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(Right) Mayor Whitmire presents the City of Houston Proclamation declaring July 21 as "Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Day" in honor of Sheikh's 45 years of humanitarian and community service.

Houston Honors Sitara-e-Khidmat Recipient Muhammad Saeed Sheikh at National Civilian Honor Celebration

Mayor John Whitmire Declares July 21 as "Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Day," Announces Intention to Visit Pakistan with Sheikh During His Next Term

HOUSTON, Texas: More than 400 distinguished guests gathered at the Hilton Houston Post Oak for the National Civilian Honor Celebration honoring Muhammad Saeed

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OUR VOICE. OUR JUDGMENT. OUR FORT BEND COUNTY FORT BEND COUNTY JUDGE RACE: DANIEL WONG LAYS OUT HIS PLAN

FORT BEND COUNTY, Texas: Republican Fort Bend County Judge candidate Daniel Wong is continuing his campaign with a platform focused on public service, economic growth, infrastructure, education, and transparent leadership ahead of the November 2026 general election.



A longtime Fort Bend County resident, engineer, entrepreneur, and former Sugar Land City Council member, Wong describes himself as "a builder, a leader, and a man of faith." According to his campaign, his priorities include representing Fort Bend County's diverse communities,

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FORT BEND COUNTY JUDGE DANIEL WONG

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US lawmakers acknowledge Pakistan's role in promoting regional stability in meeting with CDF Munir

United States lawmakers acknowledged Pakistan's role in promoting regional stability and economic resilience in a meeting with Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and

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Pak welcomes Kuwait's ratification of 2023 defence cooperation agreement

Pakistan on Wednesday welcomed the ratification of the Pakistan-Kuwait Defence

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Pakistan urges UN to fully implement Gaza peace plan, warns delays threaten peace prospects

Pakistan urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to ensure the full implementation of the ceasefire in Gaza and the peace

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Democrats split over redistricting at cost of minority districts

WASHINGTON — Democratic voters are divided over how far to go in countering Republican redistricting, with new polling showing many would accept fewer majority-minority districts — the seats designed to secure Black and minority representation — in exchange for maps that improve the party's odds.

The debate follows a Supreme Court ruling

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Pakistan's Generation Z: A Blindfold on the Eyes, a Circle Beneath the Feet

Close your eyes for a moment.

Picture a girl who wakes at four in the morning. The dark is still thick. Everyone else in the house is asleep. She goes to the kitchen, drinks water, opens her books, and begins to read. This is not the ritual of a single day. It is three years of discipline. Three years built not from dreams but from something closer to blood. Her father spent his pension. Her mother sold her jewelry. Her brother went without so that she could sit for one exam — an exam that would make her a doctor, that would change the fortune of an entire household, that would carry her not only beyond her city but beyond the borders of her country altogether.

And then the results came.

And in the results, she learned that the questions she had spent three years mastering had already been sold. For money. In the dark. Someone else's darkness was purchased with the light that should have been hers.

This is not the story of one girl. It is the blood of twenty million stories that spilled onto India's streets in July 2024.

I want to ask you something, and I want to ask it specifically of the young Pakistani reading these lines.

Have you ever felt that particular anger — the anger that comes when you know an injustice is happening and you can do nothing about it? The anger that comes when you watch the people who worked hardest lose, and the people who worked the system win? The anger that comes when you understand that the system does not want to change, because if it changed, what would become of the people whose entire power depends on it staying broken?

That anger does not make you weak. That anger is the flame from which history is rewritten.

India's young people lit that flame.

The NEET examination in India is not merely an exam. It is a doorway to millions of dreams. Twenty million young people sit for it every year. Of those twenty million, only one hundred thousand find their way through. And that one hundred thousand carries the weight of an entire family's future on its back. This is something like Pakistan's CSS examination, but wider, deeper, because it is not only the passport to a government job — it is the passport to Canada, to America, to Britain, to Europe.

A single son or daughter who becomes a doctor changes the trajectory of an entire household. A brother's education, a sister's wedding, a parent's old age — all of it, tied to the outcome of one test.

And when it became known that the exam had been bought — that those with money had purchased the questions in advance, that merit had lost to cash — the sound that rose was the sound that rises only once in a great while, from millions of chests at once.

Words sometimes become weapons. And sometimes those same words boomerang back into the chest of the one who threw them. Someone in India, with contempt, called the protesting students cockroaches — comparing them to the insects that hide in darkness and flee from light. And the students picked up that word, pinned it to their own chests, made it the name of their movement, and

then proved something the powerful had not accounted for: cockroaches may indeed hide in the dark, but once they come into the light, they are not so easily crushed.

Today, when the front-page headlines of the world's largest news agencies — Reuters, the BBC, the Associated Press, the Independent — read that India's education minister has resigned before the force of the “cockroach protests,” this is not simply news of one minister's departure. This is news of a generation's arrival.

The roots of this story reach back to May 2026, when the leaked papers of India's medical entrance examination betrayed millions of students who had spent years in preparation, whose families had staked their savings on the outcome. The government's response was arrogance: everyone would have to retake the exam. No apology was offered. No one accepted responsibility.

And when responsibility is refused, grief turns into rage. When it was reported that twenty-one students had taken their own lives under the weight of depression and stress — however disputed that number remains — the anger stopped being a protest and became something closer to a reckoning of the national conscience.

Then Sonam Wangchuk, an education reformer, began a hunger strike. Twenty days passed, and the students made his fast their own cause. And as always happens when public anger crosses a certain threshold, the political parties arrived behind it — Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Samajwadi Party, all falling into step.

But the real story was not written in the halls of Delhi. The real story was the one Najam Sethi laid out in his analysis, the one that stopped me mid-thought.

India's union ministers — men whose standing is considered among the most powerful in the country — were running after student leaders. Picture that scene for a moment. The most powerful men in a nation of a billion and a half people, men whom ordinary citizens wait hours simply to glimpse, were chasing after young people, requesting a meeting. And the students set the terms: we will not come to your office. We will not come to your home. If you wish to meet us, it will be on neutral ground.

This was not merely a negotiating tactic. It was an announcement that the oldest formula of power had been inverted. For centuries, the rule has been that the smaller comes to the doorstep of the larger, that subjects present themselves at the court of the ruler. But when students said we will not come to your door, you will come to ours, that was not a condition. That was the declaration of a new era.

And Narendra Modi — a leader who wins with seventy percent of the vote, whose popularity no one had dared challenge — first tweeted, then posted a video on Instagram, promised fast-track courts, spoke of new legislation. But the students said: not enough. And finally, mere hours ago, Dharmendra Pradhan announced his own resignation on Twitter.

Governments built on the barrel of a gun, Sethi observed, are always fragile and afraid. But democratic governments



By Raja Zahid
Akhtar Khanzada

carry a flexibility, a moral courage, because their authority rests on the affection of their people rather than on fear of them.

This is the difference standing between the protests of Pakistan and the protests of India. In Pakistan, fifteen people gathering is enough to make the government feel threatened. What happened in Islamabad in November 2024 was the direct product of that fear — that if protesters reached the Red Zone, the government itself would fall. That fear is nothing but the mark of power that knows its own illegitimacy.

India is the one country where democracy has continued, unbroken, for seventy-seven years. Where elections happen on schedule. Where results, however contested, are accepted. Where power changes hands peacefully. This is a truth we, as South Asians, ought to pause over and consider. We criticize India often, and for many valid reasons — but the strength of its democratic institutions, its mechanisms of public accountability, its demonstrated capacity for ordinary students to force a powerful minister into resignation — this is something absent across much of our region.

And here begins the question we must ask of ourselves.

Could this ever happen in Pakistan — students forcing a minister to resign? Will there ever be a day when the powerful chase after the young, rather than the young standing in line at their doors?

For now, the answer is no. And the reason for that is no is the fracturing of our entire society under Zia-ul-Haq, and the banning of student politics — the chain that has, for four decades, been stripping political consciousness from the minds of our young.

In four decades of journalism, I have heard many questions. But some questions do not land on the ear. They land on the chest. One such question has come to me repeatedly from friends in recent days: Raja sahib, when the chief justice next door called our young people cockroaches, a young man sitting in America opened an Instagram page, flew home, and waited for the moment the cockroaches hiding in the corners would be summoned. And the world watched as the boys and girls who had been compared to insects rose in the streets like a flood and shook everything — from the halls of power to the compliant press. Why couldn't this happen in Pakistan? Why is our youth silent? Who fixed them?

Before I answer that question, I want to step back — because to understand the wounds of nations, you must undo the stitches of their history.

You have all heard that when the British ruled the subcontinent, their governance rested on one golden principle: divide and rule. We have heard this phrase, read it, written it in our examinations, and drawn no conclusion from it whatsoever. The British left, but they left their formula behind, and a century and a half later, that same prescription is still being injected into our bloodstream like a tunnel through the body. Today, Pakistan's young people remain divided into the same old boxes wearing new labels — this one with the PPP, that one with Nawaz Sharif, another a soldier for Imran Khan; this one Shia, that one Sunni, and among the Sunnis, Deobandi here, Barelvi there; Sindhi, Punjabi, Baloch, Pashtun, Muhajir.

But wait. Close your eyes and think for a moment — the enemy is one and the same. The same hand that shattered your unity, divided you into factions, gave you separate slogans, separate flags, and then stood back, smiling. You were once a rope. And a rope's strength lies in the unity of its threads. As long as the threads remain twisted together, the rope can pull down a mountain. But once the threads are pulled apart, that same rope can be snapped by a child's hand. Today, you are those loosened threads. Your weakness is not your numbers. Your weakness is your division.

I live in America, and this soil has taught me something. Here too, the politics of division was practiced, walls were raised in the name of race and ethnicity — but people here are beginning to understand, and even in the halls of power, the footsteps of change can be heard. Look at Vice President J.D. Vance himself — in a recent interview, he laid bare everything about Israel. The majority of the American public, including this very Generation Z, is coming to understand that America is being used. When consciousness awakens, the corridors of power themselves begin to shift. I have seen this with my own eyes.

And it is to gather that testimony that I recently wrote a book — *Between Fear and Freedom: The Hidden Hands of Power in Modern Democracies* — A Journalist's Witness to the Rise and Fall of Democracy. This book stands against no nation and no party. It spans the hidden game being played from South Asia to America, a game kept deliberately out of the sight of generations. I have tried to understand the invisible mechanisms of power that ordinary citizens often feel but cannot name. My hope is that today's youth, and the generations still to come, will not see it simply as a book — but as a conversation, a question, and perhaps a mirror.

I wrote this book so that what is buried in my chest could be handed to the generations after me — so that when some young person, someday, gropes for a path in the dark, there will be at least one lamp in their hand.

Now let me return to the question my friends asked. Why is Pakistan's Generation Z fixed in place?

Because we are still being set against one another by the same old British formula, so that we remain weak.

We have illiteracy. We chase after false lights the way an ox chases the lantern hung before its face, and we have been turned into that same ox that turns the oil-press from morning until evening, drenched in sweat, step after step — and by evening finds itself standing exactly where it began the day. The eyes of the ox are blindfolded so it will not know it is walking in circles. Our nation's eyes are blindfolded too — one blindfold of ethnicity, another of party loyalty, another of sectarian division. The colors of the blindfolds differ. The darkness is the same.

And until we learn to think as a nation, this circular journey will continue. Leaders will keep being bought and sold. Loyalties will keep going to auction. And whoever dares to try tying the bell around the cat's neck will be pushed off the path — and the nation will drift further, and further, and further from its destination.

So to the youth of my homeland — yes, to you, I am speaking directly. Whatever nation, whatever country you belong to, become whole within it. Widen your own identity. Do not practice hatred of ethnicity, or of race, or of religion. Love your party, but not more than your nation. Honor your sect, but not above humanity itself. Take pride in your language, but do not hate another's.

Because nations are not built from hatred. Nations are built from shared purpose, shared law, and shared consciousness.

America's success is not its wealth. It is the one law that lifts everyone above the divisions of color, race, and religion. Leaders come and go from office here, but the law belongs to everyone, and everyone honors it. Institutions remain within their bounds, and when someone tries to cross that boundary, the system rises before them like a wall of iron.

You must do the same. Strengthen the real machinery of democracy. And remember this too: those who weaken democracy do not always arrive as outside invaders — they often come wearing the very cloak of the system itself. When they overreach, it becomes the duty of every generation to defend that system. Because hear this — if you do not defend it today, your children will be left fighting the very same corruption you turned your eyes from, and they will have to pay, in sacrifice, for the debt that was yours to settle.

Remove the blindfold. Step out of the circle. Let the threads become a rope again. History does not remember the nations that kept turning in circles around the press. History remembers the caravans that set out toward the horizon — that found, even amid the noise of their own time, the courage to hear the truth, to understand it, and to stand beside it.

But history also teaches us this: no chain lasts forever. In Nepal, the students rose, and the prime minister had to go. In Bangladesh, the students rose, and fifteen years of power came to an end. In Sri Lanka, the people rose, and the president had to leave the country. And now in India, the students rose, and a minister has been forced to resign.

All of this is one wave — a tsunami of Generation Z moving across South Asia, country by country.

Why coercion doesn't work

Authoritarian rule can neither meet Pakistan's challenges nor make the government secure.

Maleeha Lodhi

WHILE leaders of the hybrid government prioritise foreign engagements and overseas trips, domestic challenges continue to intensify. Public discontent and unrest are mounting across the country but the ruling elite remains detached from this reality.

In much of Balochistan the writ of the state doesn't exist. Militant violence and terrorism are spiralling out of control. In KP escalation in TTP-sponsored terrorist attacks have left people fearful and distrustful of law enforcement authorities. Last week, lawmakers from both sides of the aisle in the KP Assembly described actions against terrorists as "aimless" and ineffective. Unrest in Azad Jammu and Kashmir is far from over. Elections are approaching but they already lack public credibility. At the national level, the government-opposition stand-off continues to fuel a fraught political environment and deepen polarisation in the country. The PTI-led opposition has called for protests on Aug 5 to mark three years since its leader Imran Khan has been in jail.

Meanwhile a nationwide lawyers' movement is taking shape to protest against the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments. The Lawyers Action Committee argues that these amendments have made the judiciary subordinate to the executive and gravely undermined judicial independence. It also demanded probes into alleged "excesses" committed in Balochistan, AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan and release of all political prisoners. Add to this ferment public frustration with the growing cost-of-living burden and power outages during peak summer and the picture is one of growing tur-

moil with public anger rising against the rulers by the day.

What is the hybrid government's answer to this? There isn't one. There certainly isn't a problem-solving response. Instead, the strategy is denial. Pretend everything is fine. Then attack anyone who says otherwise. To the extent that there is a response, it relies primarily on political repression and coercive measures to manage opposition, unrest and public discontent. But putting a lid on problems doesn't make them go away.

The record is there for everyone to see. Along with undermining judicial independence by controversial constitutional amendments there is a marked descent into authoritarianism. Democracy exists mostly in name. Parliament is little more than a rubber stamp. Freedom of assembly is curbed. The opposition is suppressed with its leaders locked away in jails and given long sentences in dubious cases. The media is controlled with TV channels told what not to broadcast and even who to invite to talk shows. Dissent is silenced. Digital space is restricted. Pressure has been mounted on human rights organisations that impedes their work.

