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Houston Muslims say Republicans who courted them now target them

HOUSTON — Muslims in the Houston area say they feel betrayed by Republican politicians who once sought their votes but now embrace rhetoric portraying Islam as a threat to Texas.

The shift is stark in Fort Bend County, home to one of the state's largest Muslim communities, where

Continued on page 13

Helping Hand USA Hosts Houston Fundraiser as Younis Khan Calls for More Red-Ball Cricket

Former Pakistan captain says revival of national team requires greater focus on red-ball cricket; \$100,000 donation announced for KIND-R Hospital

HOUSTON, TX — Helping Hand USA organized a fundraising dinner in Houston to support KIND-R Hospital, Pakistan's newly established neurological hospital and rehabilitation center in Karachi, bringing together members of the

Continued on page 13

US extends Middle East deployments into 2027 as Iran conflict drags on

WASHINGTON: The United States is extending the deployment of thousands of American troops and military assets across the Middle East into 2027, signalling Washington is preparing for a prolonged conflict with Iran.

The deployment extensions, ordered by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, will affect US Army units,

Continued on page 13

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ICE arrests hit record high under Trump with nearly 50,000 detained in July

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement arrested nearly 50,000 people in July, marking the agency's highest monthly arrest total since President Donald Trump returned

Continued on page 12

Texas becomes flashpoint as anti-Muslim politics enters mainstream

HOUSTON — Texas has become one of

Continued on page 12

US halts all immigrant visa processing worldwide

The State Department has halted immigrant visa processing across all U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide, telling scheduled

Continued on page 12

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Managing external debt

The reform journey to increase exports, investment and productivity must be accelerated.

PAKISTAN'S debt has crossed Rs100 trillion raising doubts about the stabilisation programme's veracity. First, it's not advisable to use absolute amounts or per capita debt. The correct way is to use indicators that relate public debt stock and debt servicing to national income, exports of goods and services, revenues, total foreign exchange earnings and foreign exchange reserves to gauge the future capacity to discharge these obligations.

To begin with, clarify the various definitions that have created a lot of confusion in laymen's minds. Pakistan's total debt and liabilities consist of public debt and private debt. Public debt accounted for 91 per cent of the total stock of outstanding debt and liabilities on June 30, 2026. The remaining 9pc is the private debt mostly to borrowers abroad, for which the government has no fiscal obligation. However, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has to provide foreign exchange to service this debt.

Within the gross public debt, the government's share was almost 92pc while the balance was owed by public enterprises but guaranteed by the government. Borrowing from the IMF is also included in the gross public debt, although it is the SBP's liability. The total debt and liabilities is made up of borrowings in rupees from the SBP, banks, national savings schemes, prize bonds, Sukuk etc., and borrowings in foreign currency from

multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, ADB, IDB, bilateral governments or global financial markets in the form of Eurobonds or Sukuk.

Rupee-denominated borrowing is termed 'domestic debt' and foreign currency-denominated borrowing 'external debt'. Domestic debt risks are different from those of the external debt. Lumping them together is analytically incorrect. While both create debt-servicing liability for budgetary purposes and thus affect fiscal balances, the risk profile of each is quite different. Domestic debt has to be paid in rupees, which can be printed, or the central bank can acquire those obligations on its balance sheet by creating reserve money. It involves creating possible inflationary pressures but there is no risk of default — a real threat in case of foreign currency-denominated debt. Countries that have suffered debt crises have faced solvency and liquidity risks in servicing their foreign currency loans. Risks from domestic debt include rollover risk, interest rate risk, and crowding out of private-sector credit. Here, we'll focus largely on external debt and liabilities and its servicing.

