaws — is still a vital platform for dialogue and conflict resolution.

Supporters, however, say that the current model is increasingly untenable, pointing to repeated failures in addressing major conflicts and enforcing international norms as evidence of its eroding legitimacy and the need for reform.

Ambassador Khalid doesn't agree that President Xi's initiatives seek to upend or replace the current global order with a China-led alternative. “In fact, elements of these initiatives have been echoed in UN policy frameworks,” he says.

He argues that China also has the capacity to translate these ideas into reality. “China is the largest trading partner for over 145 countries, including a majority of UN member states, and around 150 countries are part of BRI. Many — Pakistan among them, through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) — have benefited from its development projects,” says ambassador Khalid, who is known as a key architect of CPEC.

Aiza, meanwhile, believes that amid rising unilateralism by the US and growing calls for multilateralism, particularly from the Global South, President Xi's initiatives are likely to find a more receptive global audience. “I think there is greater international receptivity to initiatives such as the Global Governance Initiative because much of it aligns with the public image that China represents at the current moment, particularly when compared with countries such as the United States,” she adds.

At a crossroads

As crises increasingly spill across borders and institutions struggle to keep pace, the debate over the future of global governance has gathered new urgency. The convergence of geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and institutional gridlock suggests that the world may be entering a period of transition.

The question, experts argue, is no longer whether change is necessary, but how it will unfold — and who will shape it. Whether through reform of existing institutions or the emergence of new frameworks, the direction of global governance will have far-reaching implications for international stability and cooperation.

The UN headquarters, once a symbol of a defining global order, now stands at a crossroads: whether its founding principles can be renewed, or yield to emerging new visions like President Xi's GGI in an increasingly fragmented world.

'Netanyahu belongs in The Hague': NYC mayor Mamdani mulls whether he can order Israeli PM's arrest

Continued from front page

Netanyahu is wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) over allegations of crimes against humanity and war crimes — including starvation as a method of warfare — in Israel's onslaught on Gaza.

"I believe that Prime Minister Netanyahu belongs in the Hague," Mamdani said this week on The New York Times' 'The Interview', referring to the United Nations' International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In his interview, which was published on Saturday, the NYC mayor highlighted that Netanyahu was a "war criminal" who has been charged by the ICC.

"And what you will find is that is an opinion that is held by many, purely because of what his actions have wrought over these last many years."

However, Mamdani said he was unclear on whether he has the legal authority to order the New York Police Department (NYPD), which he oversees, to detain a foreign leader like Netanyahu.

Therefore, his administration was still mulling whether to arrest Netanyahu if he comes to NYC in September, as expected for the 81st session of the UN General Assembly.

"Whatever the law allows me to do in New York City, that's what we will do, but we won't be writing our own laws to that end," Mamdani added.

Danny Danon, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, quickly called out Mamdani.

"Instead of focusing on his responsibilities as mayor and confronting the rising wave of anti-semitism in his city, he has chosen to incite hostility and generate headlines by attacking the State of Israel," Danon wrote on X.

"It will not change a thing. Israeli Prime Minister @netanyahu will come to New York, address the United Nations General Assembly with pride, and stand before the world to state Israel's truth and its unwavering right to defend its citizens," he said.

"And if anyone should be arrested, it is @NYCMayor Zohran Mamdani."

During his mayoral campaign in September 2025, Democratic Mamdani had said he would order the NYPD to arrest Netanyahu if he arrives in the city.

"This is something that I intend to fulfil," he had told NYT, describing the Israeli premier as a "war criminal who was committing genocide in Gaza".

According to NYT's Saturday report, Netanyahu also commented on Mamdani's threat to arrest him, saying he was not concerned. He went as far as even accusing the mayor of supporting Palestinian resistance movement Hamas.

"I think he should look at who he's condemning, who he's praising," the Israeli premier said during

an interview this week with Sid Rosenberg, whom the NYT described as a "frequent critic" of Mamdani.

Mamdani had condemned pro-Hamas chants in January, describing the Palestinian group as a "terrorist organisation" when criticised by some circles.

Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister, is staring down an election — scheduled for October 27 — that many believe could be the defining contest of his political life.

He currently faces a long-running corruption trial and has led Israel on multi-front offensives that have been met with international criticism.

In April, Hungary's then-incoming prime minister Peter Magyar said the country will execute ICC warrants against anyone, after he invited Netanyahu to Budapest later this year.

'Billions of dollars to kill civilians halfway across the world'

In his wide-ranging conversation with the NYT, Mamdani again called Israel's actions in Gaza a genocide and highlighted the United States' military support for it.

"There is no respite from a genocide, no matter even in a moment of joy for the entire world," he said, recalling that an Israeli air strike in Gaza City killed aid worker Mohammed al-Wahidi who had been helping organise public screenings of FIFA World Cup matches.

"It's hard to explain to a New Yorker why their needs are not even being discussed. And yet we have billions of dollars to kill civilians halfway across the world," Mamdani said.

Replying to another question, he remarked, "It is hard to find a more bankrupt policy approach than what our country has done to Gaza and to Palestine, and how it hasn't been specific to any one party."

Asked whether one's commitment to calling Israel's actions in Gaza a genocide should be a "litmus test" for someone to be part of his coalition, Mamdani said it was "an important part" but refrained from describing it as a litmus test.

At the same time, asked if his coalition can include those who support Israel, the NYC mayor said it was critical to be able to "work with those with whom we might not have agreement on every single issue".

"And you can even see in the administration that I've put together, it's not an administration where at every job interview I ask someone, 'What are your thoughts about Israel and Palestine?' Frankly, it has very little to do with most of the things that I'm hiring for," he said.

There has been a growing rupture between US progressives and Israel over its attacks in Gaza.

Left-wing Democrats are pushing to end US aid to Israel as they campaign in midterm election primaries, while moderate Democrats promote sending money that would be used for defensive weapons only.

On Wednesday, nearly half of Democrats in the House of Representatives supported an amendment to cut off aid to Israel. However, the votes from 103 Democrats and one Republican in support failed to pass the measure.

US treasury secretary welcomes Pakistan's economic reforms, return to capital markets

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continue its reforms, become more economically self-reliant, boost growth and strengthen its economic resilience".

"Secretary Bessent welcomed the progress Pakistan has made in restoring macroeconomic stability and advancing fiscal consolidation, recognising the government's efforts to implement significant economic reforms," Treasury said.

The statement added that Bessent also expressed support for Pakistan's efforts to build greater economic self-reliance and commended the government's commitment to creating the conditions for a successful return to international capital markets.

The statement, however, did not address Pakistan's request for a \$10 billion exchange stabilisation facility.

Meanwhile, a statement issued by Pakistan's Ministry of Finance on Tuesday said that Aurangzeb highlighted Pakistan's journey from macroeconomic stabilisation to sustainable, export-led growth, while noting the economy's vulnerability to regional geopolitical developments.

The statement added that Senator Aurangzeb sought greater US support for Pakistan's path to the market, underpinned by improved access to international capital markets, higher foreign exchange reserves and enhanced sovereign credit ratings.

It said both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral economic cooperation, promoting greater US investment and advancing strategic projects.

The proposed \$10 billion exchange stabilisation facility would be a financial mechanism under which the US government, through the Treasury's Exchange Stabilisation Fund, would provide loans or other backstop facilities to Pakistan to bolster its foreign exchange reserves, ease debt pressures, and help stabilise the economy.

Such facilities are primarily used to prevent currency instability and, where necessary, support a partner country's currency through intervention in foreign exchange markets.

Rana Mashood Visits Constable Ali Sheikhan's Office in Houston, Receives Honorary Civilian Advisor Appointment

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with a comprehensive briefing on the responsibilities, jurisdiction, and operational authority of the American Constable's Office, explaining its role in law enforcement, public safety, and community engagement in the United States.

In recognition of his public service and commitment to youth development, Constable Ali Sheikhan presented Rana Mashood with an Honorary Civilian Advisor Appointment Certificate along with the official Constable's Badge, symbolizing goodwill and cooperation between community leaders in Pakistan

and the Pakistani-American community in the United States.

Speaking on the occasion, Rana Mashood expressed his appreciation for the warm hospitality extended to him in Houston and commended the outstanding contributions of Pakistani-Americans in strengthening relations between Pakistan and the United States. He also praised Constable Ali Sheikhan for his dedication to public service and for serving as a positive example of Pakistani leadership in American law enforcement.

Constable Ali Sheikhan welcomed the Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, describing him as an elder brother and an inspiring leader committed to empowering Pakistan's youth. He expressed confidence that Rana Mashood's leadership would continue to create new opportunities for young Pakistanis both at home and abroad.

The visit highlighted the growing engagement between Pakistan's public officials and the Pakistani-American community, reinforcing mutual cooperation, community service, and the shared commitment to strengthening bilateral and people-to-people ties.

Ali Sheikhan Launches Papa Mart's Free Home Delivery Service with Grand Community Celebration in Houston

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launched Papa Mart's free home delivery service during a festive community event that combined business innovation with family entertainment and charitable outreach.

The celebration marked the official start of Papa Mart's online grocery delivery service, offering free home delivery to customers across the Houston area. The event featured a vibrant atmosphere with family-friendly activities, surprise giveaways, and the distribution of thousands of free toys to children, drawing a large turnout from the local Pakistani-American and wider Houston communities.

The ceremony was attended by Rana Mashood Ahmed, Chairman of Pakistan's Prime Minister's Youth Programme, who was the chief guest, along with the Consul General of Pakistan in Houston. The dignitaries toured Papa Mart's state-of-the-art grocery facility and praised the initiative for promoting entrepreneurship while strengthening community engagement among overseas Pakistanis.

Addressing the gathering, Ali Sheikhan welcomed the distinguished guests and thanked the community for its overwhelming support. He said Papa Mart was created not only to provide quality Indo-Pak groceries but also to serve as a community hub where families can come together and benefit from convenient, affordable services. He noted that the launch of free home delivery reflects the company's commitment to making grocery shopping easier and more accessible for customers throughout the Greater Houston area.

Rana Mashood Ahmed commended Sheikhan Group's efforts to invest in community-centered businesses and acknowledged the role of Pakistani-American entrepreneurs in enhancing Pakistan's image abroad through innovation, service, and philanthropy.

One of the event's highlights was a

large-scale toy drive, where children received complimentary toys while families enjoyed games, entertainment, refreshments, and other festive activities as part of the "PapaFest" celebration.

The launch represents another milestone for Sheikhan Group, which continues to expand its presence in Houston through customer-focused ventures and community initiatives. The newly introduced online platform enables customers to order fresh groceries from Papa Mart and receive them at their doorstep without delivery charges.

The successful event concluded with community members expressing appreciation for the initiative, which blended business growth with a spirit of generosity and family celebration, reinforcing Ali Sheikhan's commitment to serving the Houston community through innovation and public engagement.

Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA Hosts Inspiring Youth Leadership Talk by Rana Mashood in Houston

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Prime Minister's Youth Programme, to Houston for a special address at the Foundation's Jinnah Library on July 19, 2026.

The event brought together members of the Pakistani-American community, professionals, educators, students, and community leaders to hear Mr. Mashood's vision for empowering Pakistan's youth and strengthening connections between overseas Pakistanis and their homeland.

During his address, Mr. Mashood highlighted the importance of investing in young people through education, entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership development. He emphasized the role of overseas Pakistanis in contributing to Pakistan's economic growth, global image, and future development, encouraging greater collaboration between the diaspora and youth initiatives in Pakistan.

The gathering also provided an opportunity for attendees to engage in discussions on youth empowerment, community service, and expanding educational and professional opportunities for the next generation.

The event was hosted by the Quaid-i-Azam Foundation USA at its Jinnah Library in Houston. Foundation leaders, including Tanweer Ahmed, Dr. Asif Riaz Qadeer, and Tahir Bhatti, welcomed the distinguished guest and expressed their appreciation for his visit. They reaffirmed the Foundation's commitment to promoting the ideals of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah while strengthening cultural, educational, and civic engagement within the Pakistani-American community.

The program concluded with a question-and-answer session, followed by networking among community members and guests, underscoring the Foundation's continued efforts to foster dialogue, leadership, and meaningful engagement between Pakistan and its diaspora in the United States.

Gov. Greg Abbott orders state health agencies to crack down on 'birth tourism'

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Abbott's order directs six health-focused state agencies to investigate schemes aimed at helping non-citizens travel to the United States illegally for the alleged purposes of giving birth and securing U.S. citizenship for their children.

"Texas will not tolerate the exploitation of our immigration laws by individuals traveling to the United States illegally or under false pretenses to give birth and secure citizenship for their child," Abbott said. "This executive order directs state agencies to investigate birth tourism schemes and hold accountable any provider that facilitates this fraud. U.S. citizenship is not for sale, and Texas will put a stop to individuals seeking to profit from birth tourism."

The nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute estimates that, at most, the number of babies born to tourists visiting the U.S. is less than 30,000 out of more than 3.5 million births per year.

"There's nothing in the law that says that somebody can't come to the United States as a tourist when they're pregnant," said Julia Gelatt, associate director of the U.S. program at the Migration Policy Institute. "We had a member of our World Cup team who was born in the United States just by accident because the airline decided that this soccer player's mom was too pregnant to get on a plane to go back home, even though that was her intention to go back home and give birth."

The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution automatically conveys U.S. citizenship on anyone born in the United States, regardless of the legal status of their parents. The U.S. Supreme Court, in its final decision of the 2025-2026 term, ruled that President Trump could not limit the practice of birthright citizenship.

"I think ultimately this is the behavior of a sore loser, someone like Greg Abbott who's unhappy with the ruling of the Supreme Court," said Austin-based immigration attorney Kate Lincoln-Goldfinch, "and now the state is looking for other ways to enforce something that is entirely legal."

Lincoln-Goldfinch worries the order could make hospitals wary of treating pregnant immigrants, endangering the lives of mothers and children alike. Houston-based immigration attorney Gordon Quan shares her concern, and said that medical practitioners may be forced into the position to determine pregnant women's legal status before they can even offer treatment.

"You want to make sure that mothers have an opportunity for safe delivery, no matter what their status is, whether they be legal or undocumented," Quan said. "I think this endangers mothers who are simply having children in the state of Texas, and there's no useful purpose."

Climate scientists have predicted greater flooding in Texas for decades. It's happening now

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climate science.

While it is tricky to attribute specific rain events to climate change, experts say they know enough about how the warming atmosphere and warming oceans affect precipitation to recognize trends.

"We're not saying that our warming climate caused these floods this year, last year" Shel Winkley, chief meteorologist at Climate Central, told Texas Public Radio's The Source. "But we understand how it's making it more likely, more frequent."

A warming atmosphere, for example, increases extreme rainfall risk because warm air holds more moisture that can lead to about 4% more rainfall for every one degree warmer the air becomes, Winkley said.

In a 2024 report, the Office of the State Climatologist of Texas noted that Texas had already seen up to a 15% increase in extreme rainstorms this century from the latter part of last century.

That report predicted a 20% increase in the frequency of those storms by 2036 that would more than double the previous odds of extreme rainfall happening.

The same report found that increased rainfall will contribute to a 10% to 15% increase in flooding in urban areas, potentially doubling the risk of floods from last century.

Ocean temperatures, made warmer through heat-trapping pollution, also contribute to stronger storms.

"Right now the Gulf of Mexico, even by July standards, is above average," Winkley said. "A warmer ocean can allow for more evaporation, more rain making moisture."

None of those ingredients assure greater rainfall, but when they run into the right weather conditions, they do make the rainfall worse.

Those weather conditions were in place last week.