Yet the lesson to be learned from Pakistan's tortured history is that governments cannot strengthen or secure themselves by such oppressive and strong-arm methods. What counts is legitimacy and public acceptance that actions taken by the government are fair and lawful. But the notion the hybrid ruling elite has of ideal governance is that provided by a 'hard state'. The aspiration for a hard state has been frequently voiced by the country's top military and civilian leaders. What does it mean? Leaders who used that expression have never really

explained. They seem to want a state that has strong governance, centralised power and the capacity to assure national security. But what they have established is an authoritarian state.

The hybrid government has at its disposal an array of coercive instruments that it has used to reinforce its power. But has that helped it achieve the core goals of security, stability and the state's financial solvency? Not by a long shot. It mistakes a hard state for a competent one. A competent state is an efficiently functioning, trusted state that can secure these goals with public support and of course by a legitimate political leadership. A competent state is one able to effectively perform the core functions of a strong state — collect taxes to run the state, ensure rule of law, maintain order, control the borders and deliver public goods. It is also one in which the instruments of governance are robust and institutions fit for purpose. Trust is an indispensable attribute.

The authoritarian state that has emerged is unable to perform fundamental state functions and is predicated on coercion not trust. Moreover, the aim of its sponsors seems to be the accretion of power rather than the pursuit of public goals. There is another aspect to their flawed assumptions. This relates to the inability to distinguish between power and authority. Power and authority are not the same. Power, however 'hard', does not automatically confer authority.

Authority is where power, legitimacy and public purpose intersect. Authority rests on the legitimate exercise of power in the public interest that goes beyond the narrow interests or self-preservation of the ruling elite. The 'rightful' use of power, deployed to promote a public agenda,

bestows authority. Authority is thus more a relationship with the governed than a capacity. It is based on consent, willingly given, as well as trust, not coercion. Authority also rests critically on credibility.

The question is whether coercion has delivered what the state's managers want. Has the opposition been eliminated by banning rallies, jailing activists, and blocking its path? Clearly not. It may be in disarray, unable to mobilise and its protests blunted, but its support base and popularity remain intact. Has muzzling the media silenced dissent? Traditional media may be controlled, but social media has become the outlet for free expression and criticism.

Has reliance on kinetic force brought peace to troubled Balochistan? It hasn't. This is not to say militant violence should go unanswered. But the hard-power approach has failed because it ignores the underlying drivers of the unrest: historical grievances, popular discontent and alienation, poor governance, treatment of Baloch nationalists, and a sense of injustice over both unrepresentative rule and the unfair allocation of resources. No surprise, then, that the province remains in turmoil. In AJK, bans and crack-downs have only hardened protesters and worsened the situation. There are widespread concerns this would undermine Pakistan's long-standing position on occupied Kashmir.

Authoritarian rule is incapable of resolving Pakistan's problems or making the government secure. It only lays bare its weakness, its fear, and its rejection of democracy. A strong state is built by empowering citizens, not repressing them.

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

Outsourcing security

Why do states encourage local populations in conflict zones to stand up against violent actors?

Muhammad Amir Rana

THE recent outcry by Maulana Fazlur Rehman regarding an unspecified state policy to raise private militias for local protection against terrorists has sparked controversy. Many have accused the maulana of disrespecting those who have sacrificed their lives to protect the homeland.

However, the broader context of his remarks deserves scrutiny: why do states encourage local populations in conflict zones to stand up against violent actors? Take the example of Pakistan. Successive governments have used this tactic —from the then East Pakistan to Balochistan and KP. The core question, and perhaps the crux of the maulana's argument, is why this policy has failed in most cases.

Known for his sharp political timing, the maulana deliberately chose a platform near Lahore, the political heartland of Punjab, to ensure that his message reached key decision-makers. Yet, his objections to local state-backed civilian militias are far from isolated. Across KP and Balochistan, particularly in the southern districts, from Lakki Marwat to Dera Ismail Khan (the maulana's core constituency), the locals are attempting to form self-defence militias against terrorist groups like the banned TTP and Hafiz Gul Bahadur's faction. Tribal elders and political leaders have voiced even stronger criticism of security failures by the state — most recently seen in the Quetta sit-ins organised by the families of slain police personnel.

There are certainly instances where local private militias were formed by criminal elements seeking state patronage. Overall, however, the phenomenon of state-backed armed groups, variously termed 'amn (peace) committees' and 'lashkars', or derogatorily labelled 'death squads' and 'cardholders', is no longer popular. There are distinct reasons for this shift across both KP and Balochistan.

In KP, the reliance on local militias dates back to the British colonial model of collective responsibility. During the peak of counterterrorism operations between 2007 and 2015, the state reactivated this approach. Tens of thousands of anti-Taliban lashkar members were armed, with the civilian and security

leadership fully on board.

It was widely believed that President Asif Ali Zardari strongly favoured the strategy; reports during his first presidential tenure suggested a deal for Chinese small arms to equip KP's peace committees. Many felt personal tragedy also drove this policy, given the assassination of his wife, Benazir Bhutto, by religiously motivated terrorists. Modelled conceptually after the US-backed 'Sunni awakening' against Al Qaeda in Iraq, the policy gained initial traction among communities in the former Fata and Pata regions backed by state funding, arms, and institutional cover.

In the early stages, these militias provided crucial local intelligence and served as a protective shield for the state. However, the model quickly exposed its inherent flaws. Some militias abused their authority and committed atrocities, turning the public sentiment against them. More critically, once security forces cleared key areas, the state began viewing these groups as financial and operational burdens and gradually abandoned them. Furthermore, exposing tactical weaknesses to private militias damaged the state's image, creating a perception that economically and socially weak terrorists were capable of challenging structured security forces without state consent. This has forced security institutions to review their approach towards private militias.

The abandonment left militia members, 'cardholders' and local political figures totally vulnerable. The TTP and Baloch terrorist groups marked peace committee members, militia leaders and allied political workers as priority targets, subjecting them to targeted killing, roadside IEDs and grenade attacks. As per a database managed by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, the terrorists launched 220 attacks against the members of these militias between 2006 and 2015 and killed 507 and injured another 416, while the figure for Balochistan was 77, in which 66 members of private militias were killed. The PPP was at the centre. Its ally, the Awami National Party, ruled KP. Both parties suffered thousands of casualties as well. At the same time, the terrorists tagged them as enemies for being full partners of the

establishment, for crushing them and supporting the foreign occupation forces in Afghanistan. According to the data, the terrorists launched 2,007 attacks against political workers mostly belonging to these two parties and killed 4,068 workers and leaders. Maulana Fazl himself survived multiple suicide attacks, while scores of his party members were killed in Bajaur and the surrounding districts.

Apparently, public trust in this strategy eroded long ago. Elders remember how terrorists had killed hundreds of their members and leaders. After state protection evaporated, many refused to volunteer again. Moreover, unresolved issues following the Fata merger, including mass internal displacement, undeveloped development funds and a severely underfunded local police force, have deepened the sense of abandonment in tribal communities.

Simultaneously, political and civil actors in Balochistan have raised concerns over rumours regarding the recruitment of former Afghan security operatives for similar purposes for which private militias have been raised. The use of foreign fighters in internal conflicts is not an alien idea, as the recently Russian-made and backed Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) has earned notoriety in the field, and its foreign fighters have been used in several conflicts in Africa, West Asia and even in Ukraine.

If it is true that Afghan fighters are being replaced with local private militias or merged into existing ones, nothing could be worse; it will only empower criminal elements and foreign agents. These criminal elements, alongside private militias and so-called peace committees, were among the primary drivers of mistrust between the state and society in both KP and Balochistan. Even if this is merely a perception among the populace, the state must address it with a clear answer.

The maulana tapped directly into these deep-seated local grievances. By choosing his moment and venue strategically, he ensured that those shaping Pakistan's national security policy could not ignore the message.

The writer is a security analyst.

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Our Cockroach, Wangchuk, Jantar Mantar and Gen Z

Our cockroach system sustained by bureaucrats, clergy, soul-selling members of intelligentsia, media, feu-

Ali Hassan Bangwar

In response to my article last Sunday titled "Revolution? No Thanks," I received numerous emails and texts. While most complimented my insight, a few raised important questions: Why hasn't Pakistan seen a systemic overthrow in its 80-year history, unlike Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, or the brewing student activism in India? And will we ever see a Cockroach, Wangchuk or Gen-Z Jantar Mantar movement in our country? Before I take up these questions, I pay tribute to the students of Jantar Mantar and to every resistance movement against oppressors worldwide.

The movement in India has exposed the limits of Modi's propaganda. Meanwhile, it is also exposing the hypocrisy in our part of the world: politicians and the media criticise Modi's policies - as they should - yet

they lose all empathy when it comes to the oppressed under their noses. The metaphorical Jantar Mantar on Thandi Sarak, Hyderabad - protesting the kleptocracy of the SPSC as well as all calls for the recovery of Priya Kumari - struck them dumb.

This hypocrisy offers a clue as to why the system outlasts its counterparts elsewhere. Pakistan has personifications of Cockroach, Wangchuk and Jantar Mantar serving different purposes in our society. That is, if Cockroach, Wangchuk and Gen-Z Jantar Mantar symbolise a resiliently oppressed youth, altruism and a bastion of resistance in India, respectively, they stand differently in our part of the world.

The cockroach not only symbolises a resilient victim public, it also embodies the true benefactors of this brute system. The system's survival for nearly eight decades demonstrates the cock-

roach's remarkable resilience, which far outlasts the grit of the oppressed. This is because Pakistan's cockroach system is sustained by bureaucrats, clergy, soul-selling members of the intelligentsia and media, and feudal and tribal lords - all bound together by mutually reinforcing interests that reach every corner of the country.

In our context, Wangchuk is a planted cockroach who displays a faint pulse of public empathy, aimed at hijacking any potential people's movement. Had Sonam Wangchuk been in Pakistan and led a rights movement, he would have either already been sponsored, or would have long traded away the grievances and rights he claims to champion, gotten co-opted into the cockroach system, or made a personal fortune abroad. Nevertheless, Indian students are not fortunate enough to have active clergy, politicians, national-

ists, journalists, rights activists, or people with episodic revolutionary impulses. Alas! And we woefully have Wangchuks in every street. What a pity!

Jantar Mantar is every part of the country with a few sites echoing the voice of the voiceless unless they meet the brute force of the cockroach system. Most are led by the aggrieved with a little share of Gen Z. Even in genuine movements for rights, some among the aggrieved - in return for personal perks - choose to transmute into a Kafkaesque cockroach of the system, not out of dehumanisation, but to dehumanise people. The rest of Jantar Mantars are planted, aimed at distracting from issues, pitting people against each other, and averting any potential threat.

And most of Gen Z rarely look beyond their personal interests, with the collective good being an after-

thought. With a few exceptions, they wish to be transmuted into "Kafkaesque cockroaches" more than standing with the oppressed. They often resort to flattery for getting co-opted by the oppressive system. This way, they, instead of confronting the cockroach system, choose to be one against the oppressed explicitly or via complicity. Perhaps they find their saviours of their fortune within the system. Perhaps they seek in malady the remedy. And perhaps.

Yet, Gen Z stands as the only hope.

Today, the line between the two cockroaches - a resilient victim and a resilient oppressor - is getting blurred, with the latter outnumbering the former as the former outnumbers the latter. The horrifying fact is that the victimised cockroaches join their oppressors more than the other way around. Isn't it?

Skin colour in global politics

Shahid Javed Burki

Broadly speaking, those who write on global issues sometime focus on human skin colour. In dealing with colour, they divide the world population in four groups: White, Brown, Yellow and Black.

White is the dominant race in Europe. Britain, a white country, led the area and conquered a good part of the world in the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Its conquest of North America and Australia led to the migration of white people to these continents who defeated the native-coloured populations and established governing structures that dominated the native inhabitants.

In North America - in particular what eventually emerged as the United States of America - the European migrants converted vast tracts of lands to agricultures, growing cash crops such as tobacco. But the economy that was created needed labour to farm the land. The needed workers were brought in from Africa as slaves by buying people from native well-to-do landowners and shipping them to America.

Enslavement of large number of people created tensions within the colonised areas. In the United States, this led to a civil war between the states in the north that had few black people and the states

in the south that had large slave populations. Under the leadership of President Abraham Lincoln, the north won the war and slavery was abolished. However, it took decades before the freed black people won civil rights that were close to those enjoyed by the white population. Australia was another conquered area to which the white migrant population moved as migrants, displacing the coloured natives.

The next big coloured population is made up of the blacks in the continent of Africa. Most countries in the area were under the control of white colonial powers from Europe. Independence movements in some of the countries in the continent led to their freeing and becoming independent. Scores of African countries arrived on the global scene as self-governing nations. In between the white and black people are people of colour - brown and yellow. The brown people are mostly in South Asia - India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal - and some have formed diasporas colonies in the Middle East Europe and North America.

Finally, there are the yellow people who inhabit China and East Asia. Over time, they have become dominant players in some parts of the global economy. Today's essay is the beginning of my longer study of human colour and global politics

and with the growing conflicts among people of different colours. The most pronounced confrontation is between the United States, dominated by white people, and China, the country of yellow people.

Jin Yu Young, writing for The New York Times issue of July 17, 2026, under the caption "China viewed more positively than U.S. in 25 of 36 countries surveyed", states: "People in many countries around the world view China more positively than they do the United States." She based her conclusion on an intentional survey conducted by the Washington-based Pew Research Center that found that China was favoured in 25 out of 36 countries surveyed between March and May of 2026. It was the first time in two decades that China beat the United States in the majority of countries that were polled.

While China had reached out to the world with game-changing investments (like in Pakistan where Beijing has spent billions of dollars constructing roads, bridges and dams), the shift was, according to the report, due to deteriorating opinions of the US. "The Pew findings confirm the collapse of US soft power under President Trump's leadership, driven by his administration's use of force and economic coercion," said Susannah Patton, of

the Australian Lowy Institute.

While the US had been suffering for several years, this year's Pew's survey shows a precipitous decline in the way the country is viewed. The United States median favourability view dropped to 36 from 48 per cent in 2025. Wrote Jin: "Most of the countries that viewed United States more positively than China were among China's traditional rivals in the Asia-Pacific Region like Japan and South Korea, or had leaders close to Trump like Israel. Notably, respondents in Canada and Mexico - the United States' immediate neighbors and two of its closest allies - reported a grater affinity for China than the United States." The Pew poll also surveyed public opinion of Donald Trump in 36 countries and found that the United States involvement in military conflicts was a major factor in the decline in his global favourability. A median of 74 per cent of adults disapproved of the American president's handling of the Iran war and the Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip.

The conclusion I would draw from Pew's surveys is that while colour of the skin does matter in the way nations interact with another, it is not a defining characteristic. While people with the same skin colour relate well with one another, there can be also conflicts among

them. That is certainly true in South and East Asia. For the brown nations of South Asia, religion rather than skin colour has proven to be a stronger factor in understanding conflicts among the countries in the region. Colonial India was partitioned on the basis of religion. There were brown people on both sides of the India-Pakistan divide.