Pakistan's external debt and liabilities amount to \$139 billion, of which public sector debt accounts for almost two-thirds and the private sector one-third. In the public sector, direct government debt is 80pc of the total. What are the diagnostics of vul-

nerability indicators of the stock of EDL and debt-servicing capacity? First is the break-up between medium- and long-term and short-term loans. In our case, the ratio is: 88 MLT and 12 ST. Official liquid reserves are enough to cover the ST loans and loans maturing during the year. However, the rollover of friendly country deposits next year will go up to \$12bn again. Second is concessionality — the average interest rate, years to maturity, and proportion of fixed rate loans. The higher the element of concessionality, the stronger the safety valve. Fifty per cent of loans are concessional, showing a downward slide from the past ratios. Other stock indicators don't look healthy. Third, EDL-to-GDP ratio has moved from 24pc to 31pc in the last decade. Fourth, EDL-to-export of goods and services too has worsened — from 210 to 340. Fifth, EDL-to-foreign exchange earnings shows an upward movement from 100 to 168 — not a satisfactory trend. Sixth, EDL-to-foreign exchange reserves has shot up alarmingly from 350 to 750, despite a build-up of reserves in the last two years.

Debt-servicing indicators show that external debt servicing-to-GDP has risen from 1.7pc to 4pc, while EDS-to-exports of goods and services has more than doubled from 18pc to 44pc. So has EDS-to-foreign exchange earnings from 10pc to 22pc and EDS-to-foreign exchange reserves from 37pc to 98pc.

This picture shows that to exit the IMF programme after October 2027, palliative measures are needed over the next two years to relieve the debt situation and build up capacity to absorb shocks. There are four levers to reduce the ratios: a) faster growth of exports and foreign exchange earnings; b) faster GDP growth in US dollars; c) lower current account deficits; and (d) lower interest and refinancing costs via concessional financing and maturity extension.

Assuming 4pc GDP growth in FY27-29, inflation contained at 6.5pc, fiscal deficit of 2.9pc and primary surplus of 2pc, the target should be to bring the debt-to-GDP ratio to 60pc and external debt-to-GDP ratio to 25pc by FY29 by implementing these policy measures: a) export of goods to reach \$40bn rather than \$36bn — a \$4bn increase; b) import of goods to reach \$76bn instead of \$79bn — savings of \$3bn; c) export of services to move up to \$12bn instead of \$11bn — a \$1bn increase; d) workers' remittances to go up to \$46bn instead of \$43bn — an increase of \$3bn; and e) an FDI of \$3.7bn rather than \$2.7bn — a jump of \$1bn.

The reform journey to increase exports, investment and productivity must be accelerated. The list of delayed and deferred decisions is long. To mention a few — reducing the tax burden and overregulation of manufacturing and export, upgrading oil refineries, third-party access to oil

exploration companies, introduction of weighted average cost of gas, opening up retail electricity and gas business to the private sector, elimination of cross-subsidy from industrial to domestic consumers rather than targeting through BISP, the ML-I railway track (announced in 2015), the Sukkur-Hyderabad motorway, increased share of railway freight traffic, tax collection under agriculture income tax, property tax, GST on professional services, operationalising Exim Bank for export financing and insurance, streamlining FBR's export facilitation scheme, expeditious refunds to exporters, increasing productivity of smallholder agriculture, financial access for SMEs, agriculture, low-cost housing, and SEZs for CPEC 2.0. The announcement and implementation of the industrial policy can help achieve the outlined increases and savings in the external account.

The amount of \$12bn can be used for liquidating the bilateral deposits if they are not swapped for equity in long gestation investment projects or their maturities are not extended to the long term. By FY29, the removal of this Damocles sword over our heads should be able to moderate the vulnerability indicators discussed earlier. We don't have to seek another loan from the IMF and can regain our economic sovereignty.

The writer is a former State Bank governor.

'A daughter of the nation': PM Shehbaz lauds courage of Pims nurse Razia Noreen during hospital fire

Razia Noreen risked her own life to rescue a newborn as the nursery blaze claimed 14 babies, earning national recognition and the Sitara-i-Khidmat

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday praised the courage of a nurse who saved an infant from a deadly fire at the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) that killed 14 babies last week.

The fire early last Wednesday drew shock and horror across the country with lawmakers in both houses of parliament demanding accountability.

Footage from the incident showed that a nurse, Razia Noreen, entered the nursery at around 6:39am and emerged seconds later carrying a baby, rescuing the child. She then attempted to re-enter the nursery shortly afterwards.

The prime minister met with Noreen personally at the PM House in Islamabad, where the nurse recounted how she discovered the fire and her efforts to save the children in the maternity ward.