Typically heavy rains are kept at bay in Texas summers by an area of warmer air in the upper atmosphere sometimes called a "cap."

Bob Fogarty, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in New Braunfels, said that cap stops the warmer, humid air blowing in from the gulf to rise up and create rain.

But, Fogarty said, ahead of last week's storms, a disturbance in the upper atmosphere "took the cap away."

"Because the air was so moist it produced very heavy rainfall," he said. "The moisture levels were unusually high for this time of year, and when it rained it rained a lot."

FO expresses 'disappointment' over EU GSP+ report, says it fails to present 'balanced picture of progress'

Pakistan expressed "disappointment" over the European Union's latest GSP+ assessment, saying the report failed to present a balanced picture of the country's progress.

"I would be remiss if I do not express disappointment with the

assessment and the report's overall narrative, which does not present a sufficiently balanced picture of Pakistan's performance under GSP+," Foreign Office (FO) Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said during his weekly press briefing.

Andrabi said the assessment covered 60 beneficiary countries and included an individual report on Pakistan, describing it as "the final monitoring report under the current GSP+ framework on Pakistan's compliance with the 27 international conventions."

"So it's the final report, the last of such series," he said.

The spokesperson said Pakistan appreciated the report's acknowledgement of "Pakistan's legislative progress during the reporting period and the country's continued compliance with the 27 international conventions."

However, he added that despite recognising "the breadth of reforms undertaken since Pakistan joined the GSP+ in 2014", the report placed "disproportionate emphasis on the lower than desirable level of progress in certain areas."

Andrabi said the GSP+ scheme remained central to Pakistan's economic relationship with the European Union, "supporting exports, employment, women's economic participation, poverty reduction and broader economic development."

"It is a mutually beneficial arrangement in that respect," he said.

He added that Pakistan's engagement with the European Union extended beyond GSP+ to areas including "development, migration, counter-terrorism, regional stability, climate resilience, connectivity and many other areas."

"We will remain constructively engaged with the European Commission and other EU institutions and remain committed to the effective implementation of international conventions underpinning the GSP framework," Andrabi said.

'Any hostile act against Pakistani-flagged vessels will be regarded as grave threat to national security'

Andrabi also unequivocally condemned continued threats against Saudi Arabia and commercial shipping in the Red Sea, warning that any hostile act against Pakistani-flagged vessels or the country's maritime interests would be regarded as a grave threat to its national security.

He said the Houthi militia had earlier this week threatened a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia's commercial shipping in the Red Sea and noted that there had been reports of attacks against Saudi ships overnight.

"We reserve the right to take all necessary measures in self-defence consistent with international law," he added.

The spokesperson said Pakistan "remains deeply concerned by attempts to draw the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia into the Middle East conflict" and reiterated its "unwavering support for the Kingdom's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."

"We issued the details yesterday on this subject, which you all covered," Andrabi said.

Referring to last week's attacks on Saudi Arabia by armed groups in Yemen, he said Prime Minister

Shehbaz Sharif had issued "a very eloquent, strong statement."

"Given that the escalation has continued, the words of our prime minister resonate even more profoundly," he added.

Andrabi said that amid growing hostilities and armed attacks, Pakistan reiterated its call on all parties "to exercise restraint" and was "continuing its diplomatic outreach in support of dialogue and diplomacy."

Pakistan's recent diplomatic engagements

Andrabi also highlighted Pakistan's recent diplomatic engagements aimed at easing regional tensions.

He said Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momineh visited Pakistan this week and met PM Shehbaz, the Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir.

"The visit reflects the two neighbours' close coordination on regional developments and Pakistan's continued diplomatic engagement with Iran," he said.

Andrabi said Pakistan has "repeatedly called for restraint by all sides" and maintained that "dialogue remains the only viable solution to prevent a regional conflict."

He said that, in line with Pakistan's advocacy for dialogue and diplomacy, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar spoke with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah on July 18, during which they discussed regional developments and emphasised de-escalation, respect for sovereignty and implementation of the Islamabad MOU.

"Both sides agreed to remain in contact," he added.

The spokesperson said that, on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila, FM Dar met Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Immigration and Expatriates Dr Badr Abdelatty

According to Andrabi, the two leaders reviewed developments in the Middle East and underscored the importance of de-escalation and dialogue while emphasising respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states.

"They also discussed the broader implications of regional instability, particularly for global maritime trade, energy security and the world economy," he said.

Andrabi said FM Dar also held a meeting in Manila with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, during which the two leaders exchanged views on the latest regional and international developments.

He said the Omani foreign minister appreciated Pakistan's "constructive role in promoting dialogue, de-escalation, and regional peace and security."

"Both sides expressed concern over the recent developments in the region, stressed the importance of upholding ceasefire, respect for international law, and working towards lasting peace and stability," Andrabi said.

The spokesperson added that FM Dar's diplomatic outreach would continue in Bishkek, where he would lead Pakistan's delegation to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

(SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers meeting during his visit to the Kyrgyz Republic from July 23 to 24.

"During the visit, FM Dar will call on the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and hold a number of bilateral meetings with his counterparts from SCO member states on the sidelines of the ministerial meeting," Andrabi said.

He said that before travelling to Bishkek, FM Dar arrived in Manila to lead Pakistan's delegation at the 33rd ARF Ministerial Meeting.

"Pakistan is an ARF member since 2004. We remain committed to promoting regional peace, stability and cooperation through dialogue and we remain a partner of ASEAN towards such endeavours," Andrabi said.

He added that FM Dar was holding bilateral meetings with Philippine counterparts and other participating dignitaries on the sidelines of the forum.

Among the meetings held in Manila, Andrabi said FM Dar met Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, with the two leaders reviewing "the full spectrum of Pakistan-Russia bilateral relations" and reaffirming their commitment to further strengthening cooperation in trade, energy, connectivity and other key areas, as well as enhancing coordination in multilateral forums.

"FM Dar also met Khalilur Rahman, President-elect of the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, and visited the headquarters of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), where he met the bank's Director General for Central and West Asia, Leah Gutierrez," he said.

According to Andrabi, they discussed the bank's development agenda and partnership with Pakistan and appreciated the contribution of Pakistani professionals serving at the ADB.

The spokesperson said FM Dar had also visited Shanghai on July 16-17 to attend the signing ceremony establishing the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO).

"The initiative aims to strengthen international cooperation on artificial intelligence governance, research and capacity building," Andrabi said.

He said Pakistan became a founding member of WAICO through FM Dar's participation in the ceremony and looked forward to enhancing international cooperation on artificial intelligence, particularly South-South cooperation for sustainable economic development.

While in Shanghai, FM Dar also met Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, with the two leaders discussing the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), regional connectivity, SCO cooperation, trade and the Pakistan-China strategic partnership.

"They also reaffirmed Pakistan-China all-weather strategic cooperative partnership through multifaceted sectoral cooperation," Andrabi said.

The spokesperson also referred to Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand's official visit to Pakistan on July 20, describing it as the first visit by a Canadian foreign minister in the past 20 years.

He said Anita held delegation-level talks with FM Dar and also met PM Shehbaz.

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.



FRESH FROM THE BAKERY
Danish & French Pastries | Chocolate Donuts
Muffins | Crossaint | Brown & White Bread
with Jam & Butter

COLD STATION
Assorted Pakistani &
Continental Salads
served with Condiments
Fresh Fruits

EGG STATION
Pakistani Omette
Double Cheese Omette | Scrambled Egg
Boiled Eggs

HOT STATION
Halwa | Aloo ki Bhujia | Channa tarkari | PURI
Lahori Paye | Karachi Nihari
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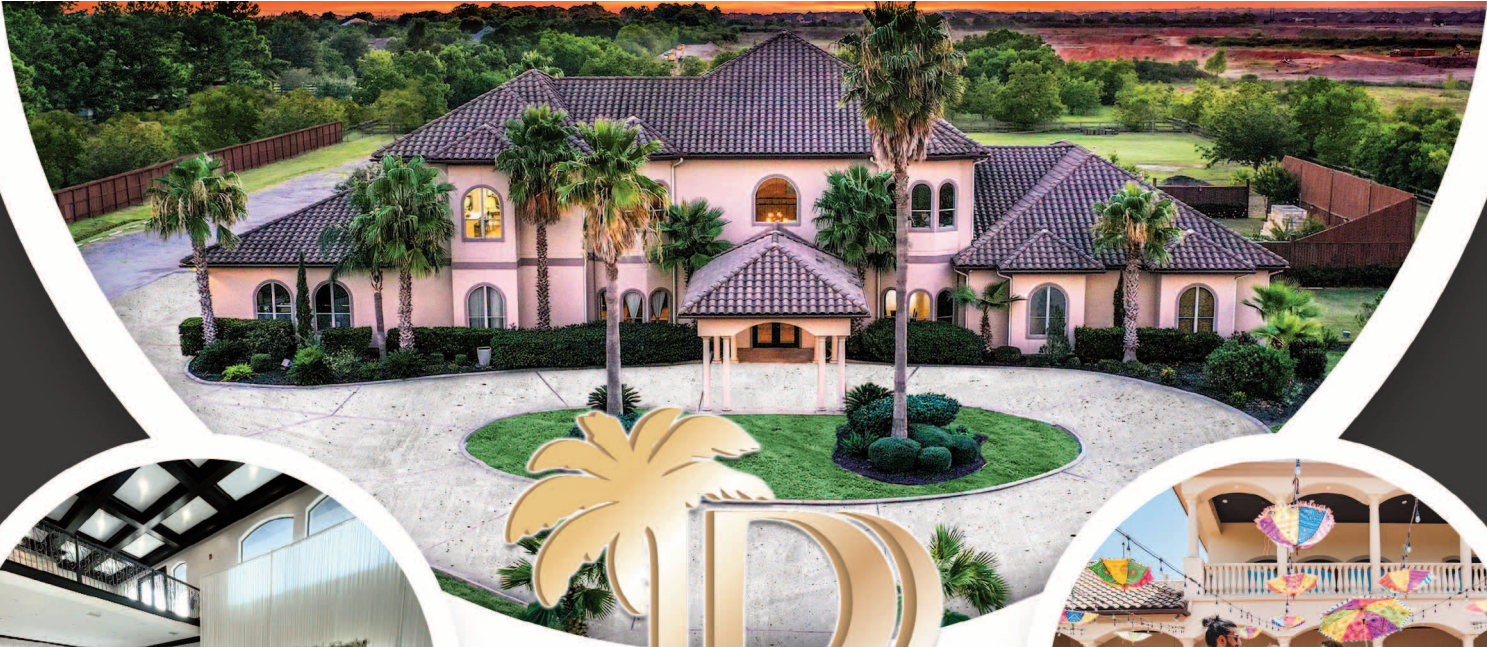
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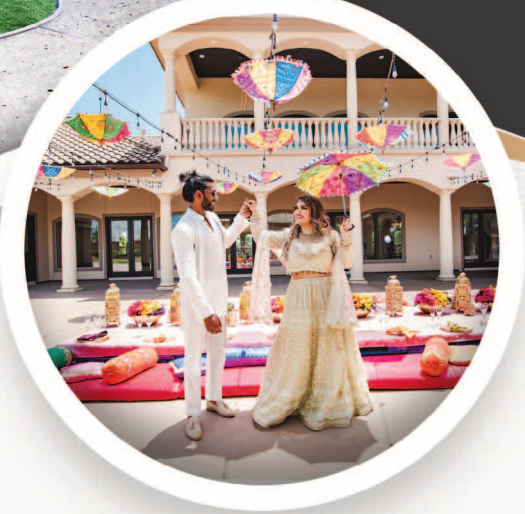
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PAKISTAN AND THE UNITED STATES: BUILDING A NEW ERA

Ahsan Iqbal Calls on Overseas Pakistanis to Help Build a \$1 Trillion Economy by 2035 Under the "Uraan Pakistan" Vision



By A. Rehman Patel
Houston, Texas

An important dialogue hosted by the International Academy of Letters USA in collaboration with Rice University brought together policy-makers, academics, business leaders, and members of the Pakistani-American community to discuss Pakistan's future in a rapidly changing global landscape.

The keynote speaker, Honorable
Continued on page 28

A National Appeal for a Stronger and More Viable Democracy in Pakistan

An Open Message to the Government of Pakistan, State Institutions, Political Parties, Parliamentarians, Bureaucracy, Judiciary, Civil Society, and All National Stakeholders

Shamim Siddiqui

If we are truly sincere about the survival, stability, and prosperity of Pakistan, then our foremost national responsibility is to establish a democratic system in its true spirit. No country can achieve sustainable political stability and economic development without strong institutions, public accountability, and meaningful participation of its citizens.

Winston Churchill once remarked that "Democracy is the worst form of government except

Continued on page 28



Texas invested billions to fight cancer. Abbott's H-1B visas restrictions may stall research, some warn

Texas spent billions recruiting scientists from around the world to turn the state into a cancer-research

powerhouse. Now, nearly six months after Gov. Greg Abbott restricted

Continued on page 31

West Coast Sourdough Marks Grand Opening in Webster, Announces Texas Franchise Expansion



WEBSTER, Texas — West Coast Sourdough celebrated the grand opening of its newest restaurant in Webster, Texas, on July 18, welcoming hundreds of customers and community members as the brand officially expanded its footprint into the

Lone Star State.

The grand opening event drew enthusiastic crowds, with the restaurant giving away 200 free 6-inch sandwiches to early visitors. Guests began arriving before the doors opened at 10:00 a.m., creating a fes-

tive atmosphere as they sampled the company's signature handcrafted sourdough sandwiches made with freshly baked bread and premium ingredients.

Located at 528 West Bay Area

Continued on page 31



Hundreds protest ICE operations in Houston, demand justice for Lorenzo Salgado Araujo

Protesters gathered at Ervan Chew Park Sunday afternoon, calling for transparency and accountability for the killing of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, who was shot by Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agents. Ronaldo, Salgado Araujo's son, said the family laid their father to rest Saturday.



Protestors at Ervan Chew Park Sunday July 19. The crowd gathered to call for "justice".



Protesters took over the bridge on Dunlavy, crossing the Southwest Freeway.



Protestors gathered at Ervan Chew Park Sunday July 19. They made demands for justice in the killing of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo at the hands of federal agents.

Hundreds of protestors gathered in Ervan Chew Park Sunday after-

noon in the Montrose neighborhood to demand transparency and account-

ability for the killing of Lorenzo

Continued on page 24

ICE is arresting relatives who come forward to take custody of migrant children in federal shelters

Attorneys say the federal agencies are using children as "bait" to detain sponsors, leaving kids waiting in shelters for months.

On an early April morning, two U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents approached Y.R. in the parking lot of her Dallas-Fort Worth area apartment as she was about to head to her construction job.

Y.R., a 37-year-old undocumented Honduran immigrant who came to the U.S. in early 2022, had spent nearly a year been filling out government forms and submitting to a back-

ground check and DNA test to get custody of her niece and nephew, who had been stuck in a federal shelter after they crossed the Texas-Mexico border in the spring of 2025.

After two weeks in a detention center in North Texas, Y.R., was released on bond by an immigration judge and reunited with her now 11-year-old niece and 14-year-old nephew in May — over a year after

they entered the shelter. Even though they have reunited, Y.R. is in deportation proceedings.

"I never thought about giving up on trying to get them. Even when I got arrested, I immediately thought about my niece and nephew," said Y.R., who asked to be identified by her initials out of fear that the Trump administration may retaliate against

Continued on page 24

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The quiet diplomatic friction between Pakistan and Japan

A joint statement issued after the Japanese premier's visit to New Delhi raised questions about Tokyo



By Kamran Yousaf

For decades, Japan has been among Pakistan's most dependable partners, one that has invested in the country's infrastructure, financed development projects, supported economic reforms and largely stayed away from the bitter politics of South Asia. Tokyo cultivated a reputation as a friend to both Islamabad and New Delhi, preferring economic diplomacy over geopolitical confrontation.