Skin colour also affects domestic policies. That is the case, for instance in the United States, where the black, while emerging from slavery, are still discriminated against. They, unlike the white people, are slow to rise in the economic and political systems. Skin colour was also a factor in the breakup of original Pakistan when the country's eastern wing peopled by Bengalis fought for independence and, following a civil war, created a country of their own - Bangladesh. While Bengalis were citizens of Pakistan from 1947 to 1971, their relatively darker skin colour compared to the colours of Punjabis, Pathans and Baloch was an important source of discrimination against them. In India, skin colour is an important determinant of the prevalent caste system. Brahmins - the upper caste Hindus - are of lighter skin colour than the lower caste people who are mostly of darker hue.

What Happens to Your Energy When You Take Vitamin B12 and Magnesium Together

Are vitamin B12 and magnesium the perfect supplement pairing for better energy?

Feeling sluggish is a frustrating but common problem, and many people may turn to vitamin and mineral supplements to help get their spark back. The nutrients you consume play a major role in how your body creates and sustains energy throughout the day. Among the most popular options in the supplement aisle are vitamin B12 and magnesium.

Both nutrients have strong reputations for supporting overall health. But are they more effective when you take them together? We spoke with nutrition experts to uncover exactly what happens to your energy levels when you combine these two powerhouse nutrients, and whether this combination is the right choice for you.

Should You Take Vitamin B12 and Magnesium Together?

For most people, taking vitamin B12 and magnesium together is safe and may even be beneficial, since they don't compete for absorption. Instead, they work as a team to keep your body functioning at its best.

"Taking B12 and magnesium together can be helpful because they support different but complementary aspects of energy and muscle function," says Johnnah Katz, M.A., RDN.

Vitamin B12 supports red blood cell production and nerve health and helps cells convert food into usable energy, while magnesium aids muscle function, nerve signaling and energy metabolism. Together, they help your body use energy efficiently while keeping muscles and nerves working properly.

However, some people should be careful. Those with impaired kidney function should consult a health care provider before taking magnesium supplements, as their kidneys may struggle to clear excess amounts from the blood. Additionally, certain medications, like acid reflux drugs or specific antibiotics, can interfere with the absorption of vitamin B12 or magnesium, so it's best to seek medical guidance before starting a new supplement routine.

Does Pairing Vitamin B12 and Magnesium Improve Energy?

If you're hoping for an immediate jolt of energy like you'd get from a cup of coffee, you may need to reset your expectations. This combination doesn't act like a stimulant per se, but it can support how your body generates and uses energy at a cellular level.

"Vitamin B12 supports energy by helping the body convert our food into usable cellular energy (ATP)," explains Sophia Deahl, M.S., RD, IFMCP. "Vitamin B12 plays an important role in making healthy red blood cells, which carry oxygen to tissues supporting physical and mental energy."

When you add magnesium to the mix, you support the systems that use that energy. As Katz points out, "Magnesium is essential for muscle relaxation, nerve signaling and hundreds of enzymatic reactions."

If you're deficient in either nutrient, your body may struggle to perform basic tasks, which may leave you feeling sluggish. Together, they address fatigue from two different angles: B12 helps generate energy, while magnesium helps your muscles and nerves use it efficiently.

That said, taking them together doesn't enhance their absorption or amplify their effects. They work independently, so you don't have to take them at the same time to benefit, but you can if it suits your routine.

How Much Should You Take?

Understanding the proper dosage is crucial for getting the most out of your supplements without experiencing negative side effects.

For vitamin B12, the recommended daily intake for adults is 2.4 micrograms. Pregnant women need 2.6 mcg and breastfeeding women need 2.8 mcg. Since vitamin B12 is water-soluble, your body simply excretes what it does not use through urine. Therefore, there is no established Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) for B12, and toxicity is exceptionally rare.¹

For magnesium, the recommended daily intake is 310 to 320 milligrams for adult women and 400 to 420 mg for adult men. Pregnant women need about 350 to 360 mg daily. Magnesium from supplements does have a UL of 350 mg per day unless otherwise directed by your health care provider. Exceeding this amount may cause gastrointestinal side effects such as diarrhea, nausea and stomach cramping.

How much of each supplement you should take depends on many factors, including diet, health status and medications, so it's best to work with a health care provider to determine what's right for you.

How to Take Vitamin B12 and Magnesium Together

You can take vitamin B12 and magnesium together or separately, depending on your preference.

Some people opt for a multivitamin blend that contains both vitamin B12 and magnesium, which is convenient if you want to limit the number of pills you swallow. Others prefer separate supplements, which allows for more flexibility with timing.

Although both vitamin B12 and magnesium play roles in energy metabolism, they can have different effects on how you feel. Vitamin B12 is often taken in the morning, as some people report feeling more alert after taking it—though, this is mostly anecdotal. Magnesium, on the other hand, is famous for its role in muscle relaxation and is commonly taken in the evening to support better sleep.

Food Sources

Supplements can be helpful, but a food-first approach is always the best place to start. Here are some whole-food sources to add to your grocery list.

Vitamin B12 Food Sources:

- Beef and liver
- Fish (e.g., salmon, trout and tuna)
- Shellfish (e.g., clams and oysters)
- Eggs
- Dairy products (e.g., milk, cheese and yogurt)
- Fortified nutritional yeast

Magnesium Food Sources:

- Leafy green vegetables (especially spinach and Swiss chard)
- Seeds (e.g., pumpkin seeds and chia seeds)
- Nuts (e.g., almonds and cashews)
- Legumes (e.g., black beans and edamame)
- Dark chocolate

Our Expert Take

Vitamin B12 and magnesium are both important nutrients for supporting the body's natural energy systems. While they won't give you the quick jolt of an energy drink, they work behind the scenes to keep your cells, muscles and nerves functioning properly. Although getting these nutrients through food is ideal, supplements can offer a helping hand.

Taking vitamin B12 and magnesium together is safe and may support energy levels, but they're just as effective when taken separately. Whether you increase your intake through food, individual supplements or a combined formula, getting enough of these two nutrients is a smart, science-backed way to help

One Ummah, One Mission: Houston Unites for a Noble Cause

Members of Houston's Muslim community gathered at Shahnai Banquet Hall for a special Dinner & Show fundraiser featuring internationally acclaimed nasheed artist Wali Ali. Organized in association with Dr. Imam Wazir Ali of the Mercy Center, the event brought together people from diverse backgrounds to promote unity and raise funds for the completion of the Ibrahim Kamaluddin Community Center and Masjid. Guests enjoyed an evening of faith, fellowship, and inspiring performances while contributing to a project that will serve future generations through worship, education, and community outreach.





Mayor Whitmire, Dignitaries Honor Sitara-e-Khidmat Recipient Muhammad Saeed Sheikh

National Civilian Honor Celebration with more than 400 distinguished guests, including Houston Mayor John Whitmire, State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani, members of the Consular Corps, elected officials, business and community leaders, gathered at the Hilton Houston Post Oak to honor Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, recipient of the prestigious Sitara-e-Khidmat (Star of Service), one of Pakistan's highest civilian honors, awarded by the President of Pakistan in recognition of his more than four decades of humanitarian, civic, and community service. The celebration, hosted by the Consulate General of Pakistan in Houston, Sister Cities of Houston, and the Host Committee led by Syed Javaid Anwar, also featured the presentation of a City of Houston Proclamation by Mayor Whitmire declaring July 21, 2026, as "Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Day."



Houston Experts Urge Residents to Prepare Before Disaster Strikes

Houston Community Media hosted a disaster preparedness briefing featuring emergency management officials and community leaders who shared essential guidance on hurricanes, flooding, heat waves, power outages, and emergency response resources.



I Tried a Low-Sodium Diet for 2 Weeks—Here's What Happened

It's not easy to eat less than 1,500 mg of sodium per day. One food writer learned it can be worth it.

I don't have high blood pressure—yet. With a strong family history of the cardiovascular condition, it's on my mind every time a nurse straps a blood pressure cuff to my arm. High blood pressure is defined as consistent readings of 130 mm Hg or higher systolic (the top number) and 80 mm Hg or above diastolic (the bottom number). It can lead to devastating consequences, including stroke or heart attack.¹ Learning more about high blood pressure and my family history, I realized that I was on a slippery slope toward the potential for heart disease.

Cutting down on sodium seemed like a natural step for my health and blood pressure. I called registered dietitian Susie Polgreen, M.S., RD, CD, IFNCP, to learn more about what I had to do. Could I, as a food writer who both lives to eat and pays my bills by doing it, cut my sodium down to the less than 1,500 milligrams per day that Polgreen told me qualified as a low-sodium diet?² I would do my best for the two weeks leading up to Memorial Day, marking the end of my experiment with a holiday burger.

Setting Up for Success

Most Americans consume more than 3,300 mg of sodium each day—well above the American Heart Association's recommendation to take in no more than 2,300 mg (about 1 teaspoon of salt) and optimally no more than 1,500 mg per day (which was my goal).²³ Polgreen told me the first order of business was to cut out processed foods. "Anyone can benefit from more whole foods and less processed foods," she said. "That just means higher nutrient density. Sodium is a natural preservative, so it's usually found in a lot of foods that are frozen or sit on a shelf for a long period of time."

That meant cutting out the frozen Indian meals that I appreciate for a quick workday lunch, but also some things I hadn't thought of. For example, one of my favorite easy dinners is a recipe for chicken thighs that also stars canned beans. Polgreen told me that canned foods were ones to watch out for. "Canned fish, canned vegetables, those [can] be loaded with salt. And then anything that you have to unwrap, so most snacky foods, like crackers [and] potato chips. The rule of thumb is you want to make sure that it's under 140 mg [sodium] or less per serving," she explained. Many canned beans exceed 1,000 mg if you eat the whole thing (however, you can reduce the sodium content by 40% from simply rinsing your beans).

My biggest surprise came with breakfast. I love a bowl of Cheerios with blueberries in the morning. But even a 1 ½-cup serving of the supposedly heart-healthy cereal contains 190 mg sodium, according to the label.⁶ I ended up sticking to yogurt to break my fast.

And something interesting quickly happened. As soon as I started cutting salt out of my diet, I morphed into a natural sodium detector. My palate became hypersensitive to salt, meaning that preparing meals without it was easier than I expected. And while two weeks wasn't enough to reap the long-term rewards, there are many to count on for those who make a low-sodium diet a way of life.

Benefits of Reducing Sodium Intake Improves Heart Health

We all know that lowering sodium

intake will reflect in your blood pressure numbers. That's because salt makes you retain fluid, putting stress on your blood vessels. But that's not the only effect salty food has on your heart. Because of its bearing on blood pressure, too much salt causes undue stress that can lead to many varieties of cardiovascular disease, including heart attack, heart failure and stroke.⁷

Lowers Risk of Liver & Kidney Diseases

Because you'll retain less fluid with less salt intake, you'll decrease the burden on your kidneys. Reducing sodium has been shown to the slow progression of chronic kidney disease and lower your chances of developing kidney stones.⁸⁹ Cutting down on sodium may also lower your risk of developing fatty liver disease, though eating less processed food and increasing

fiber intake may lead to similar outcomes.

Combats Calcium Loss

Worried about your osteoporosis risk? Sodium blocks calcium absorption, causing calcium to be lost in urine. In addition to increasing risk of kidney stones, too much sodium can also lead to a higher loss of calcium, causing weak bones.⁹¹¹ A calcium supplement can help, but one of the added benefits of consuming more calcium-rich foods is that many are naturally low in sodium.

Challenges Encountered While Following a Low-Sodium Diet

Dining Out

I've been a restaurant critic for most of the last 20 years. In my current role, dining requirements change with the season, so fortunately during this experiment I only had to eat out a few times. When I did, though, I surrendered myself to cheating on my regimen. I couldn't ask the chef not to use salt in my food, which is what I would have had to do.

Meal Prepping

Cooking at home is one of my favorite creative outlets. I usually decide what's for dinner on the fly, but making sure that I was limiting salt made this more of a challenge. There was no using prepared dressings as an afterthought when I made salad to go with dinner—I had to prepare my own vinaigrettes without added salt.

Reading Labels

I would call myself moderately aware of what's on nutrition labels. But making sure that I was keeping my sodium down to less than 1,500 mg a day meant becoming a serious scanner of at least that segment of the nutritional breakdown. After the Cheerios shock, I was more careful about making nearly everything from scratch, as outlined above.

Low-Sodium Swaps

These are a few swaps that I found helpful in my low-sodium journey:

Homemade spice blends. I grew up on Mrs. Dash, but Polgreen shared her list with me for the best herb and spice blends to amplify everything from turkey to rice. One of my favorite secrets? Garlic and onion powder does wonders for practically anything, but the fresh stuff is even better.

Swiss cheese instead of Cheddar. It turns out Swiss only has 53 mg of sodium per ounce, making it the best choice for something melty and gooey.

Making my own lunch meat. I learned that deli turkey can have around 800 mg of sodium per 100-gram serving.¹³ I ended up eating naturally flavorful venison with some herbs and spices at lunchtime instead.

Snacking on fruit and nuts. When I would usually have reached for some chips or crackers, I started eating fresh fruit instead. Fortunately, it was strawberry season where I live, but even when I ran out of farmers'-market-fresh snacks, I would grab a container of blueberries or a bag of unsalted nuts.



Democrats split over redistricting at cost of minority districts

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narrowing a central section of the Voting Rights Act, which triggered a fresh Republican push to redraw congressional maps across the South. Republicans argue some majority-minority districts are unconstitutional; Democrats warn the redraws would erode minority voting power and reshape control of the House.

The polling captures the shift as it happens.

Democratic voters start out prioritizing minority voting power, but once the Republican gerrymandering campaign and the Court's ruling are put to them, a plurality moves toward supporting countermeasures even at the cost of majority-minority seats.

Notably, some Democratic voters of color said they would accept that trade if it improved the party's prospects.

The dilemma is real, but so is what it would cost.

Representative Sydney Kamlager-Dove of California has acknowledged that hard compromises may be necessary in what she frames as a broader fight over democratic power. Voting rights advocates counter that districts built to give historically disenfranchised communities a voice are not bargaining chips, and that a party winning seats by diluting Black representation has traded away the thing the seats were for.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries has pointed to recent state maps as evidence competitiveness and Black representation need not be opposed.

Republicans have seized on the argument as proof of Democratic division over race and representation.

As more states draw new maps before the next elections, the question is whether the party treats minority voting power as a commitment or as a variable to be optimized.

Pakistan urges UN to fully implement Gaza peace plan, warns delays threaten peace prospects

Continued from front page

framework endorsed by the Council, warning that delays risk "irreparably undermining the prospects for a just and lasting peace" and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

Addressing the UNSC's open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, said the discussion offered "an important opportunity for a holistic assessment of the situation in the Middle East."

He said the latest UN assessment showed that the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained "in dire straits", adding that while the ceasefire and US President Donald Trump's comprehensive plan to end the Gaza conflict had created "an important opportunity to alleviate humanitarian suffering and advance a credible pathway to

Palestinian self-determination and statehood", delays in implementing the initiative required "urgent attention."