In a conversation at the PM House, the premier lauded the nurse, saying that the whole nation was not only praising her courage and bravery but was proud of her.

"You are truly a daughter of the nation," he told her, adding that her actions would be recorded in history.

The nurse recounted that while preparing medication, she shut the medicine cabinet to suddenly catch sight of the fire.

"I threw the cabinet door shut and rushed inside," she said,



Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stands with Razia Noreen, a nurse who saved a child from the deadly fire at Pims hospital that killed 14 babies on Aug 26, at the PM House in Islamabad on Sep 3. — screengrab via Geo News TV

adding, "I didn't even think about it."

Noreen said that she had also told another nurse to "save the kids", who had conducted rescue efforts outside the ward where there were more babies and their mothers.

"Post-natal mothers have undergone operations," she said. "She immediately tried to rescue them ... she knew that I was inside and would do something."

Noting that the fire was very strong, she rescued one of the smaller babies and brought him outside to leave "in safe hands"

with someone she knew.

"When Dr Abdul Rehman came out, I handed [the baby] over and rushed back inside," she said, but added that as she was rescuing the second baby, a sudden blast caused a blackout.

PM Shehbaz reiterated that the whole nation was paying tribute to the nurse's actions and added, "The mother of the child you saved will bless you."

Noreen stressed that it was her "responsibility" to act, as nurses were given the responsibility of taking care of others' children. She also expressed that she wished she could have saved the remaining children.

The premier noted that on March 23, the nurse would be given the Sitara-i-Khidmat and Rs10 million for her service. Noreen thanked PM Shehbaz and expressed her gratitude for bestowing such an honour on her.

PM Shehbaz had earlier approved the award and a cash reward for the nurse, who had "saved a child without regard for her own life", according to the PMO.

"Razia Noreen has demonstrated an exceptional sense of responsibility and humanity. The entire nation, including myself, is proud of Nurse Razia Noreen for risking her own life to save the child. Such dutiful individuals cannot be praised enough," he was quoted as saying.

Durbar legacy in Balochistan

Dismantling an institution isn't the same as changing the political culture that sustained it.

Muhammad Amir Rana

THE idea of a durbar still fascinates us and connects us to the subcontinent's past when kings, rajas, maharajas and nawabs held court. The media, mythology, poetry, theatre, books, and cinema have helped shape the popular image of a ruler seated on his throne, with his ministers and courtiers standing before him. Matters of revenue, war, peace and justice were decided in the ruler's court. Sometimes, the ruler decided on matters of life and death.

However, our fascination may fade once we realise that the legacy of the durbar continues under different names. Pakistan is not the only country carrying this legacy. Many Western countries, including our former colonial ruler, Britain, still retain their monarchies though stripping them of their powers.

During the colonial period, the British not only preserved but also strengthened the durbars to control the population and govern indirectly. At the end of British rule, the subcontinent contained approximately 565 princely states. However, historical estimates vary depending on how smaller states are classified. Thirteen were eventually incorporated into Pakistan after their rulers signed Instruments of Accession.

Among the courts inherited by Pakistan, none carried greater political symbolism in Balochistan than the Sibi Durbar.

It is associated with bitter memories from both the colonial and postcolonial periods.

The Sibi Durbar became a major instrument of colonial administrator Robert Sandeman's frontier policy in the late 19th century. It was an annual winter assembly at which British officials met the officially approved Baloch, Brahui, and Pakhtun chiefs. Tribal disputes were heard, successions and political relationships were considered, honours and allowances were distributed, and the hierarchy created by colonial rule was publicly displayed.

Many stories were subsequently associated with the durbar and the British treatment of Baloch and Pakhtun chiefs. One account concerns an earlier Mir Khair Bakhsh Marri, who reportedly refused an order that required the assembled sardars to pull the British political agent's carriage. According to later accounts, he was punished by being denied privileges granted to more cooperative chiefs. The episode remains part of Baloch political memory.

The formal arrangement of the durbar preserved the appearance of the older political order. The chiefs of Sarawan and Jhalawan traditionally sat to the right and left of the Khan of Kalat. Yet the most powerful person in the assembly was not necessarily the Khan. Effective authority rested with the British political agent.