It was therefore highly unusual when Pakistan recently lodged a formal diplomatic protest with Japan.

The protest never made headlines. Neither Islamabad nor Tokyo publicised it. Both governments appeared determined to prevent a disagreement from spilling into the public domain. Yet behind closed doors, Pakistani diplomats conveyed their concerns in unusually strong terms following Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to India and the language contained in the joint statement issued after her talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The quiet diplomatic exchange underlined an uncomfortable reality: while Pakistan and Japan continue to value their bilateral relationship, strategic shifts across Asia are beginning to place that relationship under strain.

Pakistan's protest came only weeks after Japan expressed its displeasure over Pakistan-China joint statement.

During Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Beijing in May, Pakistan and China issued a joint statement that included a paragraph stating: "Both sides agreed that it is essential to firmly uphold the victorious outcomes of World War II, and oppose any attempt to revive fascism and militarism. The two sides expressed support for the postwar international order underpinned by international legal documents such as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation and other principles of international law for the maintenance of world peace and security and safeguard historical truth and international justice."

To most Pakistani readers, the paragraph appeared routine diplomatic language. But in Tokyo it was interpreted very differently.

Japanese officials believed the wording echoed China's longstanding criticism of Japan's evolving defence posture and implicitly questioned Tokyo's post-war strategic direction. Pakistan may not have intended to target Japan directly, but by associating itself with Beijing's narrative, it inevitably became entangled in one of Asia's most sensitive historical disputes.

The shadow of history

Understanding Tokyo's reaction requires revisiting one of the darkest chapters in Asian history.

During the Second World War, Imperial Japan occupied large parts of China, committing atrocities that remain deeply embedded in Chinese national memory. The 1937 Nanjing Massacre alone resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians according to Chinese accounts, while historians differ over the exact numbers. Throughout the occupation, Japanese forces were accused of widespread killings, forced labour and other war crimes.

For Beijing, the legacy of Japanese militarism is not simply history; it remains an integral part of contemporary diplomacy. Chinese leaders frequently invoke the lessons of World War II whenever Japan expands its military capabilities or debates constitutional reforms.

Following Japan's defeat in 1945, however, the country fundamentally transformed itself.



Pakistan's protest came only weeks after Japan expressed its displeasure over Pakistan-China joint statement

Its new constitution, particularly Article 9, renounced war as a sovereign right and prohibited the maintenance of offensive military forces. For nearly eight decades Japan embraced pacifism, focusing on economic development while relying largely on the United States for security.

That transformation enabled Japan to become one of the world's largest economies and one of Asia's leading development partners.

Today, however, Tokyo is once again reassessing its security posture.

China's rapid military modernisation, North Korea's expanding missile programme and an increasingly uncertain regional security environment have persuaded successive Japanese governments that the country can no longer rely solely on its post-war pacifist doctrine.

Japan has significantly increased defence spending, acquired long-range strike capabilities, strengthened military cooperation with the United States and expanded strategic partnerships with countries across the Indo-Pacific.

To Beijing, these changes resemble a gradual abandonment of Japan's post-war restraint. For Tokyo, they represent necessary adjustments to an increasingly dangerous neighbourhood. Pakistan unexpectedly found itself caught between these competing narratives.

Then came the India-Japan declaration

If the China-related paragraph unsettled Tokyo, the subsequent India-Japan joint statement alarmed Islamabad.

A single paragraph in the declaration received relatively little international attention amid numerous regional developments, yet within Pakistan's diplomatic circles it generated considerable concern.

For the first time in recent years, Japan explicitly associated Pakistan with cross-border terrorism in an official summit declaration with India.

The statement noted that the two leaders "unequivocally and strongly condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism from Pakistan."

The wording represented a significant departure from Japan's previous approach.

Following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, Japan had condemned terrorism and expressed solidarity with India but deliberately refrained from naming Pakistan. Tokyo instead called for restraint, dialogue and regional stability while avoiding endorsement of India's accusations against Islamabad.

This time, however, Japan accepted language that New Delhi had long sought from its international partners. That prompted Islamabad's formal diplomatic protest.

Although both governments chose to keep the matter confidential, Pakistani officials conveyed that such wording did not reflect the traditionally balanced Japanese position on South Asian disputes and risked undermining bilateral goodwill.

Why Tokyo's language changed

The shift is less about Pakistan than about Japan's changing strategic priorities.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi belongs to the conservative wing of Japanese politics and has consistently advocated stronger defence capabilities, constitutional reform and closer strategic cooperation among countries concerned about China's growing influence.

Under Tokyo's broader Indo-Pacific strategy, India has

emerged as one of Japan's most important strategic partners.

The two countries now cooperate across an expanding range of sectors—from defence technology and maritime security to semiconductors, resilient supply chains, digital infrastructure and clean energy.

Military exercises have become more frequent. Defence dialogues have intensified. Intelligence cooperation has grown.

The relationship increasingly resembles a comprehensive strategic partnership rather than a purely economic one.

Against that backdrop, accommodating some of India's diplomatic priorities may have appeared a relatively small concession for Tokyo.

India, meanwhile, has invested significant diplomatic capital in persuading foreign governments to publicly endorse its position on terrorism following the Pahalgam attack.

Many countries condemned terrorism but stopped short of explicitly naming Pakistan, partly because New Delhi publicly presented no conclusive evidence linking Islamabad to the attack.

Securing such language from Japan therefore represented an important diplomatic success for India.

Joint statements between heads of government are negotiated word by word. Every sentence reflects careful discussion between diplomats from both countries.

The inclusion of "cross-border terrorism from Pakistan" was therefore almost certainly deliberate rather than accidental.

Does this signal a policy shift?

Probably not—at least not entirely.

Japan continues to attach considerable importance to Pakistan.

Few countries have contributed as consistently to Pakistan's development over the past seven decades.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1952.

Since then, Japan has emerged as one of Pakistan's largest development partners through concessional loans, grants and technical cooperation.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has financed major infrastructure projects across Pakistan, including roads, transport systems, energy projects, water supply schemes and disaster management programmes.

Japanese assistance has supported education, healthcare, vocational training and human resource development.

Thousands of Pakistani professionals have benefited from Japanese technical training programmes.

Japan also played a significant role in Pakistan's economic stabilisation following natural disasters, including the devastating 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods.

Whenever Pakistan faced humanitarian crises, Tokyo was often among the earliest countries to provide emergency assistance.

Unlike many Western donors, Japan generally avoided attaching overt political conditions to its development assistance.

Its engagement was driven primarily by economic cooperation and regional stability.

An economic partnership built over decades

Perhaps nowhere is Japan's influence more visible than on Pakistan's roads.

Toyota, Honda and Suzuki have dominated Pakistan's

Continued on Page 21

Always under the spotlight

How algorithmic feeds commodified inner care, replacing genuine self-validation with a non-stop global audition



We are not comparing our messy mornings to our neighbour's messy mornings. We are comparing our ordinary, unedited lives to a shadow world of attractive, and performatively happy people on Earth

By Faiza Shah |

Open your Instagram or TikTok on any given day, and you will be unable to avoid an army of fashion influencers standing in front of their cameras in nothing but their underwear. The stated goal of these "Get Ready With Me" videos is to demonstrate style—showing how a specific top pairs with a certain set of pants. Yet, it begs an uncomfortable question: why must the casual viewer sit through the intimate prelude of them dressing themselves? What once was a deeply private, personal ritual has been transformed into a public exhibition for no discernible reason. If the goal is purely to showcase an outfit, they could easily hit record after they are fully dressed.

Instead, these creators choose to put their unclad bodies on display, presumably because they look good enough to show off. But they are not doing the rest of us any favours. By flashing their undergarments to the camera, they immediately set up a toxic comparison pool for their followers. While these influencers often wrap the practice in a false narrative—claiming that stripping down proves they are "just like anyone else"—this is not some equalising display of body confidence. Nobody asked for it. It is merely a calculated opening act designed to hook attention by trading basic human privacy for algorithmic engagement. Nobody, it seems, is living life without oversharing. If they are not sharing their own GRWM type reels, they are busy watching someone else's.

This trend is a symptom of a much deeper shift in modern psychology. We live in an era where the ancient philosophical command to "know thyself" has been subtly replaced by a modern imperative: display thyself. Every day, billions of people wake up, unlock their smartphones, and peer into a digital mirror. But this mirror does not merely reflect our image back to us. It shapes, molds, and recalibrates how we evaluate our worth, how we process our failures, and how we treat our own minds.

What began as a tool for connection has evolved into a profound psychological architecture. It dictates the terms of how we perceive who we are. By turning the deeply private act of living into a public performance, social media has fundamentally changed how we treat ourselves. It has shifted our focus from internal growth to external metrics, transformed genuine self-care into a marketable commodity, and turned our minds into hyper-monitored corporations.

Seeking approval

For generations, the human relationship with the self was forged in quiet moments of solitude. Journal entries, long walks, and uninterrupted daydreams allowed individuals to process complex emotions away from the judging eyes of the tribe. In these private spaces, people learned to sit with their flaws, heal from their mistakes, and develop an internal moral compass.

Social media dismantled these quiet zones. Today, when we experience a milestone, a heartbreak, or even a quiet moment of beauty, our first instinct is often to capture and broadcast it. The implications of this shift are profound. We are transforming from independent individuals into curators of our own lives. We are constantly managing a brand for an audience of peers, strangers, and algorithms.

When we view ourselves through the lens of an audience, our self-treatment changes in several critical ways:

The quantifiable moments: We begin to score our experiences. A beautiful sunset or a hard-earned achievement loses value if it fails to perform well online. We treat our accomplishments not as personal victories, but as content that requires validation through likes, views, and comments.

The fractured identity: This creates a painful split between what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called our *habitus*—our deeply ingrained, real-world self—and our online image. We suffer a divide between the polished online persona and the messy, anxious human being sitting on the couch. The wider this gap grows, the more we reject our true selves. We end up loving the avatar we created while loathing the person we actually are.

No processing time: When every free moment is filled with scrolling, we rob our brains of the downtime needed to process difficult emotions. Instead of treating our sadness or anxiety with gentle curiosity, we smother it with a fresh dopamine hit from a trending video.



The digital world is here to stay, and it offers genuine benefits of connection, learning, and community. The challenge of our time is not to destroy the digital tools, but to rebuild the boundary between our online presence and our inner sanctuary

By constantly looking outward for approval, we forget how to validate ourselves from within. We treat ourselves like politicians on a permanent campaign trail, constantly checking the polling data of notifications to see if we are allowed to feel good about who we are. We forget to consider: are we that important?

The social media "cave"

The second profound shift is the illusion of a "standard" lifestyle. Human beings are evolutionarily wired to compare themselves to others to fit into a community. For centuries, that comparison pool was small: your neighbours, your classmates, or your coworkers. You compared your reality to their reality.

Social media expanded that small pool into a global arena of billions. In doing so, it resurrected an ancient psychological trap first described by the philosopher Plato in his Allegory of the Cave.

Plato described prisoners chained inside a dark cave, forced to look at a blank wall. Behind them, a fire burns, and puppeteers carry shapes across the light, casting shadows onto the wall. Having never seen anything else, the prisoners believe those flickering shadows are reality itself. As Plato observed, "The truth would be to them just nothing but the shadows of the images." They praise those who understand the shadows best, unaware that they are worshipping mere illusions.

Today, the smartphone screen is our cave wall. The algorithmic feeds act as the fire, and influencers, brands, and peers are the puppeteers casting highly stylised, deeply curated shadows of human existence. We sit in the digital dark, staring at a screen, mistaking these filtered illusions for the true standard of life.

We are not comparing our messy mornings to our neighbour's messy mornings. We are comparing our ordinary, unedited lives to a shadow world of attractive, and performatively happy people on Earth. This constant exposure creates a quiet, ongoing trauma of perceived inadequacy. Instead of accepting our lot in life, we are relentlessly correcting our reality to match someone else's.

Living a myth

Under the influence of these digital shadows, we no longer treat ourselves as human beings to be nurtured. Instead, we view ourselves as commodities to be optimised. This mirrors what French philosopher Michel Foucault called the "technologies of the self"—the ways in which modern society conditions us to monitor, manage, and regulate our own bodies and minds to match rigid social standards.

We are bombarded with content telling us how to optimise our sleep, our diets, our careers, our morning routines, and even our spiritual lives.

If we wake up tired and achy, we don't treat ourselves with compassion; we view it as a failure of our routine. If we feel sad, we assume we haven't bought the right journal or followed the right wellness influencer. We treat our natural human variances—our bad days, our soft bodies, our normal periods of grief or stagnation—as defects that need to be fixed.

The commodity of self-care

Perhaps the greatest irony of the digital age is what has happened to the concept of self-care. True self-care is often difficult, boring, and imperceptible. It looks like setting boundaries, saying no to people, paying off debts, going to therapy, or getting to bed on time. It is a quiet, radical commitment to your own well-being.

Social media has repackaged this deep, internal work into an expensive aesthetic. Karl Marx coined the term commodity fetishism to describe how modern markets strip the human reality out of things and replace them with a price tag. Online, "treating yourself" has been commodified into buying luxury skincare, taking photos at expensive wellness retreats, or purchasing organic green juices. This commercialisation tricks us into practicing a shallow version of kindness, and ultimately signing up for retail therapy. When we feel burned out by a hyper-competitive world, we are told to buy something to fix it. We treat the symptoms of our digital exhaustion with consumer goods, rather than addressing the root cause: our fractured attention and constant self-judgment.

Under the spotlight

When the phone camera is pointing at you or you are posting to your feed, you question yourself: Am I posing right? Is this caption safe? Will they judge me?

We have traded our private lives for a non-stop, global audi-



Under the influence of these digital shadows, we no longer treat ourselves as human beings to be nurtured. Instead, we view ourselves as commodities to be optimised

tion.

In a traditional theater, the actor performs under blinding spotlights, unable to see the audience sitting in the dark. Social media has built this permanent stage right inside our minds. The spotlights are our smartphone screens, and the invisible audience is the collective gaze of our follower list, our peers, and the faceless algorithm. And the performance can never truly end.

We are no longer living; we are perpetually auditioning for the role of ourselves. We treat our day-to-day existence not as a private experience to be felt, but as a script to be performed:

The Internalised director: When preparing a meal, dressing for the day, or reading a book, a voice whispers, "How will this play to the crowd?" We stop experiencing the moment for its raw value and begin staging it for a potential observer.

The scripted life: We carefully monitor our thoughts, emotions, and vulnerabilities, filtering out anything that wouldn't survive a public review. The natural, messy evolution of human thought is crushed in favour of safe, sterile, and widely accepted dialogue.

Chasing the limelight: This constant performance leaves our nervous systems in a permanent state of stage fright. We treat ourselves not with the gentle ease of a creature at rest, but with the hyper-vigilance of a performer terrified of getting booed off the stage.

Reclaiming the sanctuary within

We cannot simply retreat to an analogue past and delete our profiles. The digital world is here to stay, and it offers genuine benefits of connection, learning, and community. The challenge of our time is not to destroy the digital tools, but to rebuild the boundary between our online presence and our inner sanctuary.

We can only control our own thoughts, intentions, and reactions. Writing to himself in his personal journal, Marcus Aurelius noted, "You have power over your mind -- not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength." This means you have the choice to protect your own peace even while you are getting incessant digital notifications.