"It is imperative to uphold the commitments reflected in the peace plan and Security Council Resolution 2803 that endorsed it," he said. "Failure to act now risks irreparably undermining the prospects for a just and lasting peace."

Turning to developments in the occupied West Bank, the Pakistani envoy said continued Israeli settlement expansion, the establishment of new settlement outposts and rising settler violence were "altering the demographic and geographic character of the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

He also raised concerns over what he described as the planned "Crimson Thread" project, a proposed 500-kilometre network of walls and military roads through the Jordan Valley.

According to Ahmad, the project would isolate Palestinian communities, sever the Jordan Valley from the rest of the West Bank and "undermine the viability and territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State."

The ambassador said Pakistan had joined other members of the Group of Eight (G8) Arab and Islamic countries in condemning what they described as Israel's escalation at Al Aqsa Mosque, particularly "the continued mass incursions by settlers."

He said the foreign ministers of the group considered the actions "a flagrant violation of international law, the relevant UN resolutions, and the historical and legal status quo at the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem."

On Gaza, Ahmad described the humanitarian situation as "extremely fragile", saying that although the ceasefire and parts of the peace plan had brought some improvements, conditions remained dire.

He noted that 59% of Gaza's population continued to face crisis-level food insecurity, while "since the ceasefire, over 1,100 Palestinians have been killed."

"That calls into question the full and faithful implementation of the Plan," he said.

The ambassador added that nearly two million people remained confined to just 30% of Gaza's territory, where they continued to endure "catastrophic living conditions."

He also referred to reports of "a massive earthen barrier" being constructed across Gaza, saying it would entrench Israeli occupation and control over nearly 70% of the territory.

Against that backdrop, Ahmad said the Security Council must "act with unity" and outlined four immediate priorities.

First, he called on the Council to "support the full implementation of the Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict and Security Council Resolution 2803."

Secondly, he urged the Council to "demand an immediate halt to all settlement activities" and reject "any attempts at annexation, forced displacement, or alteration

of the demographic and geographic character of the Occupied Palestinian Territory," in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, including Resolution 2334.

Thirdly, Pakistan called for "international protection for the Palestinian people," echoing an appeal made by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, while urging accountability for "those responsible for crimes and violations committed against civilians."

Finally, Ahmad urged the immediate and unconditional release of withheld Palestinian revenues to enable the Palestinian Authority "to continue delivering essential public services."

Reiterating Pakistan's long-standing position on the conflict, the ambassador said "the only credible path to a just and lasting peace" remained the establishment of "an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, based on pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital."

Beyond the Palestinian issue, Ahmad said Pakistan remained "deeply concerned" about wider regional developments that were escalating tensions across the Middle East.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's support for "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all brotherly countries in the region" and urged "all sides to exercise restraint, take immediate steps towards de-escalation and uphold respective commitments under the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding."

"Pakistan remains committed to providing all support towards achieving lasting peace and stability in the region through dialogue and diplomacy," he added.

Addressing the situation in Lebanon, Ahmad said the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 remained essential for achieving lasting peace and stability. He also expressed appreciation for "the diplomatic efforts led by the US to consolidate the cessation of hostilities and advance a durable peace in Lebanon."

On Syria, the ambassador called for full respect for the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and reaffirmed Pakistan's support for the Syrian government's efforts "in this new phase."

He said the 1974 Disengagement Agreement and UN Security Council Resolutions 338 and 497 "must be fully respected," adding that "Israel must vacate its illegal occupation of all Arab territories."

Turning to Yemen, Ahmad reiterated Pakistan's support for "a Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political process" aimed at achieving comprehensive and lasting peace.

He condemned attacks against Saudi Arabia as well as assaults on commercial shipping, saying such incidents threatened "global trade and regional security."

The envoy also expressed concern over what he described as attempts to draw Saudi Arabia into the wider Middle East conflict, reiterating Pakistan's "unwavering support for the security, sovereign-

ty, territorial integrity and prosperity of the brotherly Kingdom."

Concluding his remarks, Ahmad said lasting peace in the Middle East would remain unattainable "as long as occupation persists and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination are not fulfilled."

He reaffirmed that Pakistan would continue to stand "in unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people" and support "all genuine efforts aimed at achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on relevant UN Security Council resolutions and international legitimacy."

Also on Tuesday, the UN's deputy special coordinator for the Middle East peace process Ramiz Alakbarov expressed alarm at the "rapidly deteriorating" situation in the occupied West Bank, denouncing the escalation of violence, particularly by Israeli settlers against Palestinians.

"In the past week, the escalating violence in the West Bank has resulted in civilian casualties, displacement, damage to property, and growing insecurity across affected communities," he said.

"Israeli settler attacks against Palestinian communities, homes, places of worship and civilian infrastructure have persisted at alarming levels," he said. Violence has exploded in the West Bank since the Hamas attack in Israel on October 7, 2023, with near-daily attacks by Israeli settlers and regular raids on Palestinian villages.

US lawmakers acknowledge Pakistan's role in promoting regional stability in meeting with CDF Munir

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Chief of the Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir, said the military's media wing.

According to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Member of the House of Representatives (State of Montana) Ryan Keith and Member of the House of Representatives (State of Washington) Michael James called on CDF Munir at General Headquarters, Rawalpindi.

"The visiting lawmakers acknowledged Pakistan's role in promoting regional stability and economic resilience. Both sides also explored opportunities to enhance bilateral trade, private-sector partnerships and broader economic engagement," said the statement.

The ISPR said that during the meeting, discussions focused on matters of mutual interest, regional security, bilateral defence cooperation and avenues for enhancing economic collaboration and prosperity," it said.

IT further added that CDF Munir highlighted Pakistan's vast economic potential, emphasising that sustainable regional stability was deeply anchored in economic growth, trade expansion and connectivity.

"He underscored Pakistan's ongoing structural reforms aimed at fostering a business-friendly envi-

ronment and attracting foreign investment," it added.

The US delegation thanked military leadership for its hospitality and expressed a shared commitment to strengthening economic, commercial and institutional ties between the United States and Pakistan.

Pakistan and the US have maintained a long-standing relationship encompassing security, counterterrorism, trade, investment and regional stability. While bilateral ties have experienced periods of cooperation and strain over the decades, both countries have continued to engage through diplomatic, military and economic channels.

More recently, Islamabad and Washington have sought to strengthen ties following the US-Iran-Israel conflict, during which Pakistan supported diplomatic efforts that contributed to a ceasefire. Since then, US President Donald Trump has publicly acknowledged Pakistan's role and praised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and CDF Munir for their efforts.

FORT BEND COUNTY JUDGE RACE: DANIEL WONG LAYS OUT HIS PLAN

Continued from front page

promoting fairness in Commissioners Court, investing in youth and education, and encouraging economic opportunity and smart growth throughout the county.

Wong says his leadership is rooted in faith, family, and community service. His campaign notes that he has spent more than two decades contributing to economic development, infrastructure improvements, and educational initiatives across Fort Bend County and the Greater Houston area. As the founder of a successful engineering firm with multiple offices and hundreds of employees, he says he brings extensive executive and business experience to public office.

Campaign materials emphasize Wong's commitment to ensuring every resident has a voice in county government. His platform calls for responsible fiscal management, investment in transportation and public infrastructure, support for quality education, and policies designed to strengthen local businesses while preserving Fort Bend County's quality of life.

The campaign's slogan, "Our Voice. Our Judgment. Our Fort Bend County," reflects Wong's message of inclusive leadership and community representation. Additional campaign messaging highlights commitments to serving all Fort Bend residents, fostering fairness in county government, expanding opportunities for young people, and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Wong secured the Republican nomination for Fort Bend County Judge and is expected to compete in the November 3, 2026, general election for the county's highest elected executive office.

Houston Honors Sitara-e-Khidmat Recipient Muhammad Saeed Sheikh at National Civilian Honor Celebration

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Sheikh, recipient of the Sitara-e-Khidmat (Star of Service), one of Pakistan's prestigious civilian honors, awarded by the President of Pakistan in recognition of his more than 45 years of humanitarian, civic, and community service.

The prestigious celebration was jointly hosted by the Consulate General of Pakistan in Houston, Sister Cities of Houston, the Host Committee led by Chief Host Syed Javaid Anwar, and the Organizing Committee. Among the attendees were Houston Mayor John Whitmire, State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani, members of the Consular Corps, elected officials, business leaders, faith leaders, community organizations, media representatives, and distinguished guests from across the United States.

The program opened with a welcome address by Consul General of Pakistan Muhammad Aftab Chaudhry, who congratulated Muhammad Saeed Sheikh on receiving the Sitara-e-Khidmat from the President of Pakistan. He praised Sheikh's lifelong dedication to humanitarian service, community leadership, and strengthening the bonds between Pakistan and the United States, stating that the national honor reflects Pakistan's appreciation for his decades of outstanding public service.

James Post, President of Sister Cities of Houston, highlighted Muhammad Saeed Sheikh's significant contributions to strengthening the relationship between Houston and Karachi through cultural exchange, community engagement, and people-to-people diplomacy. He commended Sheikh's commitment to building bridges between diverse communities and promoting international friendship.

Chief Host Syed Javaid Anwar introduced Houston Mayor John Whitmire and spoke warmly about Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, describing him as a man of integrity, humility, and tireless dedication. Reflecting on a friendship spanning more than two decades, Anwar said he had always admired Sheikh's unwavering commitment to both Pakistan and the United States and his passion for serving humanity. He praised the Government of Pakistan and the President of Pakistan for recognizing Sheikh's extraordinary contributions through the award of the Sitara-e-Khidmat. Anwar also acknowledged the invaluable contributions of the Host Committee, Organizing Committee, the Consulate General of Pakistan, Sister Cities of Houston, sponsors, volunteers, and community members whose collective efforts made the historic celebration possible.

In his keynote address, Mayor John Whitmire described Muhammad Saeed Sheikh as "a true star of the City of Houston," recognizing his 45 years of humanitarian and community leadership. He thanked the President of Pakistan for honoring Sheikh with one

of the nation's prestigious civilian awards and praised his remarkable contributions to Houston through numerous civic and charitable initiatives, including the annual Houston Iftar, disaster relief efforts, community development, and interfaith outreach. Mayor Whitmire then presented an official City of Houston Proclamation declaring July 21 as "Muhammad Saeed Sheikh Day" in recognition of Sheikh's decades of distinguished service to humanity and the community. The Mayor also announced his desire to visit Pakistan with Muhammad Saeed Sheikh during his next term in office to further strengthen the friendship and partnership between Houston and Pakistan.

Muhammad Saeed Sheikh was introduced by his son, Muhammad Samee Sheikh, who reflected on his father's lifelong commitment to public service, compassion, and leadership. Following the introduction, guests viewed a documentary highlighting Sheikh's remarkable humanitarian journey, community leadership, and decades of volunteer service both in the United States and internationally.

In his acceptance remarks, Muhammad Saeed Sheikh expressed profound gratitude to the President of Pakistan for the Sitara-e-Khidmat and reflected on how the Junior Chamber International (JCI) Creed, "Service to Humanity is the Best Work of Life," became the guiding principle of his life. He shared his journey of service through organizations including Pakistan Jaycees, the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce USA, the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association, Alliance for Disaster Relief, Houston Iftar, and numerous humanitarian initiatives that have served communities locally and around the world.

Sheikh emphasized that the Sitara-e-Khidmat is not a personal achievement but a shared honor belonging to the thousands of volunteers, community leaders, donors, and nonprofit organizations with whom he has worked over the past four and a half decades. He dedicated the award to all those who quietly devote their lives to serving humanity, stating that their selfless contributions represent the true spirit of public service.

Concluding his remarks, Sheikh thanked the President of Pakistan, the Government of Pakistan, the Consulate General of Pakistan in Houston, Mayor John Whitmire, Chief Host Syed Javaid Anwar, the Host Committee, the Organizing Committee, Sister Cities of Houston, members of the Consular Corps, elected officials, sponsors, media representatives, volunteers, and the entire Pakistani-American community for their unwavering support and partnership throughout his journey of service.

The evening concluded with a standing ovation as dignitaries and guests congratulated Muhammad Saeed Sheikh on receiving the Sitara-e-Khidmat and celebrated a lifetime dedicated to humanitarian service. The National Civilian Honor Celebration was widely recognized as a landmark event for the Pakistani-American community, highlighting the enduring friendship between Pakistan and the United States and reaffirming the universal value of service to humanity. The program was beautifully moderated by Dr. Aisha Khattak.

Pak welcomes Kuwait's ratification of 2023 defence cooperation agreement

Continued from front page

Cooperation Agreement during a visit by Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Jarrah Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah.

FM Jarrah arrived in Islamabad on Tuesday on a two-day official visit aimed at reviewing the full spectrum of Pakistan-Kuwait relations. FM Dar received his Kuwaiti counterpart at the foreign ministry today, where they held a meeting.

"FM Dar welcomed Kuwait's recent ratification of the Pakistan-Kuwait Defence Cooperation Agreement, signed in June 2023 and noted that the agreement marked an important milestone in bilateral defence relations and would further strengthen institutional linkages between the armed forces of the two countries while enhancing defence cooperation," said a statement issued by the Foreign Office (FO).

FO Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi separately said the development reflected the "shared resolve of both sides to further strengthen bilateral defence cooperation and elevate their security partnership".

He said the agreement provided a comprehensive institutional framework for expanding defence cooperation, encompassing military training and education, joint exercises, exchanges of expertise, and other mutually agreed areas of collaboration. It would further consolidate the longstanding defence ties between Pakistan and Kuwait, he added. "Pakistan and Kuwait will continue to work closely to implement the agreement in accordance with its provisions, thereby expanding bilateral defence collaboration, strengthening their enduring defence partnership underpinned by mutual trust, shared interests, and close institutional cooperation, and contributing to regional peace, security and stability."

On July 27, Anadolu Agency reported that Kuwait had ratified a broad defence cooperation agreement with Pakistan, three years after it was signed, according to the country's official gazette.

The agreement was approved and published on Sunday in the official gazette, Kuwait Al-Yaum, formalising a defence pact signed by the two countries in June 2023, the Kuwait Times reported.

The agreement establishes a framework for military cooperation between the Kuwaiti and Pakistani armed forces, covering military training, education, intelligence sharing, logistics, defence technology, research and exchanges of expertise, to strengthen institutional military ties between the two countries.

It also provides for cooperation in military manufacturing, electronic communications systems, scientific research, military media and cultural and sports activities.

Under the agreement, a joint military committee will oversee implementation, including the organisation of joint military exercises, official visits and other cooperative programs.

The pact will remain in force for five years and will be automatically renewed unless either side decides to terminate it. It also commits both countries to protecting confidential military information and resolving any disputes arising from the agreement through diplomatic channels.

The ratification follows a series of high-level contacts between Kuwaiti and Pakistani military officials in recent

months aimed at expanding bilateral defence coordination.

The agreement comes as Kuwait continues to deepen security cooperation with international partners amid heightened regional security challenges in the Gulf.