Pakistan retained the Sibi

Durbar after independence. On Feb 14, 1948, the Quaid addressed what he described as the first "shahi durbar" of Balochistan held under the authority of Pakistan. Speaking to members of the shahi jirga, the sardars and other representatives, he promised political reform. He announced a governor-general's advisory council as an interim arrangement until a representative constitutional system could be established.

One of the last politically consequential Sibi Durbar assemblies took place on Feb 16, 1954. Several sardars submitted a petition to the office of the agent to the governor-general calling for the Balochistan States Union (BSU) to be merged with the former Chief Commissioner's Province of Balochistan.

The BSU emerged from an agreement among the rulers of Kalat, Kharan, Makran, and Lasbela in 1952 and formally came into existence on Oct 3 that year. The four rulers retained limited authority within a union headed initially by the Khan of Kalat. The arrangement, however, survived for only three years. In October 1955, the Union was dissolved and incorporated into the newly created province of West Pakistan under the One Unit scheme.

Historians have questioned whether the petition presented at the 1954 durbar represented a spontaneous demand by the sar-

dars or reflected a political process already being encouraged by the central government. Whatever its origins, the episode demonstrated that the durbar could still be used to provide traditional legitimacy for decisions being shaped elsewhere.

The abolition of the BSU and the imposition of One Unit deepened political resentment in Balochistan. A few accounts also linked Nawab Nauroz Khan's uprising with the decision, though his armed struggle began a few years later.

The Victoria Memorial Hall, now commonly known as the Jirga Hall, was the principal setting for the Sibi Durbar. It has since been converted into the Sibi Jirga Hall Museum, although it continues to be used for official and cultural functions. Its collection includes photographs, documents, and objects related to the colonial period and the region's history. Photographs of Jinnah's 1948 visit preserve the moment when the new state addressed Balochistan through a political institution inherited from the Raj.

It is understandable that a newly created country confronting immense administrative and security challenges, could not dismantle every princely and colonial structure overnight. Pakistan required several years, and in some cases decades, to integrate the former princely states.

But dismantling an institution

is not the same as changing the political culture that sustained it. The princely courts disappeared, the colonial officers departed, and the old administrative structures were formally replaced. Yet the concentration of authority, reliance on selected intermediaries, and preference for managed consultation over genuine representation continued to shape relations between the centre and Balochistan.

There is an element of the colonial legacy in Balochistan's governance model and in the administration of its resources and politics. The Baloch sardars, despite the abolition of the sardari system in 1976, follow the same order and remain subservient to the power elites; hardly anyone raises a voice, and the reason is obvious: they don't want to lose power or diminish their relationship with the power elites.

Though few satirically associate a new institutional mechanism, called 'workshop', with the tradition of the durbar, Balochistan is still suffering. Power elites address their grievances through colonial instruments and have not made an earnest attempt to initiate the nation-building process or remove intermediaries — such as sardars and other cronies — between the state and the masses. Perhaps the power elites know that such a shift would change the entire power dynamic in the province and the country.

The Hindu right in trouble

Jawed Naqvi

HAVING prospered abroad as an unbridled organisation flaunting different names and profiles for decades, the RSS seems to be in trouble in western cities and townships where unusual rage is surfacing at its documented hatred of Muslims and Christians. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's visit to the US and Canada has come at a fraught time in the organisation's global and domestic trajectory.

The timing of this change in attitude coincides with a youth movement questioning the ideological fundamentals of the Modi government at home and decline of Israel as a morally tenable entity in the comity of nations. Israel's fondness for India's right-wing Hindu establishment has collaterally damaged India's reputation as an old comrade in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Not quite flattering also is the reality of Pakistan's rise as a widely wooed global partner with India painting itself into a diplomatic corner. When a frustrated Donald Trump yelled at Israel for becoming friendless and hated by everyone, Benjamin Netanyahu smiled back, saying he still had India for a friend. The backhanded compliment isn't lost on the world at large.