We can move from passive consumption to active, conscious boundaries and build a wall between public metrics and private peace.

The first step toward healthier self-treatment is protecting our private lives. We must cultivate a practice of choosing which moments of joy or pain we post online. When you experience something beautiful—like a deep conversation with a friend, a beautiful walk, a personal breakthrough—you exercise the choice to intentionally not photograph or post it. You can keep it entirely for yourself. This small act of resistance is the ultimate rejection of the shadow world. It proves to your subconscious that your life has immense value, even when it is completely invisible to the algorithm.

We must actively reject the narrative that we are projects requiring constant fixing. Human life is cyclical, not linear. There are seasons for hustle and growth, but there are also necessary seasons for rest, wintering, and sitting still.

Treating yourself well means allowing yourself to be imperfect. It means recognizing that the human body and mind were never designed to process the unfiltered opinions, tragedies, and lifestyles of the entire planet every hour of the day. When you feel overwhelmed, look at it as a healthy response from an overloaded nervous system, rather than a personal weakness. And put that phone away.

Mirror, mirror on the wall

Social media values the loud over the quiet, the shiny over the real, and the metric over the soul. It invites us to sit in the dark of the cave, chasing shadows while trading our true self-worth for corporate validation. It is designed to always offer us a distorted view of humanity.

The ultimate act of self-care in a hyper-connected world is to look away from that screen. Take a deep breath, turn our backs on the artificial fire of the feed, and walk out into the real world.

To close the app and sit in a quiet room is to listen to the unfiltered, unquantified voice of your own mind. Only when we step away from the digital audience can we begin to treat ourselves with the deep compassion, patience, and unconditional love that we have always deserved.

HERITAGE: THE GHOSTS OF GAWALMANDI

Usama Malick

On a warm morning this past May, I returned to Gawalmandi, eager to see what remained of one of Lahore's most celebrated neighbourhoods.

Guided by a friend who knows every twisting lane of the area, I approached the neighbourhood from Nisbat Road through Mayo Hospital. Just opposite the hospital, a narrow passage beside a row of thrift shops opens into Gawalmandi, almost hidden from the traffic outside.

Celebrated until recently as the hub of Pakistani cuisine, Gawalmandi now tells a tale of neglect and fading heritage.

THE STREET THAT NEVER SLEPT

Located just outside the Walled City, it derives its name from the cattle herders who once inhabited the area. Although it developed into a residential neighbourhood over the decades, it became nationally renowned for its food street.

The area would come alive at night, with tables and chairs occupying most of the main passageways. Motorcyclists invariably struggled to navigate the crowded food street and, more often than not, endured expletives from unsparing Lahori aunties whose feet came under their wheels. My earliest memory of Gawalmandi dates back to 2009, when I visited as a 10-year-old with my extended family. I saw foreign tourists, particularly women, in attire that would otherwise not be a common sight in the city.

I noticed that most of the elderly women accompanying us kept looking at these foreign women, clicking their tongues and repeating the word *beysharam* [shameless] over and over again.

One of them told her husband, "Mian Sahib, I wonder if there is no one to keep a check on them!" Mian Sahib, meanwhile, seemed to be taking a rather thorough look himself, and replied: "Everything seems perfectly fine to me." Enraged, she turned to the other aunties nearby who shared her disapproval, muttering under her breath about the tourists.

A FEAST IN DECLINE

But much has changed in the following 17 years.

During my recent visit, I could scarcely believe this was the same place where diplomats, tourists, the local *crème de la crème*, and people from almost every section of society once gathered for their meals.

I can vouch for the variety of cuisines that were once available on this single street. Having a particular fondness for tandoori chicken and barbecue, I can recall dozens of barbecue dishes that could be ordered. The smoke would constantly rise from the *angeethis* [braziers] as *ustaads* [experts] deftly turned meat-laden skewers over the flames, eyes half-shut against the haze.

Bearers, who knew every dish on the menu by heart, would rush towards newcomers and recite the names of delicacies at a bewildering pace.



A handful of customers at a famous fish shop in Gawalmandi, with the beautiful façade of the structure above it in need of restoration | Photo by the writer

All that spectacle was now gone. An all-pervasive gloom hung over the street. Restaurant owners sat gazing expectantly at passersby, hoping someone might stop.

VOICES OF THE OLD STREET

Reaching the end of the food street, I turned into an adjoining lane. There, I saw Jameel Butt sitting on a bench outside a shuttered shop. He was immaculately dressed — a starched white kurta paired with a light-coloured dhoti. His pencil moustache and cropped hair gave him the appearance of a *pehelwan* [wrestler] from a bygone era.

Butt told me that he was born and raised in Gawalmandi, and loved everything about the locality. At one point, he had built a house outside Gawalmandi, near Lal Pul [literally, Red Bridge], close to Mughalpura, as it was near his place of business. He would live there for eight years but, by his own admission, never felt at home. Eventually, he shifted back to Gawalmandi. "All my best memories are associated with this place," he said.

Like many longtime residents, Butt has a few stories about Nawaz Sharif, the three-time prime minister and a regular visitor to Gawalmandi. "He would often come to eat *hareesa* [mutton stew] and *paaye* [mutton or beef trotters] at the homes of Kashmiri Butts [a well-

known local clan]," he said.

When I asked him where those houses were located, he merely pointed towards the endless street. He appeared to be a staunch supporter of Sharif's political party, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and spoke highly of the initiatives undertaken by the current Punjab government. I thanked him and retraced my steps towards the main stretch of the food street.

There, I met Usman Billah, another resident of Gawalmandi and the owner of a small eatery. He told me that the *raunaq* [liveliness] never truly returned after 2012, when the Gawalmandi food street was shifted to Fort Road. Back then, reminisced Billah, Gawalmandi "belonged to warm-hearted people."

"But those times are long gone, when *babas* [old men] clad in dhottis, would sit together late into the night smoking the hookah," he said. "The days were lively, but the nights were even livelier."

Saifullah, who has a fast-food stall next to Billah's eatery, listened in on our conversation as he waited for his first customers of the day. I also asked him why and when Gawalmandi began to decline.

While Butt praised successive PML-N governments, Saifullah blamed them for Gawalmandi's decline. Saifullah offered a slightly different timeline, saying that, after the initial closure and the inauguration of the new food street on Fort Road, the original Gawalmandi was allowed to revive the food street following protests.

"Although it reopened a few years after being shut down, the hustle and bustle never returned and Covid-19 proved to be the final nail in the coffin," Saifullah said.

WHY IT REALLY MOVED

Both Saifullah and Billah told me that the government had shifted the food street on the pretext that residents of this dense, historic neighbourhood were facing difficulties in commuting.

The main passageway where the food street was located is the only exit for those living in houses in the adjoining lanes. At night, it would become impossible for a vehicle to navigate through the narrow passageway.

I could see that the government's concern was legitimate, but it gave little consideration to the lives and livelihoods of those who had relied on the food street. Saifullah and Billah insisted that the government had the wherewithal to provide them with an alternative instead of shutting them down. It appeared to me that the two men hoped the current government would act to restore Gawalmandi's old spirit.

As I prepared to leave, I watched people pass the entrance of a restaurant without sparing a glance at its intricate and beautiful *jharokas* [ornate overhanging balconies].

Gawalmandi has survived empires, Partition and political upheaval. What it now risks losing is something less tangible: the everyday life that once made it one of Lahore's most vibrant neighbourhoods.

The writer is a storyteller with an MPhil in English.

The quiet diplomatic friction between Pakistan and Japan

Continued From Page 19

automobile industry for decades.

Millions of Pakistanis drive Japanese vehicles or locally assembled Japanese models.

Japanese engineering standards have become synonymous with reliability and durability in Pakistan. The automobile sector alone has generated thousands of jobs while creating an extensive network of suppliers, vendors and service industries.

Japanese companies have also invested in pharmaceuticals, chemicals, electrical equipment and manufacturing.

Consumer electronics produced by Japanese firms became household names long before many other international brands entered Pakistan.

Although Japanese investment has slowed in recent years due to Pakistan's economic difficulties and policy uncertainty, Tokyo continues to view Pakistan as an important emerging market with long-term potential.

Trade volumes remain modest compared to Japan's commerce with India, but the economic relationship retains considerable depth.

The China factor

Yet economics no longer defines Asian diplomacy.

Strategic competition increasingly shapes relationships across the region.

China's rise has fundamentally altered Asia's geopolitical landscape.

Pakistan enjoys an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership" with Beijing, anchored by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), defence cooperation and deep political trust.

Japan, meanwhile, increasingly views China's growing military and economic influence with concern. Its partnerships with India, Australia and the United States have acquired greater strategic significance.

Consequently, Pakistan's close relationship with China inevitably affects how Tokyo views developments involving Islamabad.

The World War II reference in the Pakistan-China joint statement illustrated precisely this dilemma. Pakistan was primarily reaffirming its strategic partnership with China.

Japan interpreted the same language through the lens of its own difficult historical relationship with Beijing.

Neither interpretation was entirely incorrect.

Walking a diplomatic tightrope

For Islamabad, the challenge is becoming increasingly complex.

Pakistan has no interest in alienating Japan.

Tokyo remains an important source of development financing, technology and investment.

Nor does Pakistan wish to dilute its strategic partnership with China, which remains central to its foreign and security policies.

Balancing both relationships will require careful diplomacy

The recent protest demonstrates that Islamabad is prepared to defend its interests when it believes longstanding partners have crossed diplomatic red lines. At the same time, the decision to keep the disagreement private also reflects maturity.

Neither side wanted a temporary disagreement to overshadow decades of cooperation.

That restraint suggests both governments recognise the broader value of the relationship.

Looking ahead

The larger strategic picture, however, cannot be ignored.

Japan's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by China's rise, Indo-Pacific competition and closer alignment with countries such as India.

Pakistan's foreign policy, meanwhile, remains deeply intertwined with China.

As competition between Beijing and Tokyo intensifies, Islamabad will inevitably find itself navigating increasingly difficult diplomatic terrain.

The latest India-Japan joint statement may contain only a single sentence referring to Pakistan.

Yet diplomacy often turns on individual sen-

tences. Similarly, a seemingly routine paragraph in the Pakistan-China joint statement generated concern in Tokyo because historical memory and contemporary geopolitics remain deeply interconnected in East Asia.

Neither episode suggests that Pakistan-Japan relations are entering a period of confrontation.

The foundations of the bilateral partnership remain strong, built upon seven decades of development cooperation, mutual respect and economic engagement.

But they do indicate that Pakistan can no longer assume Japan will automatically remain insulated from broader strategic realignments sweeping across Asia.

For Islamabad, the lesson is straightforward.

As geopolitical competition deepens, maintaining productive relations simultaneously with China, Japan and other major Asian powers will require more sustained political engagement, more frequent strategic dialogue and greater diplomatic agility than ever before.

The recent exchange between Islamabad and Tokyo may have remained behind closed doors, but it offers an important glimpse into how rapidly Asia's strategic landscape is changing and how even longstanding friendships are increasingly being tested by the region's evolving balance of power.

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Hundreds protest ICE operations in Houston, demand justice for Lorenzo Salgado Araujo

Continued from page 17

Salgado Araujo, who was shot and killed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents on July 7.

Battling the brutal heat and humidity, protest organizers called off the planned march just thirty minutes before it was scheduled to begin.

The protest — organized by Immigration Youth Texas, the Houston Chapter of the Party for Socialism and Liberation and dozens of other organizations — started just after noon. Stephanie Padilla with Immigration Youth Texas said she made the call to stop the march after a few people at the pre-march rally overheated. Temperatures remained in the mid-nineties for the afternoon.

Hundreds stayed at the park, the march's starting point, listening to speeches from organizers about how to support their movement to demand changes to Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations. The crowd briefly took over the bridge on Dunlavy St., crossing over the Southwest Freeway and closing down the street.

Two of Salgado Araujo's sons — Ronaldo and Lorenzo Jr. — stood on picnic tables and repeated their calls for accountability and transparency.

"We want to continue pressuring the government to allow for a full, transparent, independent investigation," Ronaldo said. "It's very nice to see so many people, so many people of all backgrounds, races, colors, creeds, religions come together and try to ask for what's right. Try to ask for the bare minimum, and it's going to be justice."

Ronaldo said the family laid their father to rest Saturday. A public vigil and celebration of Salgado Araujo's life was held Thursday.

"It's been extremely hard and even after 11 days of going 100 miles an hour and trying to plan a beautiful celebration for my dad, I know that the fight is not over yet," Ronaldo said. "There's still a lot to be done."

Salgado Araujo was fatally shot by ICE agents during what the agency called a "targeted enforcement operation." The Department of Homeland Security later confirmed Salgado Araujo was not the intended target of the operation. The agents allege that during the encounter, Salgado Araujo "weaponized" his vehicle and attempted to run over the agent when they fired in "self-defense."

The three other men traveling with Salgado Araujo dispute the account of ICE agents and said the agent fired immediately upon opening the passenger door of Salgado Araujo's white van.

Currently, there are four different investigations into the shooting. The Harris County DA's office has launched an investigation. The Texas Rangers also are investigating at the request of the Houston Police Department, according to Gov. Greg Abbott. The Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is conducting its own investigation into the

shooting death, according to the FBI, which has said it is investigating a possible assault on a law enforcement officer.

Mariela Rivera said she came to the protest because she feels "helpless" and hopes the protest influences leaders to make changes.

"In what world is murder or someone not being a citizen a validation of murder?" Rivera asked. "I feel like there's not much I can do. I'm hoping that when everyone sees this, they think this is not something that us as Americans — a democracy — want."

Continued Calls for Transparency For Anna Garcia West, Salgado Araujo's death hit close to home. She called his killing by ICE agents a human rights issue.

"Lorenzo reminds me of my dad and how I came to be here," Garcia West said. "My father came looking for a better life. It just really strikes me that his sons would have to be without a dad and that now their mom is a widow. It's just something that feels very personal."

Salgado Araujo's death sparked outrage in communities throughout the city. Protesters swarmed Houston City Hall last Tuesday, and nearly 100 people spoke directly to city council members and the mayor, demanding changes to ICE operations and calling for accountability and transparency.

Across the country, arrests and deportations have surged during the second term of President Donald Trump.

Sasha Monterroso urged the city council to launch its own independent investigation of the shooting death — one of several across the country during the last two years at the hands of (ICE).

"Justice cannot depend on who pulled the trigger," Monterroso said Tuesday. "Accountability cannot disappear because a federal badge was involved. An independent investigation is not an attack on the law enforcement. It is a commitment to transparency, accountability, and the principle that no one is above scrutiny."

ICE is arresting relatives who come forward to take custody of migrant children in federal shelters

Continued from page 17

her. "I told my lawyer, 'I'm not leaving the U.S. without the children.'"

Since President Donald Trump returned to office, his administration has implemented a slew of changes to the vetting process for close relatives and other guardians who volunteer to take in undocumented children, from narrowing the list of acceptable identity documents to mandating DNA tests. Crucially, it also dropped a rule that prohibited the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which cares for unaccompanied migrant kids, from sharing information about potential sponsors with ICE.

According to ICE documents, agents said they found and arrested Y.R. with help from the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Those changes have led to prolonged stays in shelters for unaccompanied children. Some advocates say the

changes allow ICE to use kids as "bait" to arrest their potential caregivers.

Under the first Trump administration, immigration officials created a public firestorm by separating children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border — parents went to detention centers while children went to shelters. In some cases, the parents were deported while their children remained in shelters for months.