Kuwait has been among several Gulf countries targeted by Iranian missile and drone attacks during the recent regional escalation. Tehran has said the strikes were aimed at US military facilities hosted by Gulf states, while Kuwaiti authorities said their air defences intercepted projectiles that entered the country's airspace.

Dar-FM Jarrah meeting

The FO further added that during their meeting, the two foreign ministers reaffirmed the strong and fraternal ties between Pakistan and Kuwait, rooted in shared history, common values, and mutual respect.

"They reviewed the full spectrum of bilateral relations and discussed ways to further expand and deepen cooperation, particularly in the areas of trade, investment, energy, information technology, agriculture, and economic cooperation," said the statement.

The ministry said that FM Dar underscored the importance of sustained high-level exchanges in further strengthening the longstanding partnership between the two countries.

"The two foreign ministers agreed to establish joint working groups in key areas of bilateral cooperation, including energy, trade and investment, agriculture and food security, information technology, education, and health," the FO said.

According to the statement, both ministers further agreed to meet periodically to review the progress of these Working Groups, ensure effective follow-up on their work, and provide guidance for the timely implementation aimed at advancing bilateral cooperation.

The statement said that the two ministers "agreed to further institutionalise bilateral cooperation through enhanced institutional linkages and regular high-level exchanges".

It further added that both ministers also "reaffirmed their commitment to close coordination and cooperation at multilateral forums on issues of mutual interest".

During the meeting, Kuwait's foreign minister thanked the government and people of Pakistan for the "warm welcome and gracious hospitality" extended to him and his delegation. He also expressed appreciation for Pakistan's support to Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FM Dar, for his part, "reaffirmed Pakistan's deep commitment to its longstanding brotherly relations with Kuwait" and underscored Islamabad's desire "to further expand the mutually beneficial partnership across all areas of cooperation".

"The two foreign ministers also exchanged views on regional and international developments, including the situation in the Middle East and Palestine, while Sheikh Jarrah commended Pakistan's "constructive role in promoting regional peace and stability," said the ministry.

PM Shehbaz reaffirms full solidarity with Kuwait amid attacks in meeting with FM Jarrah

Later, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's full solidarity with the leadership and people of Kuwait and strongly condemned the attacks during the Middle East conflict in his meeting with FM Jarrah.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, the Kuwaiti foreign minister called on PM Shehbaz today at the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad.

"The prime minister reaffirmed Pakistan's full solidarity with the leadership and people of Kuwait and strongly condemned the attacks on Kuwait and other brotherly Gulf countries during the ongoing conflict," said the statement.

He stated that Pakistan was playing its part as an honest and sincere mediator and facilitator in the regional peace efforts and thanked the Kuwaiti leadership for its support for these efforts.

"During the cordial meeting, the prime minister warmly welcomed the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister and conveyed his best wishes to the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Meshal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and the Crown Prince, Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah," it said.

The statement added that the prime minister observed that the two brotherly countries had always stood together through thick and thin.

The PMO said that the prime minister expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of ties and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening cooperation with Kuwait in diverse fields, including trade, investment, energy, agriculture, information technology, maritime affairs, and human resource development.

"He also appreciated the Kuwaiti government for generously hosting the Pakistani community and acknowledged its valuable contribution to Kuwait's socio-economic development," it added.

The statement said that the Kuwaiti foreign minister conveyed the greetings and best wishes of the Kuwaiti leadership to the prime minister and reaffirmed Kuwait's commitment to further enhancing bilateral cooperation across areas of mutual benefit.

"He also expressed deep appreciation for the valuable contributions made by Pakistan, particularly by the PM Shehbaz, FM Dar and Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, in advancing dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the current crisis and restore peace to the region," read the statement.

FM Jarrah further thanked Pakistan's leadership and people for their solidarity and steadfast support for Kuwait during these difficult times.

"The two sides emphasised the importance of continued consultation and coordination on issues of mutual interest, particularly in the bilateral context, and agreed to exchange delegations in the near future to carry these discussions forward," the PMO statement added.

The premier reiterated his invitation to the crown prince of Kuwait to undertake an official visit to Pakistan at a mutually convenient time.

CDF Munir reiterates Pakistan's commitment to Kuwait

According to the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the Kuwaiti FM also met CDF Munir at General Headquarters in Rawalpindi.

The statement said that during the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security and steps to further strengthen bilateral cooperation were discussed.

"The visiting dignitary appreciated Pakistan's steadfast support, its constructive contribution toward regional peace and stability and the deep-rooted fraternal ties shared between the two nations," said the statement.

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 thalis – dals, vegetables, chutneys, sweets. Family-style dinner with Jain options available.

Shiv Sagar – 6662 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 977-0150

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

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

. Phone: (346) 266-1626

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

inspired thali buffet and a variety of healthy veggie dishes.

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7806

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

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

. Phone: (713) 864-6667

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

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

. Phone: (713) 960-8472

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 955-9878

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

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

. Phone: (713) 522-2022

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

. Uses local ingredients and has bakery items.

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

. Phone: (713) 242-8087

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

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

. Phone: (832) 886-4291

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

. Creative cocktails and vegetarian options also featured.

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

. Phone: (713) 334-5555

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

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

South Asia’s Gen Z moment

A ‘demographic dividend’ could turn into a demographic catastrophe.

Zahid Hussain

INDIA’S Gen Z uprising may not have swept away the government as it did in Bangladesh and Nepal, but it has certainly challenged an increasingly repressive system. Led by students and disgruntled youth, the protests — triggered by widespread allegations of leaked exam papers — grew into a mass movement. Demanding justice for the millions of students affected and for the reportedly dozens of suicides linked to the scandal, the protests, unprecedented in their scale, began in New Delhi and quickly spread to many parts of the country.

It soon turned into a wider democracy movement, drawing support from other sections of society. It is the most serious challenge the Modi government has had to face in its 12-year rule and has ripped open a fault line in the hard-line Hindu nationalist administration that has steadily eroded the secular character of Indian democracy. The protests forced the federal education minister to resign — a humiliating blow to Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s strongman image. Although the protests have now been called off, they have nevertheless shaken an increasingly authoritarian regime.

The Gen Z movement has upended India’s political landscape. The youth have rallied around a new political formation — the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) — that sprang into existence only months ago in response to an insulting remark about the youth by the chief justice of India. Very soon, a platform pledging to fight injustice and defend the democratic rights of the people turned into a formidable opponent of the right-wing Hindu nationalist government.

Although the protests led by the CJP centred on exam paper leaks and a decadent educational system, it was other issues — unemployment and democratic freedom — that truly galvanised the youth. The movement further exposed India’s controlled mainstream media, a reflection of the shrinking freedom of expression in that country. The protests in India may have ended, but the Gen Z movement

is not dead. Notably, social media platforms have served as major mobilising tools, allowing the youth to circumvent a controlled mainstream media often described as the ‘Godi’ (lapdog) media.

India’s Gen Z movement may not share the same intensity, but in many ways it echoes the youth-led movements in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka that toppled autocratic and corrupt governments and pulled those countries back towards democracy.

The youth revolt in Bangladesh was triggered by unfair job quotas for the children of ruling-party members. It quickly broadened into a countrywide uprising against an authoritarian regime that had effectively established one-party rule. The Sheikh Hasina government’s use of force, which killed hundreds of protesters, further inflamed public anger. The uprising finally ended with Sheikh Hasina fleeing the country — the movement’s defining victory and the prelude to a freely elected government.

Similarly, the Gen Z movement in Nepal was triggered by a ban on social media platforms critical of the government. The action ignited deep-seated anger over elite capture, widespread corruption and growing youth unemployment. Mass protests erupted across the country. The government’s attempt to crush the protests with brute force aggravated the people’s ire. Dozens were killed in what is widely regarded as the worst civilian massacre in Nepal’s modern political history. Angry protesters torched the parliament building and several politicians’ homes. Within days, the prime minister stepped down and the army briefly intervened to restore order before an interim government was formed. Elections followed a few months later, with a young leader installed as prime minister. A social media ban had lit the fuse that blew apart the entire power structure.

Sri Lanka is another South Asian country where the youth protests brought down the government. Sri Lanka’s 2022 uprising — known as the ‘Aragalaya’ (the struggle) — was one of the most dramatic protest movements in the

country’s modern history. Unlike in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, where a single issue became the trigger for a wider movement, Sri Lanka’s case was somewhat different: it was not sparked by a single sudden event but by a slow-burning explosion. The crisis was no accident — it was the product of years of economic mismanagement by a family dynasty that had dominated the country’s politics. High inflation and unemployment exacerbated the situation.

What has unfolded in these four South Asian countries is a lesson for Pakistan, which not only has a large youth population but also suffers from political and economic problems. Pakistan’s Gen Z population (born between 1997 and 2012) is believed to number nearly 70 million. This has dire implications for a country where basic rights are in jeopardy, the media and free expression are restricted, and unemployment is rising. A ‘demographic dividend’ could turn into a demographic catastrophe, with Pakistan occupying practically the lowest rung on South Asia’s human development ladder. The legitimacy of the regime — which is losing its grip in several parts — is being questioned. The economy, meanwhile, is dependent on external assistance, which restricts financial autonomy. Public discontent — driven by inflation, unemployment and political repression — has created a volatile situation.

Whatever is unfolding in Balochistan, KP and Azad Kashmir reflects a pushback against an elite-dominated power structure. Hundreds of political and human rights activists are said to be behind bars. The judiciary itself is shackled, restricting avenues for those seeking justice. News from these areas may be kept off the mainstream media, but reality cannot be hidden in the age of social media. Curbing access to social media cannot work in the tech age. Given the tensions existing along Pakistan’s borders, more unrest could have far-reaching consequences beyond the frontiers, as the regional landscape is highly volatile. Pakistan must restore democratic rights before it is too late.

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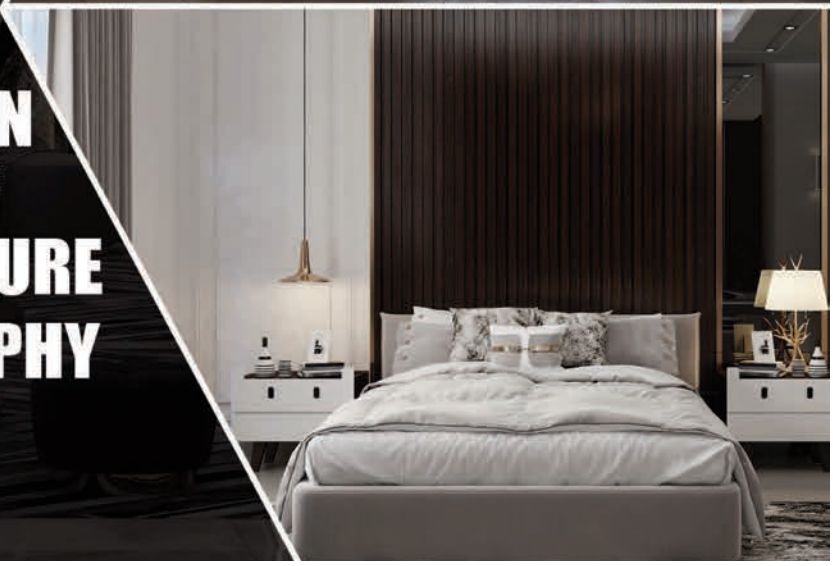
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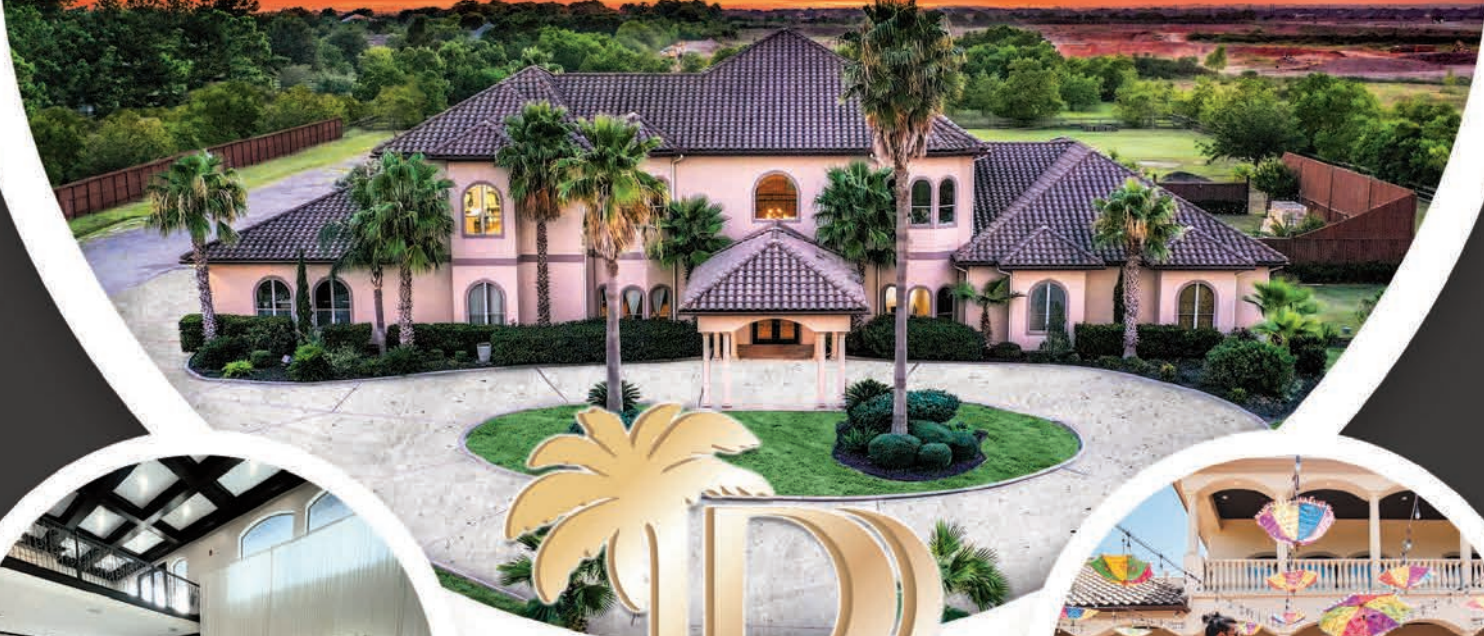
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Houston Welcomes YBQ's Inspiring Sufi-Themed Theatrical Experience



HOUSTON: Renowned Pakistani fashion designer, storyteller, and cultural icon Yousuf Bashir Qureshi (YBQ) captivated audiences in Houston with a mesmerizing theatrical performance as part of his USA Tour 2026. Organized by Aura

Luxe Events and directed by Zabad Anwer, the event offered a unique blend of Sufi philosophy, storytelling, music, and movement.

The performance featured YBQ's signature style of Dastangoi, the

Continued on page 28

Houston Community Media Hosts Disaster Preparedness Briefing, Urges Residents to Stay Ready Before Emergencies Strike



HOUSTON: Houston Community Media hosted an informative panel briefing titled "Hope for the Best, Plan for the Worst — Disaster Preparedness" on July 22 at the Southern News Group building, bringing together emergency management experts, nonprofit leaders, and community members to discuss how residents can better prepare for

natural disasters and emergencies across the Greater Houston area.