Where Pakistan is headed, India once claimed the high ground — the reliable friend ready to help untangle strategic and diplomatic knots world leaders needed to fix urgently. There was a time when leaders sought out India to intervene as an honest broker to wind down the traumatic Korean conflict, and they remained grateful that Nehru stepped in. There was a time when Indira Gandhi was urged by the Non-Aligned Movement to broker peace in the lacerating Iran-Iraq war. She dispatched senior diplomat Romesh Bhandari to placate the warring arch-foes as only a trusted Indian envoy could. And though the war eventually ended when a US warship shot down an Iranian Airbus packed with Dubai shoppers, India's helping hand continued to be valued in the entire region.

Today, the world may be interested in India's lucrative market, but sans the respect India once commanded. There were Indian stowaways slinking out abroad even then, but they were never repatriated in handcuffs and fetters as Trump did with Indian citizens recently, even though Narendra Modi had canvassed support for his re-election in 2020.

The RSS prides itself as a shadowy unregistered paramilitary body,

whereas even the Nazis were a registered party. Critics point to its opaque financial resources at home and abroad. Those resources may have come under a cloud on two fronts. The opposition in India is demanding the group's registration amid calls for transparency, which the RSS is assiduously resisting. Abroad, Trump has increased the visa fee to impossible figures for IT professionals to seek, and IT professionals are known to be the mainstay of RSS sympathisers and its finances in the US. How has the RSS stayed popular among the Indian diaspora was a question that a huge number of protesters in the US and Canada were asking ahead of and during Bhagwat's visit. It rode piggyback with the powerful Israel lobby. But Christian Zionists and Jewish Zionists are under attack from within the Democratic and Republican establishments with Zohran Mamdani and Tucker Carlson being the tip of the iceberg. The consequent decline of Israel's prowess is not good news for the RSS.

Bhagwat's reportedly conciliatory tone during his New York meeting presaged a looming crisis for the group in its various avatars. At the public meeting, he claimed that Hindus who wish to see Muslims out

of India would cease to be Hindus if they did so. The comments were borrowed from a brainstorming meeting he organised in Delhi in 2018. Did that stop the bloodcurdling assaults on Muslims and Christians or the Dalits from Hindutva zealots? No.

Even as Bhagwat was in New York or preparing to get there, the ground reality in India defied his claims. A new law in Maharashtra was being unveiled for Christians visiting the church to fill out a form to say they were not being coerced to convert. Is there a similar law for those forced or lured to convert to Hinduism? Around then the decks were also being cleared to free the Hindutva fanatic from jail who had burnt alive the Australian priest and caregiver Graham Steines and his two sons in their jeep in 1990. Two faux Hindu gurus jailed for rape, with one sentenced also for murder, are enjoying paroles and furloughs at will, while intellectual dissenters like Umar Khalid are languishing in prison, with no sign of a trial starting soon.

Nehru used to say that the RSS was not a trustworthy organisation. Its leaders said one thing and did another. For example, the RSS distanced itself from Gandhi's killer Godse but distributed sweets at the assassination, according to Sardar Patel. Modi, an

RSS man did one better. He freed Samjhauta Express terror bomb accused Sadhvi Pragya from jail, made her an MP and then watched her praising Godse as a hero for killing Gandhi. Bhagwat reportedly told the Delhi brainstorming that some parts of former RSS chief Golwalkar's book needed to be discarded. Let's check it out.

In Chapter V of his book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Golwalkar says: "The non-Hindu peoples in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, ie, of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment — not even citizen's rights." What else is being pursued over the last 12-plus years? If Bhagwat is trying to rewrite the Golwalkar book, it indicates two possibilities. One, the RSS has gone fundamentally at loggerheads with the Modi government. Two, the RSS is in serious trouble.

The writer is Dawn's correspondent in Delhi.

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Closing the gap

Pakistan's stunting problem needs more than a nutrition response.

Shizah Kashif

WHEN a child is reported stunted, it is tempting to ask which ministry is responsible. Is it the ministry of health, nutrition, social protection, or others? In reality, all of them are responsible institutionally — and none when it comes to implementation on the ground.