More than 4,600 children were separated from their parents after crossing the U.S.-Mexico border under what the Trump administration called a zero-tolerance policy. More than half were boys under the age of 10. The Biden administration reunited nearly 70% of the children with their parents, as of April 2024, the last report a family reunification task force published before the Trump administration returned to office.

The new information-sharing practice and arrests of potential sponsors will have a chilling effect on families who may not come forward to take children for fear of being detained, said Bob Carey, the former director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement director during the Obama administration.

The Trump administration did not say how many sponsors have been detained as part of these efforts, but an NPR radio affiliate in California cited at least 100 such cases across the country as of March. In comparison, at least 170 sponsors were arrested during the first Trump administration as of late 2018.

Alexa Sendukas, a managing attorney with the Galveston-Houston Immigrant Representation Project, said the policy is separating migrant families without generating the attention that followed the border separations during Trump's first term, because arresting potential sponsors is "much less obvious to the general public and much less likely to generate outrage, because it's happening secretly."

Advocates say the new policies also harm children's mental health by keeping them in shelters for months at a time.

As of June, the Office of Refugee Resettlement had an average of just under 1,800 children in custody across the country — a drop from an average of over 5,000 kids in January 2025 when Trump returned to the White House. But they spent an average of 117 days in shelters in fiscal year 2025 — double the average during the first Trump administration and three times more than a decade ago.

There is no specific law that dictates how long immigration officials can hold a child in a shelter. But immigration lawyers representing children in custody say that the prolonged stays in shelters violate a federal law that requires that each child be "promptly placed in the least restrictive setting" that best serves them.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which oversees ICE, defended the Trump administration's practices of arresting some sponsors who are undocumented and have a criminal history.

In the statement, the spokesperson blamed the Biden administration for letting thousands of unaccompanied minors cross the U.S.-Mexico border and provided more than a dozen examples of ICE detaining sponsors with criminal histories that included possession of child pornography, larceny, fraud and homicide.

ICE is committed "to protect vulnerable children from sexual abuse and exploitation" through collaboration with

local police departments, the spokesperson said. "The primary focus of this initiative is to conduct welfare checks on these children to ensure that they are safe and not being exploited."

Sendukas, who is representing Y.R., said she doesn't buy it. She said her organization's clients, including the three women the Tribune interviewed, are law-abiding sponsors who have complied with everything the federal government has asked them to do. In the ICE documents, the agency said Y.R. has no criminal history.

"I do not believe for one second that this is about protecting children," she said. "All of the families we're working with are honest, God-fearing, hard-working people, just trying to make a better life for their children, and all they want is to reunite with their children."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, which oversees ORR, did not respond to requests for comment from the Tribune.

Mental breakdown

F.S., a 32-year-old woman, said she left Guatemala in 2023 because of violence and because she couldn't afford to raise three children in her home town. She joined a caravan of migrants that got her to Mexico, then crossed the border, surrendered to the Border Patrol and requested asylum.

She was allowed to stay in the U.S. while her case was pending and moved in with a childhood friend who lived outside of Dallas. A deportation order was issued after she missed a court date; F.S. said she didn't get the letter about the court date because they moved and it wasn't forwarded to their new address.

In October 2025, her oldest son decided to join her. After getting a ride to the Texas-Mexico border, where he crossed alone and turned himself into Border Patrol agents, he was immediately placed in a shelter.

F.S. said she talked to her 13-year-old son regularly and visited him at least once a week. She would make the four-hour drive one way to see him at the shelter.

Like Y.R., she was arrested by ICE after she began the vetting process to get custody of her son. According to court documents filed in immigration court by F.S.'s lawyer, she was arrested as part of the Trump administration's operation to find undocumented sponsors.

"I believe I was arrested because I came forward for my son," she said. "I feel bad because he blames himself. He says the reason I'm arrested is because of him."

Her son has been in a shelter for over eight months as of July 20. He took her arrest hard, she said, and has been prescribed various medications to help quell his anxiety "and to help control his emotions." He has refused to talk to anyone at times.

F.S., who also asked to be identified by her initials because she fears retaliation by the government for speaking publicly about her case, said her son was recently admitted into a psychiatric hospital because his anxiety has become debilitating.

"I fear for him here in the United States if he remains in the shelter. He is not doing well there, and he needs my support," she said.

Both the mother and son have agreed to be deported so they can reunite sooner, said Sendukas, who is also representing them.

Sural Shah, a California-based pediatrician and chair of the American

Academy of Pediatrics' Council on Immigrant Child and Family Health, said long stays in shelters can also cause children to mistrust their caregivers.

"There can be, especially for young kids, a lot of questions: Why didn't you come help me? Why didn't you come get me?" Shah said. "That's really difficult because all of that affects how children adjust to that trauma and we know that these early experiences can have impacts on them for the rest of their lives."

"I feel guilty," F.S. said. "I never imagined he would be in the shelter too long because I thought I was doing everything by the rules."

Another immigrant mother said she also was arrested after coming forward to sponsor her daughter, following the advice of a social worker who assured her nothing bad would happen.

M.R., 41, said she crossed the Texas-Mexico border illegally with one of her three children in 2021 after a crime syndicate murdered her husband, brother and pregnant cousin in El Salvador. Her two other children crossed the border in 2025 and were placed in a shelter, she said; her eldest daughter was released when she turned 18, but her 9-year-old was not.

When she gave her information to ORR, the agency asked her to come to an office for a DNA test, she said. ICE agents were waiting to arrest her. Three months later, she's in a Louisiana detention center awaiting deportation, while her daughter has been in the Texas shelter for over seven months.

"I feel terrible, I came to the U.S. seeking refuge, but I feel like I'm in an equally, if not, worse situation than we were in El Salvador," M.R. said, holding back tears. "I thought I was doing everything the right way, but it turned out it's just a nightmare."

Crossing the river alone

Y.R. said she left Honduras in April 2022 because she feared she would be a target of local gangs known to extort people.

"There was just a lot of insecurity," she said.

She left behind her daughter with her father. She also left her niece and nephew, who she had helped her sister raise. She entered the U.S. with a tourist visa.

A year later, Y.R.'s sister and brother-in-law decided to flee Honduras too, with her niece and nephew. Y.R. said someone threatened to kill her brother-in-law and the rest of his family if he didn't pay a "safety fee."

They arrived in Mexico, hoping to get an appointment with U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents to request asylum. But with only so many appointments available each day, the family grew desperate after months and decided to cross the border and surrender to Border Patrol agents. Instead of being allowed to stay, they were deported back to Honduras, Y.R. said.

The family decided to try again, only to be kidnapped by suspected drug cartel members looking to ransom migrants in exchange for their freedom, Y.R.'s nephew said. The boy, who is now 14, said they escaped when the men guarding them were distracted.

The family decided the children had a better chance of getting permission to stay in the U.S. if they crossed without their parents, so they walked to the banks of the Rio Grande and the children waded across on April 25, 2025 and approached Border Patrol agents.

The next day, they were in a government shelter with dozens of other children. Meanwhile, the parents returned to Honduras.

Constable Ali Sheikhani Honors Rana Mashood with Official Badge and Appointment

Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashood Ahmed, visited the official office of Fort Bend County Constable Ali Sheikhani in Houston, where he received a briefing on the responsibilities and authority of the American Constable's Office. During the visit, Constable Sheikhani presented Rana Mashood with an Honorary Civilian Advisor Appointment Certificate and the official Constable's Badge in recognition of his public service and leadership. The visit was also attended by the Consul General of Pakistan and members of the Pakistani-American community.



The burden of language

Why are so many Pakistanis growing up without a language they can truly call their own?

By Furqan Ali |

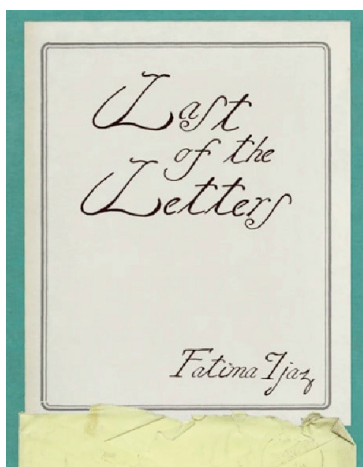
Hailing from Peshawar, at 24, I can read and write only in English. I can speak Urdu fluently, yet cannot read, write, or speak in either my mother tongue, Hindko, or the region's lingua franca, Pushto. Like any other 'good Muslim,' I can also read Arabic without understanding anything substantial. Mine is hardly an unusual story. Most of Pakistan's youth face the same dilemma, though to varying degrees. It is, therefore, important to understand and frame this morass in the public discourse.

First, it's imperative to take a tour of the basic architecture of languages. There is no innate language, as is proved by feral children – the children brought up by wolves and other animals. We only learn the language that we hear around us. Ergo, language is related to the social reality. Further, notwithstanding the social, economic, and geographical disparities, all languages are equal; albeit, some might have functional superiority, but not the structural one, in a certain context. For instance, English is more suitable for studying space technology vis-à-vis Urdu because of the developed diction and discourse in the former.

Historically, languages arose around 150,000 years ago, probably in Africa, when Homo sapiens began to emerge. Its study, as a science, that is, linguistics, interestingly, started in Taxila between the seventh and fifth centuries BC by Panini. It was thenceforth discussed and developed prospectively in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and thereafter. Finally, Ferdinand de Saussure, in the twentieth century, made a breakthrough that reshaped the inquiry into language – transforming the etymology-centric exploration into a more system-centric one. The highlight of his work is the exposition of language as a system, leading to the flourishing of structuralism. Here, the knowledge of the whole system (called la langue) is in the mind of the native speaker, without which sounds or meaning cannot be created. The application of this system, i.e. the individual utterances, which are always faulty, is called parole.

Noam Chomsky, perhaps the most credible linguist of our time, adopted and tailored it. According to him, us humans have a knack for learning languages, and this faculty in mind is called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This device uses universal grammar (UG), i.e., general principles common to all languages. Then, for each language, we have specific rules.

Apart from technical description, the study of how language is used in society, how we create meaning, and how we express reality through language, remains an enigma and is far more important pragmatically. In this context, broadly speaking, languages have two functions: first, it works as a social lubricant. A man in Pakistan, on the internet, grieving the loss of his mother, can resonate with another woman, living in the US, who lost her son. Isn't this fascinating? Ontologically, this interaction through a meaningful and understandable medium is what defines us as humans, and in a way, it distinguishes us from animals.



With rising globalisation, this tool has become even more powerful and useful. Especially with the pursuit of understanding other cultural nuances, facets, commonalities and disunities, and pervasive commodification of language – from signboards to memes – it is impossible not to dive into the language game; this exchange affects us at a more linguistic and cultural level by morphing one's own language through selective borrowing and letting go of alien languages. A good example is the rise of Urdu, the induction of Urdu into English, reflecting a shift toward a local "nativised" identity.

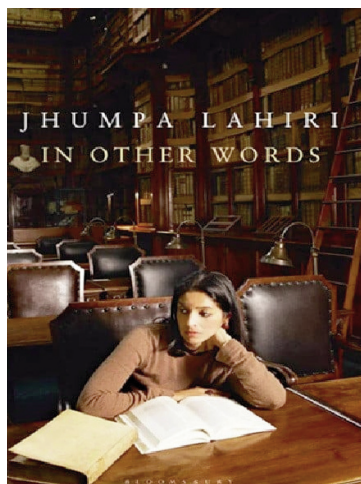
Second, a language serve as pedagogical tools, teach us and shape our process of thinking. How so? It provides us with concepts such as justice, democracy, feminism, or socialism, which can help us understand and improve reality. It organises our thoughts by influencing how speakers express time, space, relationships, and actions, and it transmits culture and moral values through stories, proverbs, literature, and everyday speech, enabling us to do complex reasoning.

And so, through a bottom-up approach, language, being a social product (as is argued in Plato's Cratylus, relates to the culture, behaviour, and thinking at society level. However, this expression is not always perfect; there is always a residue which remains inexpressible: the difference between la langue and parole.

Expressing the inexpressible

Shadab Zeest Hashmi, in her book Ghazal Cosmopolitan, described ghazals as "a tradition of expressing the almost inexpressible." We can expand this notion to all kinds of literary/creative texts. After all, this pursuit of attuning ideal (what is in the mind) with real (what is on the paper) foments the overabundance of meaning-ness (mazmun-afimi) that gives pleasure to our aesthetic sense, food to our intellect, and in a way, provides us the fertile ground for humanistic inquiry – an investigation to understand ourselves – for the readers as well as writers of the text.

Also, the experience of textual meaning is, logically, correlated to the form of the text. Against this backdrop, Fatima Ijaz, the author of The Shade of Longing and other Poems and Story Circle: Letters on Creativity & Friendship, in her chapbook, Last of the Letters, explores different forms of writing. Unlike strict poetry or prose, we see 16 unsent letters, along with a poignant, abstract poem, thereby widening the emotional and metaphysical frame of



mind.

It is difficult to assess what was written before. In some letters, one feels that the poem was written before the letter, and the verses are afterwards reincarnated into an epistolary one-sided conversation. And in others, it feels like the poem is a progeny of the letter. Nonetheless, given the outlandish form, the book permeates both the permanence of text and fluidity of text – something not usually found in standalone books. This covers the journey of her language, too; at times it is brittle, at others it is fluid.

The overlapping theme of this book/collection of unsent letters is ironic: Fatima is unable to process her thoughts in writing, so each letter presents a different pretext of this inability. She amusingly expresses her misery of not being able to express, and by extension, expresses the inexpressible. This includes the shiny, resplendent metaphors embodying the dance of the soul to the bleak, varied facets of grief articulating the void whose depth feels like a black hole – ultimately, manifesting the emotional nuance and atrocities of the lived experience that can be imagined only in a poetic-cum-prose medium. She writes:

"the pictures of sepia
seeping through bones;
is this a memory?
are you part of it —
physically?
schubert plays
wherever you are."

These letters might help us, through a writer's investigation of her own breadth, to understand our own selves: how we felt when we were left alone, what we missed when we ignored the flight of a moth, what more is in the brightness of the sun and serenity of the moon that we, due to chores, ignore, the emotional singularity of a pulse, an ache, a sudden collision of thought and feeling that poet, like Fatima, experience on a random Friday, and mostly importantly in our context, how the language undergoes a stress test to express the inner worlds.

Language as a beloved

Till now, we have seen different expressions of language as a structure and its manifestation through diverse forms; what is missing in the equation is the interpersonal companionship between the speaker and the means of the speech. This meaning-creation machine, much like the things we cling to in our daily lives, offers an intimacy and emotive substance on its own. In the words of Roland Barthes, "Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other.

It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words." As far as my textual world is concerned, I feel I am aphasiac due to the excessive detachment from my native language in the early stage of life; now, my ancestral skin feels a stranger to me.

I recently came across this exact weltanschauung shared by the author Jhumpa Lahiri, in her book In Other Words. Jhumpa, being a Bengali American, remained flummoxed by her parent's and society's insistence on adopting English – and that too without a foreign accent – rather than finding home in her own language, Bengali. This led her into an identity crisis.

After all, without indigenous words, the place, the people, the life, the streets, the light, the sky, the flowers, the sounds, all are lost to a different terrain – far cruder and eerily constructed. One might, through trials and tribulations, decorate this foster house; yet, the dysmorphia of belongingness will haunt interminably. And that was the case with her for many years of life.

The incompatible adversaries between the two – she calls Bengali her mother and English her step-mother – nudged her, at the age of 25, to find her own language, Italian, without any family, cultural, or social pressure. To her, it was like finding a beloved; fingers to feel the entanglements of the inner world raptured by the previous two dysfunctional relationships. She writes, "This language is not in my blood, in my bones. I'm drawn to Italian and at the same time intimidated. It remains a mystery, beloved, impassive. Faced with my emotion it has no reaction."