The briefing featured representatives from the Harris County Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Management and the Greater Houston Disaster Alliance, including the Greater Houston Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Houston. Panelists Brian

Murray, Brook Campbell, and Kara Cook-Schultz shared practical guidance on preparing for severe weather, hurricanes, flooding, extreme heat, and extended power outages.

Throughout the session, speakers emphasized that disaster preparedness begins long before a storm enters the Gulf Coast. Residents

Continued on page 28

Visa overstays detained at airports as Trump expands immigration enforcement

The Trump administration has expanded its immigration enforcement tactics by stepping up arrests of foreign nationals with expired visas at airports across the United States, including people who are still pursuing legal pathways to remain in the country.

In recent weeks, immigration officers have detained travelers at more than a dozen U.S. airports, according to The New York Times. Immigration attorneys say the sweep has affected a wide range of people, from highly skilled workers awaiting

visa renewals to spouses of U.S. citizens and former exchange visitors. Some of those detained were legally authorized to work while their immigration applications remained under review.

The operations reflect a shift in how immigration authorities are using airports as enforcement hubs. Previously, airport arrests largely cantered on individuals with final removal orders. Lawyers now say the focus has broadened to include visa overstays who have open

Continued on page 28

Houston Muslim Community Unites for Fundraiser to Support Masjid and Community Center Project



HOUSTON: Members of Houston's diverse Muslim community came together Sunday evening for a unique Dinner & Show fundraiser aimed at fostering unity while raising funds for the completion of the

Ibrahim Kamaluddin Community Center and Masjid project.

Held at Shahnai Banquet Hall, the event was organized in association with Dr. Imam Wazir Ali of the Mercy Center and brought together

Muslims from different backgrounds and traditions in an atmosphere of fellowship, mutual respect, and shared purpose.

The evening featured a spiritually uplifting Nasheed-style performance by renowned artist Wali Ali, whose inspirational presentation resonated with attendees and highlighted the values of faith, compassion, and unity.

Organizers described the gathering as a "one-of-a-kind event,"

Continued on page 28

Trump administration moves to end Medicare drug plan subsidies

WASHINGTON, United States — The Donald Trump administration plans to end a subsidy program that has helped keep Medicare Part D prescription drug premiums lower, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday, warning that the move may lead to higher costs for many seniors in 2027.

The program, which provides insurers with an estimated \$3.6 bil-

lion in subsidies this year, will expire after 2026. About 25 million Part D beneficiaries will learn their 2027 premiums this fall.

"We are stabilizing the market so this bailout is no longer needed," said Mehmet Oz, administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, in a post on the US social media platform X.

Continued on page 28

Houston's decades-old program awarding city contracts to minority-owned businesses is ruled unconstitutional

U.S. Judge David Hittner sided with a white couple who sued the city in 2023, claiming their landscaping businesses faced racial discrimination.

A longstanding city of Houston program requiring some government contracts to be awarded to minority-owned businesses was ruled unconstitutional Tuesday by a federal judge.

U.S. Judge David Hittner ruled in favor of a white couple who sued the

city and a city-affiliated management district in 2023, claiming their local landscaping businesses faced racial discrimination because of the municipal contracting initiative created in 1984. Hittner determined the "race-conscious portion" of the Minority, Women and Small Business

Enterprise Program violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Gerald and Theresa Thompson, the owners of Landscape Consultants of Texas and Metropolitan Landscape

Continued on page 28

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'The fear killed her': How an exam scandal in India sparked a student uprising

Her death and exam-related suicides fuelled mass protests demanding accountability from Modi's government

The prospect of retaking one of India's most competitive exams was so daunting for 19-year-old Sheikh Sana that a day before the test, the pressure became unbearable.

Instead of preparing again for the exam, she wrote "I am sorry" on a plain sheet of paper and took her own life, her family said.

Her death, along with the suicides of other aspiring students who sat medical college entrance exams only to face retakes after it emerged that test papers had been leaked, has become a focus for thousands of young protesters demanding accountability from Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

On Saturday, Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned over the protests.

About two months of protests have evolved from demands for action over the leaks into a broader expression of frustration over education, opportunity and accountability in a country where 65% of the population is under the age of 35.

More than two million students sat the pen-and-paper exam, known as the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), in May. After the leak came to light, the government launched an investigation into the test-selling scheme, cancelled the release of the results and ordered a retake in June, forcing candidates back into intense test preparation.

Sana's family, as well as the families of two other students who took their own lives, attributed their deaths to the voiding of the first exam and the uncertainty that followed.

"The fear killed her. The fear of re-NEET," Sana's father, Sheikh Jaffar Hussain, told Reuters at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar protest site, where students have been demanding accountability over the government's handling of the affair.

The government has not commented on the deaths of the exam candidates. Police officials in Rajasthan, Telangana and Gujarat told Reuters they had registered as suicides the deaths of Sana and two other students whose parents Reuters interviewed, and that the cases were still under investigation. They did not comment on the reason for the deaths, which Reuters was unable to independently confirm.

In mid-May, India's federal Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) announced that teachers and agents at private tuition centres had leaked the exam paper, charging students large sums for access to the questions. The CBI has arrested 13 suspects, including a doctor and several teachers, over the leaks.

Modi said in a video message on Thursday that he was pained by the paper leaks and promised strict action against those responsible, including by trying them in fast-track courts.

"I know that paper leaks are not an ordinary issue. And for millions of students and their guardians, this is painful," he said.

Surging protest movement

This week, tens of thousands protested in central Delhi, and police used batons and tear gas to disperse crowds. Opposition lawmakers disrupted parliament as they echoed protesters' calls for the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Rahul Gandhi, leader of the main opposition Congress Party, told reporters that exam paper leaks had gone unpunished, and



Habibunnisa, mother of Sheikh Sana, 19, an aspirant doctor who took her own life before the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) exam retest, shows a picture of her daughter at the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) protest site, a day after thousands of protesters marched toward parliament demanding the resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over NEET examination paper leaks, at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi, India, July 21, 2026.

that there had been more than 150 leaks over the past decade. Pradhan and his ministry did not respond to a request for comment on past leaks.

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), the Gen Z movement leading the protests in the capital, says 21 students died by suicide in cases it believes were linked to the exam fiasco. Reuters could not independently verify the CJP's numbers.

The offices of the prime minister, education minister, and the top government spokesperson did not respond to requests for comment from Reuters on the protests and the student deaths.

On Tuesday, Pradhan said the government was committed to discussing NEET and addressing youth concerns.

In a post on X on Saturday announcing his resignation, he said: "I deeply respect the aspirations, feelings, and legitimate expectations of the country's youth."

Some political analysts say the unrest, which has spread to other regions of India, presents a challenge for a government that has often described India's youthful population as one of the country's biggest strengths.

"When young people are on the streets of Delhi protesting against a malfunctioning education system, it acquires much larger significance," said Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, a political science professor at Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata.

However, analysts also say it will be hard to dent Modi's popularity. In his 12 years in office, he has weathered a series of major protest movements, including over a new citizenship law and agricultural reforms, without lasting electoral damage.

Fierce competition for education

For thousands of Indian families, the medical college entrance exam is seen as a gateway to financial security, social

mobility and prestige in a country where competition to gain professional qualifications is fierce and opportunities can be scarce.

Despite rapid economic growth, India's official youth unemployment rate stood at 9.9% last year, far above the overall rate of 3.1%.

Only around 6% of candidates secure a place in medical college through the test, according to government data.

Families often spend years of savings or borrow heavily to fund tuition, accommodation and study materials, in the hope that a child will win admission to medical school.

In one such case, Rajesh Kumar, a farmer in Jhunjhunu district in the northwestern state of Rajasthan, said he sold land worth 2.8 million rupees (\$29,000) and took a bank loan of 1.1 million rupees to support his son Pradeep Kumar's preparations.

The 22-year-old student had dreamed of becoming a doctor since childhood and moved to the coaching hub of Sikar to study for the exam, his father said. He died by suicide on May 15, days after the release of the exam results was cancelled.

Sitting on a red plastic chair outside his modest brick home, with a young calf tethered nearby, Kumar told Reuters the cancellation shattered his son.

"We are farmers and hardly educated, but my son always wanted to become a doctor," he said.

Kumar said he blamed what he called a "failure of the system" for his son's death and that he would not immerse his son's ashes in the Ganges, part of Hindu last rites, until Education Minister Pradhan resigned.

The CJP and the Congress Party have demanded compensation for the families of students who took their own lives. The government hasn't offered any, but Kumar, like other relatives Reuters interviewed, said he was not seeking money. "I want accountability," he said.

'He wasn't able to fight more'

Another student, 17-year-old Kahaan Patel, died in Gujarat, Modi's home state, days before the retake of the exam took place in June.

His father, Prashant Patel, said his son had hoped to study medicine and later go to the United States for higher education. He said that after the retest was announced, his son tried to prepare again, but could not cope with the uncertainty.

"He wasn't able to fight more, so he ended it," Patel told Reuters.

Education activist Nandita Narain, a former president of the Delhi University Teachers' Association, said the protests reflected concerns about the pressure on students competing for college places, and the growing role of often costly private coaching and commercial interests in education.

"The youth of India have finally awakened to the seriousness of the problem," Narain said. "The anger which was building up for some time has come to the surface."

Back at the Delhi protest site, two photographs of students who died by suicide were placed on the stage as protesters continued to chant slogans demanding answers.

Pakistan-origin Saadia Zahidi to lead International Air Transport Association

GENEVA: The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has appointed Lahore-born Saadia Zahidi as its director general in place of Willie Walsh, who will relinquish his duties on July 31.

A press release said Saadia Zahidi will take over as the air transport body's new chief on Nov 1 this year. Sandrine Le Borgne, IATA's chief financial officer, will serve as acting director general during the intervening period.

Ms Zahidi will be IATA's ninth director general and the first woman to hold the position. She is currently working as managing director at the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Ms Zahidi is the author of Fifty

Million Rising, a book which traces the rise of working women in the Muslim world.

She holds a BA in Economics from Smith College, an MPhil in International Economics from The Graduate Institute, and an MPA from Harvard University.

"The board is very pleased to appoint Saadia Zahidi as director general of IATA. Saadia's long and outstanding experience at the World Economic Forum will enhance and strengthen IATA as the voice of the world's airlines," the press release said.

"Saadia brings the right skills to effectively articulate what our industry needs to continue connecting people and economies safely, efficiently, and sus-



tainably. She'll bring a fresh perspective to IATA that will grow its support for the airline industry on the foundations of IATA's well-established technical, financial, and data capabilities," the press release added.

In her acceptance message, Saadia Zahidi said: "I look forward to working closely with our member airlines, governments, and the ecosystem of partners to build on IATA's remarkable foundation, ensuring aviation continues to connect the world while embracing innovation, strengthening resilience, and advancing sustainable growth."

The airline group is turning to the Pakistani-born economist, an outsider to the aviation sector, at a time when air-

lines are wrestling with geopolitical and economic headwinds as oil prices rise above \$100 a barrel due to Middle East strife.

The influential Geneva-based organisation has largely been run by former airline CEOs or board members. As director general of IATA, Zahidi will also face discussion over curbing pollution from flights at a time when airlines' flagship goal of net zero by 2050 has been put at risk by a shortage of efficient new aircraft and green jet fuel.

In January this year, Zahidi had expressed concern in a WEF podcast that environmental risks were being deprioritised as executives focus on areas like trade tensions.

4 ‘Healthy’ Habits That May Actually Slow Your Metabolism After 40

These habits might seem healthy, but on closer look, they aren’t doing your metabolism any favors.

Anyone near or past the age of 40 can tell you that your body changes with age. Hormonal, metabolic and lifestyle shifts can change body composition and health. A glance in the mirror or abnormal bloodwork may prompt you to adopt healthier habits, but some seemingly “healthy” habits may do more harm than good for your metabolism.

Your metabolism encompasses the chemical reactions in the body that convert food into energy.¹ When people wonder if their metabolism is slow, they’re typically referring to their metabolic rate or daily energy expenditure, or how many calories the body burns throughout the day. Your metabolism stays fairly stable between the ages of 20 and 60, and then starts to decline.² However, muscle loss begins in our 30s, and metabolic rate is largely driven by the amount of muscle someone has.^{3,4} “As we age, we tend to lose lean body mass, which is about 50 percent skeletal muscle, and when we gain weight, it tends to be fat,” says Elizabeth Ward, M.S., RDN. “The more muscle you have on board as you age, the higher your metabolic rate.”

It’s natural to lose muscle with age, but if you want to keep your metabolic rate high, a main goal should be preserving muscle. Some habits that seem healthy accelerate muscle loss. Here are the “healthy” habits dietitians say may actually slow your metabolism after 40.

1. Eating Low-Calorie Meals and Snacks

“If you’re gaining weight after 40, it makes sense to think that cutting way back on calories at meals and snacks would be helpful,” says Ward. “However, this can lead to under-eating that can make it difficult or impossible for your body to make new skeletal muscle cells because you aren’t eating enough protein and carbohydrate.” Not only that, rapid weight loss means more muscle loss. Muscle burns more calories than fat tissue, so we want to keep as much muscle as possible on board, Ward says.

Eating low-calorie meals can also increase hunger, so while eating fewer calories seems better, it can backfire. Shift your focus from trying to eat less to trying to eat more of the foods that fuel your metabolism. “Focus on a balanced eating plan with adequate energy from carbohydrate and enough protein that’s slightly lower in calories than what you typically eat if weight loss is the goal,” says Ward. Colorful fruits and vegetables paired with lean proteins and whole grains support a healthy metabolism.

2. Only Doing Cardio Workouts

“Cardio workouts are good for your heart health and they can burn a lot of calories to help with weight control,” says Ward. But only doing cardio workouts like running or biking could slow your metabolism. That’s because cardio exercise does little to build and preserve skeletal muscle tissue, which over time, may lower your calorie-burning capacity, says Ward.

Skipping strength training can lead to even more muscle loss than what naturally happens in your 30s.³ This doesn’t mean you should neglect cardio altogether. It’s about balance. “The best exercise regimen includes cardio and resistance training,” Ward says. “You can cut back on cardio and add at least two sessions of strength training weekly (about 20-30 minutes each), or you can add the strength training to your cardio.”

3. Cutting Carbs

It’s popular to cut carbs to help with weight gain or insulin resistance, two issues that can show up in your 40s. And while reducing carbohydrates can certainly aid weight loss and improve blood sugar control, cutting out all carbs could be detrimental to your metabolism. When you cut carbs, you naturally eat fewer calories, which can lead to weight loss. That might be your goal, but when you lose weight, your resting metabolic rate goes down.⁶ Not only that, you lose muscle alongside fat if you aren’t doing anything to preserve the muscle. You can combat some muscle loss by lifting weights and eating adequate protein, but you’ll get the most out of your workouts if you replenish with carbs and protein.