Forty per cent of Pakistan's children under five years are stunted while 17.7pc suffer from wasting, as of 2018. The scale of this crisis cannot be understated. Driven by more than just diet, the onset of stunting in a child is driven cumulatively by maternal nutrition, household poverty, food security, sanitation, healthcare, and education.

Over the past several years and despite frequent administrative changes, Pakistan has actively recognised this reality, progressively building a multi-sectoral policy architecture to tackle stunting at both federal and provincial levels. However, progress has remained limited. The challenge the country faces today is not a shortage of program-

ming: it is a recurrent gap between high-level multisectoral policy and local-level multisectoral delivery.

While health and nutrition were devolved to provinces following the 18th Amendment, parallel ministries and a persistent federal-provincial overlap have stymied how national-level targets trickle down to the local level. With the 2018 National Nutrition Survey revealing steep geographical disparities in stunting that would otherwise remain concealed behind national-level averages, responsible institutions are forced to ask an important question: after targets are set, how do we reach the last mile of multisectoral coordination and delivery?

Pakistan's social protection system offers one promising avenue through the Benazir Nashonuma Programme (BNP).

The programme's latest independent evaluation in May 2026 painted a promising picture: child beneficiaries displayed an 18pc lower risk of stunting at 12 months, a 12pc reduction in child anaemia,

and a 17pc increase in full immunisation coverage. At the same time, the evaluation offered a warning — and an opportunity — that runs the risk of being ignored: despite improved pregnancy weight gain, fewer than 25pc of participating women achieved adequate dietary diversity.

That is because despite the BNP's nutrition-specific interventions, multisectoral factors continue to affect maternal malnutrition and, ultimately, child stunting. A cash transfer cannot secure nutritious foods if they are not available in local markets. A health facility cannot compensate for sanitation. And, a nutrition programme cannot improve the socioeconomic conditions shaping what families eat on a daily basis.

We already have evidence that the programme's delivery systems work. The opportunity now lies in using what the programme already has — its reach into vulnerable households, service delivery network, and growing data infrastruc-

ture — to connect those households to other government sectoral programmes at the local level.

BNP operates across 158 districts on one of the country's most extensive social protection datasets to date. The National Socio-economic Registry already provides a mechanism for identifying and reaching vulnerable households, while BNP tracks additional maternal and child health data.

These datasets can be used to diagnostically identify districts where BNP households show particularly high concentrations of specific risk factors. Are households lacking safe water? Are mothers receiving antenatal and postnatal care? Are children immunised? Are girls attending schools? Can families afford robust diets?

The answers would determine which government departments would need to act next in addressing stunting locally. Figuring out the accountability and ownership piece is the next step — Indonesia offers a useful model. Under its Stranas

Stunting convergence strategy, districts analyse local stunting and service gaps, use those findings to align existing departmental plans and budgets, and then monitor whether priority households receive the services they need.

Cross-sectoral convergence for stunting is often misunderstood as a plurality of programmes.

In reality, the principle is simpler: convergence occurs when government programmes target the same problem, in the same place, for the same child. The early successes of BNP offer an opportunity for Pakistan to not simply scale social protection and cash transfer programmes by expanding the number of beneficiaries reached, but to connect its investments in child and maternal health, WASH, food systems, education, and population to existing platforms that already reach vulnerable households.

The writer is an analyst working for an international organisation that provides counsel for effective social impact.

Peaceful path

Dr Niaz Murtaza

WHAT have peaceful democracy protests achieved in our long autocratic history? A look at those against Gen Ayub, Zia and Musharraf, and the murkier 1977 protests, offers clues.

Political and economic exclusion and repression fuel protests. A shocking abuse, disputed polls, power grab or economic pain often provides the spark. Movement traits (coalition size, muscle, leadership and tactics) and context (urban density, external aid etc.) provide circuitry for the fire to spread. Regime cohesion, repression and foreign help provide the fire brigade. But even if they win a battle, they may lose the war if allies lack the strength and a democratic agenda.

Exclusion and repression fuelled all four. Economic pain added fuel in 1969 and 1977. Three targeted outright autocrats; the 1977 a more legitimate civilian. A student's killing under Ayub Khan, poll disputes under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Pervez Musharraf's firing of the chief justice were sparks. The 1983 protest lacked a clear spark, so it stoked a smaller fire despite the fact that repression was at its peak. Context

decided no one's fate, ties with the US were strained under Bhutto in 1977 and strong under Zia in 1983.