What we can learn from her is that the new rules, lexicon, etymology, and application of universal syntactic structure might arouse the deep layers of consciousness that were veiled before; on one hand, acquiring a novel language may expand our horizons by teaching us new ways of thinking and expressing in a different, more meticulous, and more exact way – something Fatima endeavoured for. On the other hand, this adventure might help us understand our own nature vis-à-vis the previously unfamiliar great minds of the novel tradition.

The policy angle

While we have covered the micro- and macro-level dynamics of languages, it is also important to understand the policy angle: Why do we remain a nation bereft of expertise in any language? Why can we not express ourselves properly despite higher education? What is the stupidity in education policies that hamper our students from excelling?

Frankly speaking, when we are being taught in a foreign language from Pre-1 – even Lord Macaulay in 1835 mandated English as the medium of instruction from the sixth standard onwards – as per the Single National Curriculum (SNC), how exactly are we going to develop competency in the subject or cognitive abilities in general when most of the time will be squandered over understanding the language of the subject rather than the subject itself?

Anjum Altaf, in his book, "Critical Reflections on the Single National

Curriculum and the Medium of Instruction," provides a very common-sense thought experiment: If we ask a girl from Baltistan to learn in Chinese because it is the language of the future, what exactly will happen? She will neither learn the language properly nor will she learn the subject. Since the attention will be dissipated in figuring out the meanings and associations of words in the alien language, rather than imbibing and creating new ideas. Similar is the case with English.

Nobody is against learning a new language. As stated above, learning it would, apart from improving communication skills, reshape how we learn, interact, and engage with the world. It is only the timing of picking up that is crucial. Studies suggest that learning in the native language develops a knack for learning new languages. And this is not something outlandish; one can observe scientists from different countries, including Japan, South Korea, China, Russia, and some countries of the EU, who study in their respective native languages and learn English as needed. They very quickly and aptly adopt it.

The solution, then, is to adopt a methodology, like Europe's 'Mother Tongue plus Two formula,' where in the initial years of learning, all subjects are taught in the native language. Then a second local language is added during the elementary years, and a foreign language in secondary school.

Coda

Languages are not arbitrary; rather, they all follow a certain structure (universal principles), and a human mind, like a bot, can embrace many, given that we just imbibe the rules of that certain language at a certain stage of life when we are comfortable with our own native language. They can arouse the in-depth layers of consciousness and help us become more humane. This entails expressing, like Fatima, in multifarious, multifaceted, and multilayered forms to close the chasm between what one wants to say and what can be said. Unlike Jhumpa, not everyone has the privilege to discover and learn new languages for years, but then finding a beloved is less a task and more like a sweet accident.

Also, Anjum's policy exposition is relevant in addition to the forms of expression and the bond with the language at a governance level. Unfortunately, here in Pakistan, languages are tied to a passport for a better job. Without realising that when a child is ostracised from his lingual home, the cost is at the same time: pedagogical, cultural, and deeply personal.

I am still in the quest of finding my own skin; I am unsure whether I will find it in the form of a new language or a rediscovery of what I already know in bits and pieces. Nonetheless, these books helped me understand this predicament, which is not merely educational but human.

Like a living companion, languages need our attention, time, energy, and openness, and so, we need to think more and more about them.

The writer is a Peshawar-based researcher who works in the financial sector.

Where in the world would you live?

The latest global liveability rankings remind us that urban comfort is a fragile ecosystem

By Faiza Shah

Stability, access to amenities, clean air—what do you want in the place you live in?

When you strip away the flashy skyscrapers and tourism brochures, the answer forms the core of what we expect from a home. A great city should guarantee a seamless triad of daily existence: absolute personal safety, universally accessible public utilities, and a clean environment. The pinnacle of urban living isn't defined by luxury real estate booms, but by a city's ability to minimise daily friction for its average citizen. It means tap water you can drink without a second thought, transit networks efficient enough to make owning a car pointless, and public systems that treat people as an investment. When a city manages this complex grid flawlessly, liveability becomes natural.

Yet, our urban world remains deeply fractured. The Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 2026 Global Liveability Index rates 173 cities across indicators like Stability, Healthcare, Culture and Environment, Education, and Infrastructure. Its latest annual survey reveals a widening chasm between cities that fulfill this promise and those torn apart by geopolitical failure.

The top tier

At the top tier of the 2026 rankings, the ideal of urban comfort becomes a relaxed daily reality. For the second year running, Copenhagen claims the crown, closely followed by Vienna, Melbourne, Sydney, and Zurich.

What makes these cities thrive is intentional, human-first design.

Earning perfect scores in stability, education, and infrastructure, Copenhagen, the Danish capital, builds simple pleasures right into the city's movement. "You can bike to work, jump in the harbour after and be home for dinner. It's not a special day, it's just Tuesday," notes resident Laura Amira Kassem in a recent BBC Travel profile. Its scale means everything is walkable, bikeable, and accessible.

In second place, Vienna treats basic necessities as a public right. By maintaining strong social frameworks over its housing supply, the city ensures affordable rent is a reality, protecting its neighbourhoods from hyper-gentrification. With a flawlessly integrated tram system along the historic Ringstrasse, life simply moves at a stress-free pace.

Scoring a massive 96 in culture and environment, Melbourne, Australia, avoids corporate monotony by acting like a collective of distinct suburban villages. From the culinary energy of Footscray to the green stretches of Princes Park, world-class arts and food are distributed across the urban landscape rather than locked away in a central business district.

Sydney perfectly merges economic power with immediate, democratic access to nature. Residents routinely embed the envi-

MOST UNLIVEABLE CITIES

Cities at the bottom

The latest Global Liveability Index highlights the world's least liveable cities and the factors pushing them down.

City	Liveability Index Ranking	Stress factors
Damascus, Syria	173	Decades of armed warfare have left the city's physical urban grid shattered
Tripoli, Libya	172	Tripoli continues to struggle with severe institutional fragmentation
Karachi, Pakistan	170	Continues to suffer from critically low scores in infrastructure and healthcare, as population growth vastly outstrips public investment
Tehran, Iran	164	Escalating geopolitical tensions have directly degraded the city's currency value, blocking essential imports, and compromising everyday safety for its residents
Kyiv, Ukraine	166	Although the municipal government maintains essential services, wartime aggression inevitably cancels out local civic resilience

"The greatest luxury a city can offer isn't wealth or skyscrapers—it's safety, stability, clean air, and the confidence that everyday life simply works."

ronment into their workdays, catching a sunrise ocean swim at Tamarama Beach before heading into the office. Backed by perfect scores in healthcare and education, it offers a rare blend of cosmopolitan scale and laid-back coastal life.

A masterclass in precision, Zurich, Switzerland, relies on pristine public logistics. The city features over 1,200 public fountains bubbling with fresh drinking water and a legendary transit system that entirely eliminates commuting anxiety.

The least liveable cities

If the top tier reflects the triumph of systematic urban planning, the bottom tier is an indictment of global geopolitical failure. The lowest-ranking cities in 2026 are not suffering from poor aesthetic choices or bad

transit schedules— they are the direct casualties of a conflict-stricken world.

When a region fractures, the collapse of civil stability triggers a rapid, devastating domino effect on everyday life. For instance:

Despite recent marginal improvements to medical distribution pipelines, Damascus remains at the absolute bottom. Decades of civil war have left the physical urban grid shattered, proving that armed warfare completely dismantles a city's foundation.

Tripoli continues to struggle with severe institutional fragmentation. Meanwhile, Tehran's slide into the bottom 10 highlights the direct domestic fallout of regional escalations, where conflict quickly degrades currency stability, basic imports, and everyday

safety.

Kyiv's depressed position is a stark reminder that external military aggression overrides local resilience. While the city maintains a dedicated civil service, the ongoing threat of missile strikes from Russia damages its stability scores.

The Asian shift

Beyond direct warzones, South Asia presents a profound case study in how broader regional instability and climate vulnerabilities drag down liveability scores. Massive hubs like Dhaka, Bangladesh (Rank 171) and Karachi, Pakistan (Rank 170) consistently anchor the bottom of the global list.

In these regions, the deficit is driven by a secondary effect of regional economic and environmental crises: hyper-urbanisation. Karachi, for instance, faces severe infrastructure deficits because its municipal resources are completely overstretched.

While South Asia struggles with structural deficits, East Asia presents a completely different narrative of urban engineering. Standing as a brilliant exception to the rule that massive populations destroy quality of life, Tokyo, Japan holds the number 10 spot globally. The only mega-city in the top 10, Tokyo proves that hyper-density can coexist with flawless public safety, unmatched transit networks, and premium healthcare.

Concurrently, mainland China's major urban centres have become the index's fastest climbers. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen have surged up the rankings. This upward trajectory is a direct result of aggressive, deliberate state investments in public health insurance frameworks, modernised hospital networks, and sweeping environmental initiatives designed to clear urban skies. By treating public health and logistical connectivity as baseline priorities, China is rewriting the rules on how fast a developing metropolis can elevate its standard of living.

What should this make us think?

The EIU's 2026 index forces us to confront an imperative realisation: liveability is not a permanent status symbol— it is a fragile ecosystem.

While Western Europe remains the highest-scoring region on average, its progress has plateaued, showing that even the most established hubs can stall under economic strain. Meanwhile, a wave of Asian cities— particularly across mainland China and Japan—are climbing the ranks due to aggressive, deliberate investments in public healthcare systems and modernised transit.

This report challenges us to rethink what we value in our own environments. A city cannot build world-class schools, maintain reliable power grids, or keep its air clean if its core institutions are threatened by violence or hollowed out by economic isolation. Ultimately, the global rankings prove that the ultimate luxury in the modern world isn't wealth or opulence—it is peace, predictability, and a basic promise kept to the people who walk its streets.

Ahsan Iqbal Calls on Overseas Pakistanis to Help Build a \$1 Trillion Economy by 2035 Under the "Uraan Pakistan" Vision

Continued from page 17

Ahsan Iqbal, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, presented a comprehensive vision for Pakistan's economic transformation, diplomacy, technological advancement, and international partnerships under the national initiative "Uraan Pakistan."

The event, titled "Reimagining Pakistan: Diplomacy, Development, and Opportunities Post U.S.–Iran War," featured opening remarks by Ambassador Sada Cumber, former U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, while Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, former U.S. Ambassador to Qatar, participated as a panelist. The program was moderated by Ghazanfar Hashmi.

Addressing a distinguished audience of community leaders, entrepreneurs, scholars, students, and professionals, Minister Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that Pakistan is seeking to redefine itself not through the lens of crises, but through opportunity, innovation, and strategic global partnerships.

He described Uraan Pakistan as more than a government initiative, calling it a national roadmap designed to transform Pakistan into a \$1 trillion economy by 2035 through sustainable growth, export expansion, technological innovation, and human capital development.

The minister urged overseas Pakistanis to become ambassadors of Pakistani exports and help the country achieve its target of more than \$100 billion in exports, emphasizing that exports are the foundation of long-term economic independence.

He highlighted the critical role of Artificial Intelligence, digital transformation, cybersecurity, big data, robotics, satellite technology, genomics, applied mathematics, and quantum computing in shaping the future economy. He also announced plans to establish Pakistan's National Center for Quantum Computing, enabling the country to compete in emerging technologies.

Speaking about education and research, Ahsan Iqbal stressed the importance of expanding partnerships with leading American universities and research institutions. Through the U.S.–Pakistan Knowledge Corridor, Pakistan is strengthening collaboration in curriculum development, faculty exchange, technology transfer, robotics, advanced healthcare, start-up ecosystems, and scientific research.

He noted that discussions are also underway to expand cooperation in space technology, including partnerships with institutions such as NASA, while encouraging Pakistani students to pursue advanced education and research

opportunities in the United States.

The minister described Pakistan's youthful population as one of its greatest strengths and called for significant investment in digital skills to prepare young people for the demands of the global knowledge economy.

Addressing overseas Pakistanis directly, he encouraged them to contribute beyond remittances by investing in Pakistan, transferring knowledge and technology, promoting innovation, supporting exports, and building international business partnerships. He said every overseas Pakistani is both an ambassador and a strategic partner in Pakistan's development journey.

Turning to global affairs, Ahsan Iqbal observed that today's world faces growing challenges from fake news, misinformation, and political polarization. Referring to discussions at the World Economic Forum, he stressed that dialogue, mutual understanding, and responsible leadership are more essential than ever in addressing global divisions.

He also highlighted Pakistan's recent achievements, including declining inflation, improving investor confidence, strengthened economic stability, and a more constructive diplomatic role in promoting regional peace. He described Pakistan's evolving foreign policy as one that seeks dialogue, cooperation, and sustainable development rather than confrontation.

The minister noted that 2025 and 2026 have been dedicated to the vision and ideals of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Allama Muhammad Iqbal, inspiring a renewed national commitment to unity, progress, and institution-building.

He further emphasized that the future of U.S.–Pakistan relations should move beyond traditional diplomacy toward a strategic partnership based on education, artificial intelligence, space technology, scientific research, digital services, innovation, entrepreneurship, start-up collaboration, and investment.

"We invite our overseas Pakistanis to invest not only their capital but also their knowledge and expertise," he said. "The Government of Pakistan is committed to providing opportunities and facilitating partnerships that will benefit both countries."

Concluding his address, Ahsan Iqbal called upon the Pakistani-American community to join the national mission of Uraan Pakistan, stating that together they can build stronger bridges between Pakistan and the United States while creating new opportunities for future generations.

The event concluded with a banquet dinner and networking session attended by prominent Pakistani-American business leaders, educators, physicians, engineers, entrepreneurs, students, and community organizations. Participants expressed optimism that stronger collaboration in education, technology, investment, and innovation would further strengthen the enduring relationship between Pakistan and the United States and contribute to Pakistan's long-term prosperity.

A National Appeal for a Stronger and More Viable Democracy in Pakistan

Continued from page 17

for all the others that have been tried." This observation remains relevant today. Democracy is not perfect, but history has repeatedly shown that no alternative has provided greater long-term stability, accountability, and peaceful transfer of power.

Abraham Lincoln's timeless principle that democracy must be "government of the people, by the people, for the people" remains the clearest definition of legitimate governance. A democratic system loses its moral strength when it drifts away from the will, welfare, and participation of ordinary citizens.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's democratic system has gradually become associated with money, patronage, and political influence rather than public service. The result has been declining public confidence, weakened local institutions, and increasing political polarization.

1. Abolish Development Funds for Parliamentarians

My first recommendation is that all development funds allocated to Members of the National Assembly (MNAs), Senators, and Members of Provincial Assemblies (MPAs) should be permanently abolished.

The constitutional responsibility of legislators is to legislate, oversee the executive, and formulate national policies—not to execute development projects. Development schemes should be planned and implemented by professional local governments and government departments under transparent procedures.

Removing discretionary development funds would significantly reduce political patronage, discourage opportunistic politics, and allow elections to focus on ideas, policies, and leadership rather than financial incentives.

2. Build Strong Local Governments

The foundation of every successful democracy is an empowered local government system.

Pakistan has experimented with different local government models over the decades, but none has been allowed to develop into a stable constitutional institution. Sustainable democracy requires elected local governments with constitutional protection, financial autonomy, and clearly defined administrative powers.

When local governments are strong:

- Citizens receive better municipal services.
- Corruption becomes easier to monitor.
- Young leadership emerges naturally.
- Provincial governments become more accountable.
- Democracy reaches ordinary citizens instead of remaining con-

finied to provincial capitals.