“Cutting out all carbohydrates means that you are also limiting important nutrients found in carbohydrates like dietary fiber and key micronutrients like B vitamins, magnesium, zinc, iron and important phytochemicals that can play a huge role in disease prevention,” says Renee Korczak Ph.D., RDN, CSSD. Skip the refined carbs, and aim for whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes, which provide fiber to support blood sugar control and a healthy metabolism.

4. Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent fasting involves eating within a certain time window, usually 8-10 hours. It doesn’t directly slow metabolism and may even improve metabolic health by reducing inflammation and improving glucose metabolism.⁹ But, if not done thoughtfully, intermittent fasting could slow your metabolism. “For women in perimenopause (and menopause), a shortened eating window makes it more challenging to consume enough protein to preserve lean muscle mass, which is essential for healthy aging and metabolic health,” says Jaime Shelbert, RDN, LDN.

“Meal timing also matters as research points to aligning food intake with the body’s natural circadian rhythm to support metabolic health,” says Shelbert. When intermittent fasting, people often start eating in the middle of the day, essentially skipping breakfast. This can push meals later into the evening, which impairs glucose metabolism and increases the risk of metabolic disorders.¹⁰ “If you choose to practice intermittent fasting, focus on adequate protein, strength training and an earlier eating window, plus consider whether it is a sustainable approach that fits your lifestyle,” says Shelbert.

Other Tips for Metabolism After 40

To support a healthy metabolism after 40, experts say skip the trendy diets and focus on these habits.

Prioritize protein: Protein supports muscle growth, and high-protein diets are associated with greater daily energy burn.¹¹ The body also burns more calories digesting protein compared to carbs and fat. Aim to have protein at each meal and snack, preferably from whole foods, like Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs, beans, lentils, lean meat, poultry and fish, says Korczak.

Don’t slack on sleep: Lack of sleep and poor-quality sleep negatively impact how carbohydrates and fats are metabolized. This can lead to insulin resistance, obesity and heart disease.¹² Aim for 7-9 hours of good quality sleep each night.

Take stress seriously: Stress spikes the hormone cortisol and chronically elevated cortisol drives the storage of belly fat and can lead to obesity.¹³ Take stress as seriously as you take your diet and exercise. Build in time to journal, meditate, walk or do yoga.

Move more: Get more movement throughout the day outside of scheduled workouts. This

increases what’s called NEAT, non-exercise activity thermogenesis. Think movements like walking, fidgeting or doing chores. Low levels of NEAT are associated with obesity and type 2 diabetes, so schedule that walk break and take the stairs.

Our Expert Take

Maintaining a healthy metabolism after the age of 40 comes down to preserving muscle and eating a balanced diet with adequate protein, carbohydrates, healthy fats and vitamins and minerals. While metabolism remains fairly stable until the age of 60, muscle loss begins much earlier, so strength training and prioritizing protein are of utmost importance.

Don’t forget about stress and sleep too, which both impact hormones and metabolism.



The Best Balance Exercise to Do After 40, According to Physical Therapists

This simple exercise can help support your balance, stability and independence as you age.

Falls are one of the most serious health risks for older adults, and the threat is more common than you might think. About 1 in 4 adults over 65 falls every year, and falls are the leading cause of injury-related death in this age group.

If you're in your 40s or 50s, fall risk probably isn't top of mind, but it should be. Balance naturally begins to decline in your 40s, which means it's important to start working on it well before any warning signs appear.

The good news is that research shows performing balance exercises can help reduce your fall risk and help you maintain the stability and independence required for healthy aging.³ But if you could only do one balance exercise, which would it be? We asked three physical therapists and their answer was unanimous: the single-leg stance.

Why the Single-Leg Stance Is the Best Balance Exercise for Adults over 40

"The single-leg stance is one of the best balance exercises for adults over 40 because it is simple, effective, mimics real-life movements and can be modified or progressed based on an individual's ability," says Robyn

Culbertson,
PT, D.P.T.

Research shows that being unable to hold a single-leg stance for at least 15 seconds is linked with a higher risk of recurrent falls compared to those who can hold it for up to 30 seconds.⁴ Other research suggests that the ability to hold it for at least 10 seconds is associated with lower all-cause mortality risk.

"Every step you take is basically a single-leg deal," says Andrew Gorecki, PT, D.P.T., FAFS. "Walking is just shifting your weight from one leg to the other, and for almost half a second you're fully on one leg. If your single-leg balance is weak, every step feels like a little recovery effort. When it's strong, it just happens automatically."

The exercise also engages multiple systems at once. "[The single-leg stance] strengthens the muscles of the feet, ankles, hips and core while improving proprioception, which is your body's awareness of where it is in space," explains Gabriela Van Sickle, PT, D.P.T., CFMT, WCS. "It also trains the brain and nervous system to react quickly to small changes in position, which is essential for preventing trips and falls."⁶

Delfa-de-la-Morena JM, Paes PP, de Oliveira DPL, et al. Single-leg balance and lower limb strength: Quantitative analysis with the balance master system. J Funct Morphol .How to Do the Single-Leg Stance

Here are step-by-step instructions:

Stand close to a sturdy surface, such as a counter, wall or chair that won't tip if you need to catch yourself.

Stand with your feet about hip-width apart and shift your weight onto one foot.

Bend your opposite knee so your heel moves toward your glutes, lifting your foot just an inch or two off the floor. (If lift-

ing your foot all the way is too challenging, let your toes lightly graze the floor.)

Focus your eyes on a fixed point on the wall in front of you. Looking down or letting your eyes wander makes balancing more difficult.

Keep your posture upright, engage your core and avoid leaning your trunk to the side. "Squeeze the glute on your standing side," says Gorecki. "You should feel it working on the outside of your hip. If you feel it more in your inner thigh or back, you're compensating."

Hold this position for up to 30 seconds, breathing through your nose throughout.

Switch sides and repeat.

Modifications for beginners: If 30 seconds feels out of reach, go for as long as you can and gradually build up. You can also try a tandem stance (one foot directly in front of the other) or a staggered stance as an intermediate step before progressing to full single-leg balance.

Progressions when it gets easy: Once you can hold for 30 seconds no problem, you can make it more difficult by closing your eyes, adding gentle head turns, reaching your free foot in different directions or standing on a slightly unstable surface like a folded towel.

Tips for Getting Started

Consider these expert tips before starting:

Prioritize Form over Duration. "Focus on maintaining proper form rather than holding the position for an extended period of time," recommends Culbertson. "Keep your posture upright, engage your core and focus your eyes on a fixed point in front of you."

Stand Close to Something Secure. "Practice [balancing] near a sturdy countertop or railing that won't move if you need to catch yourself," advises Van Sickle. "This is especially important in the early stages or if you have any history of falls or dizziness."

Build It into Your Routine. "Do the exercise every day," recommends Gorecki. "Three sets of 30 seconds each side takes only three minutes. You can do it while brushing your teeth."

Work with a Physical Therapist If You Have Concerns. "If you have any concerns about your ability to perform this task safely, please speak with a physical therapist who can help create a personalized plan," says Culbertson.

Don't Wait Until Something Goes Wrong. "One of the biggest mistakes people make is waiting until they notice a problem before prioritizing strength and balance," says Van Sickle. "These are skills that should be developed proactively, especially beginning in your 40s."

Our Expert Take

Whether you're looking to enhance your balance, prevent falls or improve mobility, practicing the single-leg stance daily can help you feel and move your best for decades to come. If you have any concerns with your balance or have underlying musculoskeletal issues, speak with a physical therapist first to make sure it's right for you.



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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.



Sufi Soul Meets Stage: YBQ Delivers Unforgettable Performance in Houston

Yousuf Bashir Qureshi (YBQ) captivated Houston audiences with a powerful theatrical performance featuring the timeless art of Dastangoi, beautifully combined with movement, dance, and live music. Organized by Aura Luxe Events and directed by Zabad Anwer, the evening took attendees on a spiritual journey through the seven stages of love, celebrating the beauty of Sufi philosophy, storytelling, and artistic expression.



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

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

By Akhtar Pathan

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Acquiring life-saving skills is a noble endeavor’

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

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

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

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

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

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

The underlying principle remains unchanged: acquiring practical skills that

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

‘The Prophet encouraged learning to swim’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What sociologists say about the decline in swimming

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

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

The first is economic access.

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

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

Historical exclusion compounds the problem.

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

Urbanization has introduced another

obstacle.

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

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

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

A public survival skill becomes a luxury

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

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

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

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

Competitive youth swimming has undergone a similar transformation.

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

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

Poor communities face the greatest risk

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

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

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

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

How to transform swimming into an essential life skill

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

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

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

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

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

WHO’s ‘PROTECT’ framework against drowning

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

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

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

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

Men and children face the highest risk

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

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

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

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

Experts also emphasize the role of families.

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

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

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

Swimming is not simply a sport or leisure activity.

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

Houston Welcomes YBQ's Inspiring Sufi-Themed Theatrical Experience

Continued from page 17

traditional art of oral storytelling, combined with expressive dance and live musical performances. Through the presentation, he guided the audience on a symbolic journey through the seven stages of love, exploring themes of self-discovery, spirituality, and human connection.

The evening drew members of Houston's South Asian community, lovers of literature, art, and Sufi culture, who praised the production for its emotional depth and artistic excellence. Attendees described the performance as an immersive cultural experience that seamlessly blended timeless storytelling with contemporary theatrical expression.

Speaking during the event, YBQ reflected on the enduring power of stories to unite people across cultures and generations, emphasizing that Sufi traditions continue to inspire compassion, reflection, and inner transformation.

The Houston performance was one of several stops on YBQ's USA Tour, which also included Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and Chicago. The event reinforced the growing appreciation for South Asian performing arts among audiences across the United States and celebrated the rich heritage of Sufi literature and storytelling.

Houston Muslim Community Unites for Fundraiser to Support Masjid and Community Center Project

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designed to create meaningful connections among different segments of the Muslim Ummah while encouraging collaboration in support of a lasting community institution. Guests enjoyed dinner, entertainment, and opportunities to contribute toward the completion of the masjid and community center, which will serve as a hub for worship, education, youth development, and community services.

The fundraiser was hosted by Imam Dr. Wazir Ali, Syed Illyas, Dr. Mazhar Chaudhary, Syed Shahid Ali Sunni, and Atif Quadir, who thanked attendees, volunteers, and donors for their overwhelming support and generosity.

Speaking during the event, organizers emphasized that the project represents more than a building—it is an investment in future generations and a symbol of unity within Houston's growing Muslim community. They encouraged continued community participation to help complete the facility and expand its educational, religious, and outreach programs.

The evening concluded with prayers for the success of the project and a renewed commitment from attendees to strengthen bonds across the community while working together to achieve the shared vision of a vibrant Islamic center serving the Greater Houston area.

Visa overstays detained at airports as Trump expands immigration enforcement

Continued from page 17

immigration cases, even if they have no criminal history.

Reports indicate that immigration officers have carried out arrests at multiple stages of air travel, including airline check-in counters, security areas, boarding gates, and arrival terminals. Several incidents have circulated widely online after witnesses shared videos of travelers being taken into custody.

One of the most widely discussed cases involved a 27-year-old Ecuadorian woman who was preparing to board a domestic flight from Denver. After scanning her boarding pass, she was reportedly asked to step aside before plainclothes immigration officers approached and escorted her away.

According to her attorney, she entered the United States legally through a cultural exchange program and later filed paperwork seeking permission to remain in the country. While her application was pending, she had received authorization to work.

Attorneys also pointed to the detention of a Ugandan woman living with sickle cell disease, who was reportedly traveling in a wheelchair despite having an active asylum claim before she was taken into custody.

The airport arrests have prompted immigration lawyers to rethink the advice they give clients with unresolved immigration matters.

For years, domestic air travel was generally viewed as relatively safe for people waiting on visa renewals, green card applications, or other immigration benefits. Lawyers now say they are increasingly urging clients with pending cases to avoid flying because of the heightened risk of being detained.

Legal experts say the administration's latest approach represents a significant escalation in enforcement, extending beyond people already facing final deportation orders to include individuals who have openly lived and worked in the United States while navigating the legal immigration system.

The expanded airport operations are part of the administration's broader effort to intensify immigration enforcement nationwide. Federal immigration authorities have been directed to increase arrests as the government pursues a larger deportation campaign targeting people without lawful immigration status.

Homeland Security officials maintain that remaining in the United States after a visa expires violates federal immigration law, even if an individual later files application seeking legal status. Federal authorities have yet to provide data on the number of arrests made as part of the broader airport crackdown.

Houston's decades-old program awarding city contracts to minority-owned businesses is ruled unconstitutional

Continued from page 17

Management, filed their lawsuit in the aftermath of a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down affirmative action admissions policies at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, which along with colleges all over the country had used them to prevent racial discrimination and ensure their campuses include Black, Hispanic and other minority students. Texas legislators also have passed laws in recent years that ban diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at public schools in the state.

Hittner wrote in court documents that the Houston case "addresses an unresolved issue of constitutional law."

"Equal protection means equal protection for everyone, not preferential treatment for some," said Erin Wilcox of the Pacific Legal Foundation, a national nonprofit that represented the Houston couple. "The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees every business owner the same shot at a government contract, regardless of race. This is a victory not just for the Thompsons, but for every business owner who believes government contracts should be won on merit."

Houston City Attorney Arturo Michel said in a Tuesday night statement the city is "evaluating a potential appeal."

"The City recognizes that the court relied on recent United States Supreme Court decisions," Michel also said. "The decision does not affect other programs, such as the City's Small Business Enterprise Program. The City will abide by the court's decision regarding existing contracts and recently awarded contracts pending any further court order."

In his own statement, U.S. Rep. Christian Menefee, D-Houston, said the ruling is "yet another step by far-right activists, like the lawyers who filed this case, fighting to erase every tool minority and women business owners use to compete on a level playing field."

"They've fought to end diversity programs in our colleges, at corporations, and in government contracts," he added. "It's a shame, and The Supreme Court of the United States has cleared the way for it to happen in ending affirmative action and gutting the Voting Rights Act."

Hittner noted that his ruling applies only to the race-based aspects of the city business program and a similar initiative utilized by the Midtown Management District, which also was sued. The management district's leadership is appointed by the mayor and city council.

The city and management district can continue to ensure that small and women-owned businesses receive government contracts.

The Houston City Council considered amending its minority-owned business program in 2025, in response to the lawsuit as well as a

study that found Asian- and Hispanic-owned businesses did not face disparities in certain categories of city spending. Black-owned businesses faced disparities across all spending categories, the study found.

The council ended up voting to accept the study results while continuing the program without making any changes, along with establishing a veteran-owned small business certification program.

Regarding the proposed changes at the time, Whitmire said, "If we don't have this consensus going forward as we go to court to defend the entire program, it will be in jeopardy. So that was certainly a consideration — get ready for court — because we have individuals in society that would end the program totally, and obviously we cannot tolerate that."

Trump administration moves to end Medicare drug plan subsidies

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An administration official estimated that 25% of enrollees will see premiums stay the same or decrease in 2027, while about 30% will pay less than \$10 more per month.

Most of the remaining 45% are expected to face increases of \$11 to \$20 monthly, although the official said lower-cost plans will still be available for those who switch.