3. Administrative Reorganization Through Smaller Provinces

Pakistan's population has grown dramatically since independence, while the administrative structure has remained largely unchanged.

In my opinion, national debate should seriously consider creating additional provinces through constitutional means and broad political consensus.

Smaller administrative units could:

- bring government closer to the people;
- improve service delivery;
- reduce regional inequalities;
- strengthen administrative efficiency; and
- create healthier political competition.

Sindh deserves particular attention because of its diverse linguistic and urban-rural composition. Administrative restructuring—if undertaken through constitutional consensus and public consultation—could reduce political tensions and allow every region to focus more effectively on its own development. Such reforms should unite citizens rather than divide them.

4. Reform Senate Elections

Pakistan's Senate was created to provide equal provincial representation. However, concerns have frequently been raised regarding the transparency and financial influence surrounding Senate elections.

One possible reform deserving national discussion is the direct election of Senators by the people of each province rather than through indirect voting by provincial assemblies.

A directly elected Senate would:

- increase public accountability;
- reduce opportunities for vote-buying;
- strengthen democratic legitimacy; and
- improve citizens' confidence in the upper house of Parliament.

Any such reform would naturally require constitutional amendments and broad political consensus.

5. Reduce the Influence of Money in Politics

Money has become one of the greatest threats to democratic governance.

When elections become excessively expensive, honest and capable citizens are discouraged from entering politics. Political competition gradually shifts from public service to financial power.

Pakistan should therefore strengthen:

- campaign finance regulations;
- transparent political funding;
- independent auditing of election expenses;
- effective accountability mechanisms; and
- equal opportunities for all political parties.

In the same spirit, no independent candidate should be allowed to participate in parliamentary elections. A healthy dem-

ocratic system should be based on political parties with clear manifestos, internal accountability, and collective responsibility. Independent candidacies often encourage personality-based politics, weaken party discipline, and create space for post-election bargaining that is not transparent to the public.

6. Encourage Responsible Student Politics

Every great democracy has benefited from politically aware young citizens.

Universities should gradually revive healthy and peaceful student politics under strict codes of conduct that prohibit violence, weapons, intimidation, and ethnic hatred.

Students should learn democratic values, debate public policy, and prepare themselves for future national leadership.

7. Strengthen Political Institutions Instead of Individuals

No democracy becomes strong through powerful individuals alone.

Strong democracies are built upon:

- independent institutions;
- constitutional supremacy;
- rule of law;
- free elections;
- accountable governance;
- an impartial civil service; and
- an independent judiciary.

When institutions become stronger than personalities, democracy becomes self-sustaining.

Pakistan possesses enormous human potential, strategic importance, and abundant natural resources.

Our greatest challenge is not the absence of talent, but the need to build stronger democratic institutions that ensure equal participation for every citizen regardless of language, ethnicity, province, or economic status.

If we eliminate political patronage, strengthen local governments, reform our democratic institutions, reduce the influence of money in politics, and encourage merit-based leadership, future generations will inherit a more united, prosperous, and stable Pakistan.

Real democratic reform does not happen overnight. However, if sincere reforms are implemented consistently over three or four election cycles, Pakistan can gradually produce stronger institutions, more capable political leadership, and a democratic culture based on service rather than privilege.

The future of Pakistan depends not on personalities, but on institutions; not on slogans, but on reforms; and not on division, but on national unity under the Constitution.

The writer is former Federal Minister of communication, during 2004-2007.

Born n brought up at Hyderabad Sindh in. Did, MSc. statistics in 1971 from Sindh University Hyderabad.

Later, elected MNA in 2002.

Selected for Federal Minister for communication till 2007.

The impossible politics of climate security

In his latest book, Ashok Swain offers a chilling analysis of a world drifting toward climate apartheid

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What makes *Climate Security* compelling is that it never questions the severity of the climate crisis. The author treats climate disruption as an existential emergency

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Swain has produced a book that is as disturbing as it is essential, challenging the comforting illusion that preparing for climate change automatically means preparing for a fairer world

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ |

Ashok Swain's *Climate Security* is not a comfortable book, nor does it pretend to be. At a time when climate anxiety is increasingly wrapped in diplomatic slogans and defence policy jargon, Swain strips away the language of preparedness to expose something far less reassuring: a global response to climate change that often looks more like a blueprint for preserving privilege than protecting humanity.

The book arrives in a policy landscape saturated with the phrase “climate security,” a term that has moved from academic conferences into military doctrines and even UN Security Council briefings. The idea carries an obvious appeal—and who could object to securing the planet against climate chaos? Swain's concern is not with the aspiration itself but with how the concept is being used to justify militarised borders, surveillance states and geopolitical opportunism under the banner of environmental concern.

What makes *Climate Security* compelling is that it never questions the severity of the climate crisis. The author treats climate disruption as an existential emergency. His criticism is directed instead at the way powerful states have chosen to respond, often prioritising the protection of wealth, territory and influence over the security of those most vulnerable to climate impacts.

At the heart of the book is a challenge to one of the most widely accepted assumptions in contemporary climate discourse: that environmental change inevitably fuels conflict. The narrative is attractive because of its simplicity. Rising temperatures produce droughts, droughts create resource scarcity, and scarcity leads to violence. Around the world, it has become a staple of security briefings and political speeches. Swain spends much of the book showing why reality is rarely so straightforward.

Drawing on a wide range of case studies, he argues that climate stress rarely translates directly into armed

conflict. Environmental pressures interact with political marginalisation, weak governance and entrenched inequality. Climate change acts less as a trigger for violence than as a force that magnifies existing instability, deepening crises that are already taking shape. The distinction matters because it carries significant policy implications. If climate change is framed as an inevitable source of conflict in poorer countries, wealthier nations can cast themselves as future victims rather than historical contributors to the crisis. That argument comes into sharp focus in Swain's discussion of water politics. Water scarcity is frequently presented as the defining climate flashpoint, with politicians and analysts warning of inevitable “water wars” across shared river basins. In his book, Swain dismantles that assumption with characteristic care. Swain argues that shared water resources are more likely to encourage cooperation than conflict. River basins governed by fragile agreements often prove remarkably resilient, with states choosing negotiation over confrontation even during periods of severe scarcity. But the myth of inevitable water conflict persists because it serves powerful strategic narratives. Governments can invoke it to justify aggressive infrastructure projects, securitised resource management and nationalistic rhetoric under the guise of environmental necessity. The fixation on future water wars, Swain suggests, tells us less about hydrology than geopolitics. Scarcity becomes a tool for political mobilisation, obscuring the governance failures and social inequalities that determine how water is managed and distributed.

The chapters on climate-induced migration are among the book's most provocative. The author challenges the dystopian imagery that often dominates political debate in the West, where climate refugees are portrayed as vast populations poised to overwhelm fortified borders. Drawing on empirical evidence, he shows that most climate displace-

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The chapters on climate-induced migration are among the book's most provocative. The author challenges the dystopian imagery that often dominates political debate in the West, where climate refugees are portrayed as vast populations poised to overwhelm fortified borders

ment takes place within national borders or neighbouring countries. That has done little to weaken the political appeal of the narrative. Climate migration continues to shape some of the toughest immigration policies in the Global North. Swain argues that migrants have become convenient symbols in populist politics, allowing governments to recast environmental displacement as a security threat rather than a humanitarian challenge. In doing so, victims of a crisis driven largely by industrialised economies are recast as perceived aggressors. The consequences extend beyond political rhetoric, as framing displacement as a border security issue allows governments to expand detention regimes, militarise migration routes and outsource asylum responsibilities, all while presenting those measures as climate preparedness.

Another recurring concern is the growing role of military institutions in climate governance. Armed forces are increasingly taking on responsibilities in disaster response and adaptation planning, partly because they possess logistical capabilities that civilian agencies often lack. Swain accepts the practical rationale but warns that militarising climate policy changes the way the crisis is understood. Security institutions tend to prioritise control, surveillance and strategic defence. When adaptation is viewed through that lens, protecting infrastructure and maintaining order can take precedence over reducing social vulnerability. The danger, Swain argues, is the emergence of a climate response shaped by fortress thinking. Infrastructure is hardened, borders fortified and surveillance expanded, while the structural causes of vulnerability remain largely untouched. Climate adaptation becomes less about reducing risk than insulating wealth from its consequences. The same logic, he argues, can be seen in the way authoritarian governments exploit climate security narratives. Environmental emergencies become a rationale for centralising power, expanding surveillance, restricting civil liberties and suppressing dissent. Climate governance, in these cases, serves political consolidation as much as ecological protection.

The discussion of global climate inequality is among the book's

strongest sections. Swain describes a world edging towards what he calls climate apartheid, in which wealthy countries invest heavily in adaptation and protective infrastructure while poorer nations confront increasingly severe disasters with limited support. Those most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions are often the best equipped to shield themselves from the consequences. Those least responsible remain the most exposed. For Swain, this is not simply an unfortunate consequence of economic inequality but a defining feature of today's climate security paradigm. Prioritising national resilience and border protection allows powerful states to protect their own populations while shifting the humanitarian costs of climate disruption elsewhere.

The book also examines the role of international institutions in reinforcing securitised climate discourse. Swain acknowledges the growing attention climate risks receive within UN peace and security frameworks but questions whether these initiatives genuinely advance human security. Too often, he argues, global governance reflects existing power hierarchies, allowing dominant states to shape climate policy around their strategic interests.

Stylistically, *Climate Security* is restrained and the author relies on case studies and policy analysis rather than dramatic rhetoric, allowing the evidence to carry his argument. Readers may disagree with some of his conclusions, but by the final chapters it becomes difficult to dismiss the questions he raises about the politics of climate security.

The book is less persuasive when it turns to solutions and Swain calls for a human-centred approach built on social justice, international cooperation and a fairer distribution of resources. The vision is compelling, but it leaves relatively little guidance on how governments might overcome the political interests that have entrenched the current security framework. That may reflect the scale of the challenge as much as any weakness in the book itself. Swain is diagnosing a political mindset rather than offering a policy manual, though he does argue that developing countries must prioritise adaptation instead of waiting for wealthier

nations to act.

The book arrives as governments face growing pressure to demonstrate that they are prepared for a more volatile climate. Security-driven responses are politically attractive because they project decisiveness. Fortified coastlines, expanded surveillance and militarised disaster response create an appearance of control. Swain asks whether that sense of control comes at the expense of justice. The question running through *Climate Security* is ultimately a simple one: whose security is climate policy designed to protect? Swain's answer is unsettling. Too often, today's climate security framework appears more concerned with managing the geopolitical consequences of climate change than preventing human suffering.

For readers accustomed to climate books centred on technology or economics, *Climate Security* offers a different perspective. The Sweden-based author argues that climate change is not only an environmental crisis but also a political and moral one, and that the choices governments make today will shape global inequality, migration and international relations for decades to come.

Climate Security is unlikely to reassure policymakers committed to defence-centred climate strategies, nor readers looking for easy answers. Instead, it offers a carefully argued critique of how the world's most powerful states are preparing for environmental disruption. As the climate crisis reshapes global politics, Swain leaves readers with a question that extends well beyond environmental policy. Will a warming world encourage greater international cooperation, or accelerate a retreat behind fortified borders, expanding surveillance and widening inequality?

To understand the author's expectations for the future, the *Express Tribune* spoke with him about his book and its place in today's geopolitical landscape. Here's what he had to say:

ET: Your book comes out at a time when climate change is all but deprioritized. What factors do you think are pushing it down the priority list?

AS: It's worrying that climate change is being pushed down the list, but in many ways, it's predictable. Short-term thinking, fear of electoral backlash, and the political cost of rapid economic transitions all play a role, even though inaction will cost far more in the long run. Misinformation, lobbying, and rising right-wing populism have made climate action politically divisive and easy to delay. The US leaving the Paris Agreement hasn't helped—it

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The impossible politics of climate security

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signals that major powers can step back from global responsibility. And with the world focused on wars and other crises, there's a dangerous illusion that climate risks can wait, even as they continue to build.

ET: One of the most striking threads in your work is the shift from solidarity based climate cooperation to security driven climate governance. Do you see this shift as reversible, or has it become structurally embedded in international climate politics?

AS: The shift toward security-driven climate governance is real and increasingly embedded, but it's not irreversible. Climate change is now framed as a national security concern because it affects borders, disasters, migration, and military readiness, which draws political attention. But these risks can't be solved through isolation or military measures alone—climate change has no borders and demands cooperation. That means the security framing can either push countries toward narrow self-preservation or toward collective action if leaders use it wisely. Wars dominating headlines and the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement make solidarity harder, but cooperation is becoming structurally unavoidable.

ET: Has the climate security discourse, intentionally or otherwise, reinforced stereotypes about fragility in the Global South?

AS: Yes, even when unintended, climate security discourse can paint the Global South as naturally fragile or permanently unstable. Climate impacts hit poorer regions harder because of weaker economies,

limited institutions, governance challenges, and fewer resources for adaptation. The danger is that this vulnerability is often framed as a local failure rather than the result of global injustice—unequal responsibility and capacity. The cruel irony is that the poorest countries have contributed least to emissions but suffer most, while having little influence in negotiations. Climate security narratives need careful handling to highlight these structural inequalities instead of stigmatizing vulnerable societies.

ET: You show that most climate displacement remains internal or regional, yet the fear of mass migration toward wealthy states dominates global policy. Why has this misconception become so politically useful?

AS: It's politically useful because it lets wealthy states treat climate migration as a border threat rather than a human security and justice issue. Most climate-related displacement happens within countries, but the idea of cross-border arrivals hits harder politically—it taps into domestic polarization, rising ethno-nationalism, and election concerns. This fear justifies tougher migration controls while shifting attention away from the deeper responsibilities of emissions reductions and adaptation support. With global attention now on war, migration fears are even easier to weaponize as part of broader security agendas.

ET: In the book, you caution that climate emergencies can legitimise expanded surveillance and restrictions on civil liberties. Are we already witnessing early forms of climate authoritarianism?

AS: Yes, we're already seeing warning signs, even if climate authoritarianism isn't the dominant

model everywhere. Climate stress can undermine economic stability, deepen inequality, and weaken trust in institutions, opening the door to stronger state control and less democratic accountability. When repeated disasters and growing insecurity hit, governments often seek faster decision-making and expanded powers, which can reduce transparency and public scrutiny. Treating the climate crisis as a national security issue gives leaders more authority to act quickly, sometimes bypassing normal democratic processes. The risk is that emergency measures introduced during climate shocks could gradually become permanent tools of governance.

ET: Your book calls for human centred climate security rooted in justice and cooperation. Given current geopolitical tensions, how politically realistic is this transformation?

AS: It's politically difficult, but both necessary and possible—especially since the alternatives are far more destabilising. Climate change isn't just an environmental issue; it multiplies insecurity, poverty, and conflict, meaning countries will have to respond sooner or later. Human-centred climate security only works if leaders treat climate action as essential to stability and legitimacy, not optional. Multilateral cooperation is still possible, and progress can happen even in a divided world. But with the space for justice-based cooperation shrinking, leadership and pressure from society are more important than ever.

ET: Are international climate governance structures capable of delivering justice-based solutions, or are they structurally shaped by existing geopolitical hierarchies?

AS: They have potential, but unequal power and geopolitical hierarchies still shape how they function. Countries most vulnerable to climate change often have the least influence in negotiations and struggle to field enough qualified negotiators. Climate finance promises frequently fall short, undermining trust and fairness.

These aren't just technical problems—they reflect deeper inequality between Global North responsibility and Global South consequences. Still, collective progress is possible through stronger agreements and renewed engagement from major powers. Justice-based solutions can emerge, but only if governance becomes less driven by self-interest and more grounded in obligation and equity.

ET: After completing this book, are you hopeful that global climate governance can still shift toward protecting the most vulnerable, or do you believe the trajectory toward fortress style adaptation is already well underway?

AS: The book leaves room for hope, but it's cautious and urgent. Global climate governance is moving slowly, often blocked by apathy and self-interest, though there are signs cooperation can strengthen as impacts intensify. At the same time, fortress-style adaptation is already visible—wealthy states focus on borders, control, and protecting their own populations rather than the most vulnerable. The warning is clear: unless climate becomes a top political priority, civil society pressure won't be enough. With attention now on war, we risk sliding further into defensive adaptation unless political commitment to justice and solidarity is renewed.

THE POLITICS OF WAITING

Waiting has become one of the most common experiences of everyday life in Pakistan. Yet it is rarely discussed as a public issue. It is treated as a personal inconvenience rather than a reflection of how institutions function.

Citizens wait in National Database & Registration Authority (Nadra) offices to obtain identity documents. They wait for passports. They wait for electricity to return after power outages. They wait for water tankers in neighbourhoods where piped water no longer reaches homes regularly. They wait in traffic congestion and at overcrowded bus stops. They wait for court cases to be decided, for building approvals to be issued and for government departments to respond to applications. Millions also wait for visas, work permits and overseas employment opportunities, often investing years of savings and planning in processes whose outcomes remain uncertain.

This waiting is so deeply embedded in everyday life that it has become normalised. However, when an entire population spends a significant portion of its time waiting for services that should function efficiently, the issue is no longer personal. It becomes political.

The problem is not the delay alone. Every society experiences delays. The real issue is uncertainty. Citizens are often unable to predict how long a process will take or whether it will be completed at all. As a result, planning becomes difficult and insecurity becomes a permanent feature of daily life.

A visit to any Nadra office illustrates this condition. Despite improvements in digital systems, long queues remain a common experience. People frequently spend entire days renewing identity cards or correcting records.

The same applies to passport offices, where sudden backlogs can leave students, workers and travellers uncertain about their future plans. The

costs of these delays are rarely calculated. Lost working hours, transport expenses and missed opportunities are absorbed by the citizens themselves.

The same uncertainty defines urban services, where waiting is not the exception but the default.

In many parts of Karachi, the formal water supply system is unable to meet demand, leaving entire neighbourhoods dependent on water tankers. Families wait for deliveries that may arrive late, arrive partially filled, or not arrive at all. The tanker economy is often discussed as a water issue, but it is also a time issue. Residents must continuously adjust their schedules around an unreliable service. Their time becomes part of the cost of obtaining water.

The same pattern can be observed in transport. Karachi's population has expanded far beyond the capacity of its public transport system. Affordable housing is increasingly located on the urban periphery, while employment opportunities remain concentrated elsewhere. Consequently, workers spend several hours each day travelling long distances. Although projects such as Bus Rapid Transit systems have improved mobility on specific corridors, they have not yet addressed the larger mismatch between urban growth, housing and transport planning.

For many workers, commuting consumes three to four hours daily. If they are working five days a week, it results in 15-20 hours of commute per week — over a year, the equivalent of three to four months of full workdays lost to travel alone. Yet these losses are seldom included in discussions on economic development. Traffic congestion is treated simply as a transport problem, when it is also a question of social and economic efficiency.

The electricity sector provides another example. During periods of scheduled or unscheduled

interruption in electricity supply, households, businesses and students reorganise their lives around power outages. Shopkeepers adjust working hours. Students postpone study schedules. Small enterprises invest in generators and alternative energy sources. Again, citizens absorb the consequences of systemic inefficiencies through their own time and resources.

Perhaps nowhere is waiting more consequential than within the justice system. Court cases involving property disputes, inheritance matters or civil litigation often continue for years and, in some cases, decades. Justice delayed is not simply justice denied; it is also a transfer of costs from institutions to citizens. Families postpone investments, businesses defer decisions and individuals remain trapped in uncertainty. The delay itself becomes a burden.

These conditions contribute to the growth of informal systems. Where formal institutions are slow, intermediaries emerge. Agents facilitate documentation processes. Informal transport operators fill mobility gaps. Water tankers replace municipal supply networks. Personal connections are used to accelerate procedures that should function routinely. Such arrangements are often described as corruption or informality, but they are also responses to excessive waiting.

The impact of waiting is not distributed equally. Wealthier groups can often reduce delays through private alternatives. They can instal solar systems, hire legal teams, purchase private transport and access services through personal networks. Low-income households have fewer options. They remain dependent on public systems and, therefore, spend a greater proportion of their lives waiting.

Waiting, in this sense, becomes a form of inequality.

The issue also influences politics. In an envi-

ronment where citizens must rely on elected representatives, bureaucrats or influential individuals to resolve routine problems, access to services becomes dependent on patronage rather than rights. Water connections, infrastructure repairs, and administrative approvals often become matters of negotiation. Citizens seek favours rather than demand institutional accountability. This relationship weakens democratic governance. Efficient institutions reduce dependence on intermediaries. Inefficient institutions strengthen them.

Pakistan's development debate often focuses on large projects, investment figures and economic growth rates. While these indicators are important, they reveal little about how people actually experience the state. A more meaningful measure may be the amount of time citizens are forced to spend obtaining basic services.

How long does it take to secure a passport? To register property? To travel to work? To receive water? To resolve a legal dispute? To obtain an electricity connection? These questions reveal much about the effectiveness of governance.

Time is a public resource. When institutions function poorly, citizens pay for those failures with their time. The burden is largely invisible, but it affects productivity, opportunity and quality of life. Waiting, therefore, is not simply an inconvenience. It is an indicator of how power, resources, and institutions are organised. A society in which citizens spend an increasing portion of their lives waiting is a society in which inefficiency has become institutionalised.

The reduction of unnecessary waiting may seem like a modest objective. Yet it is central to the creation of more equitable and effective cities. Development should not be measured only by the infrastructure that is built. It should also be measured by the time returned to citizens.

Texas invested billions to fight cancer. Abbott's H-1B visas restrictions may stall research, some warn

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public institutions' use of the H-1B visa program, cancer advocates and immigration attorneys warn the policy could undercut that strategy.

At MD Anderson Cancer Center, researchers holding H-1B work visas explore why tumors resist treatment, test new drugs and use artificial intelligence to analyze tissue cell by cell. Records obtained by The Texas Tribune show the Houston institution sponsors 277 workers through the program.

Across Texas, 44 public universities, health centers and system offices reported sponsoring 3,332 H-1B workers to the Texas Workforce Commission. The higher education institutions had to detail their use of such employees as part of Abbott's directive.

The records do not establish whether Abbott's policy has disrupted research, clinical trials or patient care. But Lore Gruenbaum, chief scientific officer and senior vice president of research at Blood Cancer United, said these types of restrictions send "a chilling message that foreign-born researchers are less welcome" at a time when institutions already face difficulty recruiting and retaining young scientists.

Gruenbaum estimated that foreign-born students make up more than 40% of the graduate-student pool in biomedical research and at least half of post-doctoral trainees.

"If we don't have that talent pool available, the quality and the scope and the impact of the research that can be done will very likely decrease," she said.

Alejandro Coronel, a press assistant in the governor's office, did not answer the Tribune's questions about the directive's potential impact on cancer research.

Instead, Coronel pointed to Abbott's Jan. 27 directive in which the governor said the restrictions are needed to protect Texas workers and prevent abuse of the federal program.

Abbott barred public colleges, universities and state agencies led by gubernatorial appointees from filing new H-1B petitions without TWC's permission through May 31, 2027, the end of the next legislative session.

Institutions seeking approval must explain why the job is essential, why existing employees or a Texas vendor cannot do it, what uniquely qualifies the pro-

posed worker and how they tried to recruit Texans or other authorized workers.

Abbott required public institutions to report their existing H-1B workers to TWC, including their jobs, countries of origin and visa expirations dates as well as the documented efforts to give qualified Texans a chance to apply for those positions.

As of July 17, no public university or state agency had sought permission, TWC press officer Sara Fischer said.

MD Anderson officials said the center is complying with Abbott's directive and "will await further guidance on how future hires may work." They did not answer repeated questions from The Tribune about whether the policy has affected hiring, research, clinical trials or patient care.

The center's report to the state did not note whether qualified Texans applied for the jobs held by its H-1B workers. Officials told the TWC it was "not administratively feasible" to determine how each position was recruited because they do not collect applicants' citizenship or immigration status, according to the documents reviewed.

MD Anderson reported a total of 278 workers on the first page of its report to TWC, but the accompanying spreadsheet listed 277. Most of those jobs are tied directly to cancer research and treatment.

From 2020 to 2025, MD Anderson filed 853 H-1B petitions. Annual filings rose from 91 in 2020 to more than 160 in each of the last three years, including both new petitions and renewals.

Recruiting the brightest

The visa program has become integral to the cancer-research enterprise Texas spent decades building.

In 2007, Texas voters approved the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas, initially committing \$3 billion to make the state a national leader in fighting cancer. Then-Gov. Rick Perry said the investment could "lure the brightest research minds from around the world."

MD Anderson researchers have received more than \$745 million from CPRIT, about 18% of all the state programs' awards.

From 2020 through 2025, MD Anderson also led all U.S.-based higher education institutions in National Cancer Institute funding every year, receiving nearly \$847 million in total.

Abbott issued his directive days after a conservative outlet scrutinized Texas A&M University spending more than \$3.25 million on H-1B-related expenses over nearly five years.

MD Anderson spent about \$2.78 million filing 853 H-1B petitions during that same timeframe, including 564 new petitions and 289 renewals.

The H-1B program was created to supplement the nation's workforce, not replace it, Abbott wrote in his directive. "Bad actors" had failed to recruit qualified Americans and, in some

cases, replaced them with lower-paid H-1B workers. Public institutions "must lead by example" and ensure taxpayer-funded jobs are "filled by Texans first," he wrote.

State officials' public focus on H-1B fraud in recent months has centered largely on private businesses, not public universities or public agencies.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has investigated dozens of private businesses and sued one company and its owner over an alleged scheme involving fake childcare businesses and fraudulent H-1B petitions.

Paxton's office did not respond to questions from The Tribune about whether it has received any complaints about or launched any investigations into Texas public universities over their use of the visa program.

State Rep. Ann Johnson, a Houston Democrat whose district includes part of the Texas Medical Center and a former Harris County prosecutor, said she would support efforts to prosecute fraud but does not believe Abbott's directive is really aimed at stopping it. Johnson was treated for thyroid cancer at MD Anderson.

"You're not stopping fraud," Johnson said. "You're stopping a patient from getting the finest care from the finest doctor in the world because they're no longer welcome in Texas."

Layers of scrutiny

Universities' ability to recruit foreign researchers depends partly on a pipeline that begins with international students, some of whom remain in the country after graduating from schools in the United States.

The Trump administration last week finalized a rule generally limiting international students' authorized stay to four years unless they receive an extension. The change could particularly affect doctoral students, whose programs often take longer.

Fanta Aw, executive director and CEO of NAFSA: Association of International Educators, said the rule would shift decisions about students' academic futures to an already overburdened immigration system.

"This is not just bad for higher education. It is bad for American innovation, economic growth, workforce development, and global leadership," Aw said.

In Texas, immigration attorneys said many were relieved when the TWC issued guidance in March that interpreted public agencies' approval requirement more narrowly than Abbott's directive initially suggested.

Jerry White, TWC's director of human resources, told institutions that approval was required for prospective workers living outside the United States whose petitions would have been subject to a \$100,000 federal fee. Renewals and certain status changes from students and recent graduates already in the country did not require approval, he wrote in a March 13 email.

Kathleen Campbell Walker, an

El Paso immigration attorney with Dickinson Wright PLLC and former president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, works with public universities.

In June, she questioned whether college officials would need the agency's permission to hire an out-of-state graduate already in the United States on a student visa if they wanted to hire and sponsor that person through the H-1B status.

TWC's initial guidance had specifically referred to students and recent graduates of a "Texas institution of higher education," raising the possibility that approval may be needed to hire someone on a student or H-1B visa who trained at Harvard, Yale or another out-of-state state school. TWC officials later responded to Campbell Walker in writing that universities do not need its permission in such situations.

The commission's March guidance noted that permission "will not be granted" for workers from countries on a prohibited list. That includes China, one of the most common countries of origin among MD Anderson's H-1B workers.

Campbell Walker questions why Texas would consider a worker's country of origin after a federal court vacated a separate policy pausing immigration applications filed by people from 39 countries. The federal government appealed, but its request to pause the ruling was denied on July 15, requiring immigration authorities to resume normal processing while the appeal proceeds.

Campbell Walker said the shifting guidance and remaining uncertainty about the prohibited-country restriction underscore her view that the directive is more political than practical.

"And it's a political statement, to me, that does not put Texas first," Campbell Walker said.

The absence of permission requests does not mean universities no longer need H-1B workers, Campbell Walker said. Institutions may be relying on foreign talent who do not require such approval or are avoiding new petitions that could draw scrutiny from state leaders, she said.

"I think that the universities are very worried about being targeted for potential retribution if they file H-1B petitions right now subject to the governor's directive," Campbell Walker said.

The state review adds another layer to an already extensive federal process.

TWC requires institutions to identify the position's Labor Condition Application, confirm that the salary meets or exceeds the federal prevailing wage and document their recruitment efforts. That federal application requires wage and worksite information and is intended to prevent employers from underpaying H-1B workers.

Federal officials review whether the job requires special-

ized expertise, whether the worker is qualified and whether the employer and worksite are legitimate, said Samantha Wolfe, a Colorado-based immigration attorney who advises universities and employers.

TWC's instructions list what institutions must submit but doesn't explain how the agency weighs the information or decides whether to approve a request.

Wolfe said the additional state review could put Texas institutions at a disadvantage when they compete with universities and hospitals elsewhere for specialized researchers and physicians.

Hiring delays can prevent laboratories from adopting specialized technology, stall grant-funded work and slow research into rare cancers, Gruenbaum said. Because some blood cancers affect relatively few patients, a small number of research groups may be responsible for advancing a promising treatment for an entire disease.

"Biomedical science is a team sport," she said.

Blood Cancer United funds research at MD Anderson and relies on its researchers and physician-scientists to review grant proposals, Gruenbaum said.

MD Anderson's influence extends beyond its own laboratories. It trains researchers, physicians and physician-scientists who later help develop drugs at biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies, Gruenbaum said.

"This is the training ground," Gruenbaum said of MD Anderson. "Nobody can advance without going through this training ground."

West Coast Sourdough Marks Grand Opening in Webster, Announces Texas Franchise Expansion

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Boulevard, Suite 300, Webster, next to Buffalo Wild Wings, the new restaurant is expected to serve as a key location in the company's growing presence in Texas.

During the celebration, company representatives also announced that West Coast Sourdough is now franchising throughout Texas, inviting entrepreneurs and investors to become part of the brand's continued expansion. Franchise information was made available to interested attendees throughout the event.

The grand opening highlighted the community's strong response to the California-based sandwich chain and underscored the company's commitment to bringing its fresh, artisan-style menu to customers across Texas.

With the Webster location now officially open, West Coast Sourdough aims to continue expanding throughout the state, offering its signature sourdough sandwiches while creating new business and employment opportunities in Texas.



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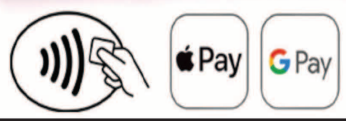
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