Part D plans offer stand-alone drug coverage alongside Medicare's traditional medical benefits. Higher premiums for the Part D plans could push more Medicare enrollees into Medicare Advantage, the private-insurer version of Medicare, which generally wrap in drug benefits and often charge no premiums at all.

The subsidy program has pumped an estimated \$9.8 billion into the market, \$6.2 billion in 2025 and \$3.6 billion in 2026, according to a Government Accountability Office report.

Houston Community Media Hosts Disaster Preparedness Briefing, Urges Residents to Stay Ready Before Emergencies Strike

Continued from page 17

were encouraged to develop family emergency plans, build disaster supply kits, identify evacuation routes, and stay informed through trusted official sources rather than rumors or misinformation.

A key message of the event was that staying informed saves lives. Officials urged residents to sign up for emergency notifications through ReadyHarris.org, where they can receive real-time weather alerts, emergency updates, power outage information, and recovery resources via text and email.

The panel also highlighted the importance of knowing where to seek help after a disaster. Residents were reminded that dialing 211 connects them to verified local assistance, disaster recovery resources, and support services available 24 hours a day,

ensuring access to reliable information during emergencies.

Speakers stressed that effective disaster response depends on strong partnerships between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and local communities. They noted that public awareness, advance planning, and community cooperation are essential to protecting lives and minimizing the impact of disasters.

Organizers said the briefing reflects Houston Community Media's ongoing commitment to educating the public on critical community issues and equipping residents with the knowledge and resources needed to prepare for emergencies. Attendees were encouraged to remain connected with official emergency management agencies and community organizations for continued updates, preparedness information, and disaster recovery resources.

The event concluded with a simple but powerful reminder to the community: Stay connected. Stay prepared. Stay safe, Houston.

Witness to Houston ICE shooting must be released from immi- gration detention, judge orders

A federal judge on Monday ordered the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to release from their custody one of the witnesses to a federal immigration agent's fatal shooting of Lorenzo Salgado Araujo.

Jose Trinidad Rojas Pliego must be released from detention within 48 hours of the order, which was issued Monday evening. Authorities must release Rojas Pliego in a public space and give his attorneys notice at least three hours beforehand, according to the order.

Roja Pliego, a Mexican citizen, was one of three men who were passengers in Salgado Araujo's van when Immigrations and Custom Enforcement officers began following the group and ultimately shot the longtime Houston resident. Rojas Pliego has lived in the United States since 1998, has several children and stepchildren who are U.S. citizens and has no criminal record, according to the order.

Because the officers who stopped the men had no body cameras or dashcams, Rojas Pliego and the other men are the only known witnesses to the shooting. He and another passenger have countered federal officials' recollection of events, asserting that agents rammed Salgado Araujo's van with their vehicles prior to shooting him. Federal officials have maintained Salgado Araujo attempted to ram an agent's vehicle before he was shot.

U.S. District Judge Keith Ellison's order for Rojas Pliego's release comes less than a week after he issued a separate order blocking Rojas Pliego's deportation, and he noted in Monday's order that Rojas Pliego's request is "one of hundreds of similar petitions" amid the Trump administration's application of immigration detention protocol.

Ellison's order states that the government is not permitted to detain noncitizens without "individualized justification" only because they did not enter the country lawfully. It also stipulates that DHS must seek a pre-detention hearing before it seeks to re-detain Rojas Pliego.

The #1 Evening Activity to Help You Poop in the Morning, Recommended by Gastroenterologists

Say goodbye to bloating and hello to morning relief!

If you feel backed up or haven't had a good poop in a few days, you're not alone. About 15% of U.S. adults struggle with chronic constipation.¹ And far more people experience it occasionally. While there are many simple tweaks that can be made to help you get regular, gastroenterologists recommend what is perhaps the simplest of all: Go for an evening walk.

Here's how walking after dinner might help you poop in the morning.

Stimulates Gut Motility

"Physical activity can help stimulate the muscles in your intestines and promote regular bowel movements," says Kenneth Brown, M.D.

"Walking can improve your gut motility," agrees Supriya Rao, M.D., who recommends an evening walk after dinner. It's a gentle form of movement that can help stimulate your intestinal muscles without spiking cortisol and preventing sleep.

Plus, physical activity can help relieve bloating—the most common complaint of constipation that Michael Bass, M.D. hears from his patients. "Short walks after eating in the evenings can help relieve common gastrointestinal complaints like bloating and flatulence," says Bass. "Walking stimulates the motion of your intestines to help propel food down your GI tract and expel gas." Bass adds that over-the-counter medicines usually provide little relief for bloating, while walking is a free and healthy option.

Helps Relieve Stress

It's no secret that most adults are super stressed. In fact, in 2024, 43% of U.S. adults said they were more anxious than they were the prior year.² Unfortunately, this stress can lead to gut-health issues like constipation. "Stress can disrupt your gut-brain connection, alter your gut microbiota and can slow or speed up digestion, which can lead to bloating, constipation and even diarrhea," says Rao.

Fortunately, physical activity can relieve stress. Even just a few minutes of aerobic activity can decrease tension and improve your mood, sleep and self-esteem.³ This is another reason to squeeze in an evening walk—it's a chance to unwind from the day's stressors.

For an added bonus, try walking with friends or family.

One study found that young Japanese adults who exercised regularly with others had lower rates of constipation.⁴ Why? Researchers aren't 100% sure, but they think it could have to do with the role that

socializing plays in reducing depression and motivating regular physical activity. Depression is linked with constipation due to the gut-brain axis, so addressing depression may also help manage constipation. Plus, movement is often more fun with friends, so you're more likely to exercise regularly if you invite others along.

Other Tips to Help You Poop in the A.M.

Hydrate: "Staying hydrated can help prevent constipation by keeping stools soft and moist," says Brown. So make sure to drink water with dinner and into the evening. If you struggle with getting up to pee in the middle of the night, spread your fluid intake out throughout the day so you don't have to drink as much at night to stay hydrated.⁵

Practice Meditation or Breathwork: "Calming the mind through deep breathing or meditation in the evening can help ensure a good night's sleep, which can also help gut health through the powerful gut-mind connection," says Roshini Raj, M.D. So try a gentle evening yoga class or meditation to lower your stress and lull you to sleep.

Eat a High-Fiber Dinner: Fiber has a ton of benefits—it's a key nutrient for gut health, metabolic health, heart health and more. "Fiber adds bulk to your stools and helps them move smoothly through the digestive tract," explains Rao. How can you meet your fiber needs? Make sure to include high-fiber foods like fruits, veggies, nuts, seeds and whole grains in your dinner.

Our Expert Take

If you're desperate for a morning poop, there are a few tweaks worth making to your evening routine. For one, try going for a post-dinner walk. The movement can stimulate your intestinal muscles and reduce stress to support regular bowel movements. Consuming fiber and fluids is also essential. So, make sure to include fiber-rich foods in your dinner with a glass of water. Finally, incorporate relaxing activities like meditation or breathwork to lower stress and promote quality sleep.



Experts urge stronger conservation as mangroves sustain millions across Southeast Asia

International Day for Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem highlights vital role of mangrove forests in protecting livelihoods, food security and climate resilience in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia

By Mushfiq Ahmad

As the world marks the International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem on July 26, environmental experts are calling for greater investment in community-led mangrove conservation, warning that the future of millions of coastal residents — including many Muslim communities across Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia — depends on the survival of these unique forests.

Stretching along tropical coastlines, mangrove ecosystems serve as natural barriers against storms, nurseries for fish and shellfish, and important carbon sinks. Across South and Southeast Asia, they also underpin the livelihoods of fishing families, seaweed farmers, honey collectors and ecotourism operators.

Experts said mangrove conservation must go hand in hand with improving local livelihoods if restoration efforts are to succeed.

“For many centuries, mangrove forests have supported local communities of Southeast Asia,” said Professor Dixon Gevana, a forest environmental scientist at the University of the Philippines Los Baños.

“More than ever, mangroves’ role in sustaining local well-being and resilience is highlighted as vulnerability to climate change, particularly storm surges and flooding, continues to increase,” he told MNTV.

Gevana said healthy mangrove forests act as “effective greenbelts” that shield coastal communities from powerful waves while providing sources of income through fisheries, non-timber forest products, tourism and emerging blue carbon projects.

Gevana pointed to the Tawi-Tawi province in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao as an example of how traditional knowledge and mangrove conservation can support sustainable development.

He said many coastal residents recognize that healthy mangrove forests create favorable conditions for seaweed farming by maintaining cleaner water and stable marine environments.

Mangroves also protect nearby seagrass beds that support small-scale fisheries relied upon by local families for both food and income.

To strengthen long-term conservation, Gevana called for greater investment in ecotourism, blue carbon projects and mangrove protection zones, alongside education initiatives that encourage young people to pursue careers in marine science, forestry and fisheries.

He also stressed that conservation programs should first address communities’ basic needs, including food security, clean water and housing, before expecting long-term environmental stewardship.

He added that community-based conservation programs are also strengthening local leadership by giving residents greater responsibility in protecting the ecosystems on which they depend.

Threatened by development

Despite growing recognition of their value, mangroves continue to disappear across the region.

Gevana identified land conversion as the greatest threat, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. “The conversion of mangroves to oil palm plantations, aquaculture ponds, residen-



tial areas, seaports and roads remains the major reason for mangrove loss in Southeast Asia,” he said.

He said the problem is driven largely by limited awareness of the economic and ecological value of mangroves, resulting in conservation receiving lower priority in land-use planning and public funding.

Although community-based programs have shown promise, he said many local initiatives still struggle with inadequate financial support and limited technical capacity.

“The future of successful mangrove conservation is very much local,” Gevana said.

He urged governments to strengthen community rights, expand technical assistance and establish accessible funding mechanisms, including support for blue carbon initiatives that reward communities for protecting mangrove forests.

Bangladesh’s lifeline

In neighboring Bangladesh, the world’s largest mangrove forest — the Sundarbans — remains central to the lives of millions living along the country’s vulnerable coastline.

Dr. Md. Badiuzzaman, Executive Director of the Mangrove Institute of Science and Technology, shared his organization’s assessment with MNTV, drawing on published scientific research.

According to the institute, the Sundarbans cover roughly 10,000 square kilometers, with about 60% located in Bangladesh, where approximately 3.5 million people depend directly or indirectly on the forest for their livelihoods.

The forest protects coastal settlements from cyclones and storm surges while supporting fisheries, honey collection, nipa palm harvesting and other forest-based livelihoods.

Bangladesh’s coastal population is predominantly Muslim, making mangrove conservation particularly significant for many Muslim fishing and farming communities.

However, the institute warned that the Sundarbans face mounting pressure from rising salinity, sea-level rise, shrimp farming, pollution, overexploitation and increasingly severe cyclones.

Among the highest priorities, it said, are restoring freshwater flows into the forest, expanding community-led restoration projects using native mangrove species, strengthening pollution controls and ensuring conservation programs generate sustainable incomes for local residents.

The institute also highlighted successful community ecosystem-based adaptation projects that have established thousands of hectares of new mangrove plantations while reducing



cyclone and erosion risks and creating new livelihood opportunities, particularly for women.

Communities at the center

Environmental researchers say lasting conservation cannot be achieved without local participation.

Dr. Lorena L. Sabino, Director of the Institute of Agroforestry at the University of the Philippines Los Baños, told MNTV that mangroves provide essential ecological and economic services for coastal communities throughout the Philippines.

“Mangroves support coastal livelihoods by providing nursery grounds for fish, crabs and shellfish,” she said.

“They also protect communities from storm surges, flooding, erosion and strong waves while storing significant amounts of carbon.”

Sabino said mangroves continue to face pressure from aquaculture expansion, coastal development, pollution, unsustainable resource use, climate-related hazards and insufficient long-term monitoring.

She said protecting existing forests, restoring degraded areas with suitable native species and strengthening community-led management should remain top priorities.

“Conservation should also be linked with sustainable livelihoods and the meaningful participation of women, youth and local organizations,” she said.

Scientists increasingly view mangrove restoration as one of the most cost-effective nature-based solutions for addressing climate change.

Beyond storing large amounts of carbon, mangroves reduce coastal erosion, protect infrastructure from increasingly powerful storms and sustain fisheries that provide food and employment for millions across the region.

Mariski Nirwan, Senior Manager Coastal Resilience YKAN, said that for an archipelagic nation like Indonesia, with a coastline stretching approximately 95,000 kilometers, the second longest in the world, mangroves are an incredibly important ecosystem. “Without mangroves, our coastal resilience would be significantly weakened, especially considering that around 60% of Indonesia’s population lives in coastal areas.”

Nirwan said one of the most significant issues is land-use conversion. Many mangrove areas have been transformed into aquaculture ponds (linked to 44% of mangrove deforestation), plantations, settlements, industrial zones, and infrastructure developments. In several coastal regions, mangrove conversion for aquaculture has occurred for decades and remains one of the primary causes of mangrove loss. As

a result of these pressures, Indonesia has lost more than 50% (source: FAO) of its mangrove cover over the past three decades, making it one of the countries with the highest rates of mangrove degradation in the world. This isn’t just about land; it’s about the 60% of Indonesia’s population whose lives and livelihoods are intertwined with these coastal forests.

Economic pressures often drive local communities to engage in unsustainable practices, such as converting mangrove forests into shrimp ponds, which in turn accelerates coastal erosion and increases their vulnerability to flooding. Others cut down mangroves to produce charcoal and sell it for a relatively good price.

“These pressures are not merely statistics; they translate into real challenges for local communities. People cut down mangrove forests without fully realizing the consequences that may one day arrive at their own doorstep,” said Nirwan.

Mangrove ecosystems also face challenges arising from limited public awareness of the importance of mangrove functions and economic dependence on extractive activities. When communities do not fully recognize the long-term benefits of mangrove conservation, pressure on these ecosystems tends to persist.

For this reason, YKAN emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in mangrove management and restoration efforts to foster a sense of ownership and ensure the sustainability of conservation initiatives.

In addition, governance and land status issues present further challenges. Some mangrove areas lie outside protected zones or are classified as production forests, making them more vulnerable to land conversion. At the same time, increasing climate change impacts, such as sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and tidal flooding, place additional stress on already degraded mangrove ecosystems. Therefore, YKAN promotes an integrated, science-based approach to mangrove management that actively involves government agencies, local communities, and the private sector to ensure the long-term protection and sustainability of mangrove ecosystems.

The most critical action needed to protect and restore mangrove forests while supporting local livelihoods is the implementation of a community-based approach, in which local communities become the primary actors in mangrove protection, management, and restoration. YKAN emphasizes that communities should be involved from the very beginning, including identifying problems, developing management plans, conducting patrols and monitoring activities, and participating in decision-making processes related to mangrove management. This approach is known as Community-Based Ecological Mangrove Restoration (CBEMR) and has proven to be more sustainable than mangrove planting alone.

In addition, YKAN believes that protecting existing healthy mangrove forests should be the top priority, as damaged mangroves require a very long time to recover their ecological functions and carbon storage capacity. Therefore, conservation efforts include protecting critical areas, supporting community patrols, strengthening village institutions, and providing legal access through social forestry schemes.

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