Movement traits varied. All were coalitions with varied social bases. The 1969 one was mainly a leftist student-worker-political one. The 1977 protest mainly rallied conservative parties, traders and clergy. The 1983 protest united the PPP, its 1977 foes and progressive groups. The 2007 demonstrations drew in centrist lawyers, parties and activists. But the social base or ideology always counted less than the size of the coalition. Major politicians led more in 1969 and 1977 than in 1983 and 2007.

Tactics differed too. All had shutdowns, but 1969 had more worker strikes, 1977 business closures, 1983 civil disobedience and 2007 court boycotts and marches. But unlike some global protests where mammoth crowds paralysed capitals to topple regimes in days, all four were smaller, spread across cities and unfolded slowly. So, regime strength was decisive. The US cut support to Ayub in 1965. The army did so in 1969 after 10 years as his health failed, letting the fire raze the autocrat's fort. Bhutto too alienated the military, which ousted him; Zia survived

via a cohesive military and coercive capacity in 1983. Musharraf slowly lost US and military support. So, fractured fire brigades let small crowds win three times.

But the autocratic base always survived to reverse even small gains. In 1969, a general took over to hold our first fair polls but rejected their result, leading to tragedy. Bhutto gained power but ruled harshly. The 2007-09 gains yielded the most fruits: freer polls, freedoms and good laws. But most gains were ironically reversed with help from their architect parties. So, the main legacy of decades of struggles is the badly mauled 1973 Constitution. This reflects autocracy's strengths: institutional cohesion, strong control and surveillance, a business empire to reward allies, and hold over the piety, propriety and patriotism mantra. Coalitions broke soon, while political leaders, often veterans of past autocracies, ruled harshly.

Our failures mirror global ones. Our review suggests only about 40 per cent of successful postwar peaceful protests outside Europe led to durable democracy. Most had strong pro-democracy parties and iconic democrats like Nelson Mandela. But peaceful protests rarely defeat a cohesive auto-

cratic establishment; they usually succeed when the autocratic base itself lets an autocrat fall. Armed struggles do worse: only 26pc after 1900 won, and just 6pc led to democracy. They may topple decaying orders but often build a new autocracy later. Neither can defeat a strong autocracy. But there is a third way: constitutional change often backed by grassroots work that slowly ends auto-crazy.

Repression today provides ample fuel; disputed polls, power grabs, economic pain, abuses and judicial curbs have given many sparks. Yet no fire has spread. The missing circuitry is a coalition able to integrate local anger into national action. This reflects regime tactics based on past lessons — arrests, speech bans and co-optation of civil society — plus the impact of past curbs on student and worker groups. But anger against repression is like dammed floodwater that finds new outlets to cause havoc.

The current hybrid set-up may face the same fate, leaving us for the umpteenth time to rebuild democracy from autocracy's wreckage. However, durable democracy will require politicians to commit to democratic norms and grassroots work.

This Vitamin May Cut Dementia Risk Almost in Half, Research Says

A long-term study links higher riboflavin intake with up to 49% lower risk of disabling dementia.

You know that moment when you open the pantry and can't remember what you came looking for? Most of us shrug off those little lapses, but they still spark the same quiet question: Is there anything I can do now to help my brain age well? Diet is one of the few levers we actually control, and one study suggests that some humble B vitamins, the kind you'll find in everyday foods, may matter more than we think.

Researchers in Japan followed adults for more than 15 years and reported that people who ate the most riboflavin (vitamin B2) had up to a 49% lower risk of developing disabling dementia than those who ate the least. Folate and vitamin B6 also tracked with lower risk, while vitamin B12 didn't show a clear link. It's an intriguing pattern that fits what we already know about B vitamins: they're workhorses in energy metabolism and help regulate homocysteine, a compound tied to vascular and brain health.¹

No single nutrient is a magic shield, and this study can't prove cause and effect. But it does add a real-world, long-term data point to the idea that what's on your plate can support your brain over the decades. Here's what the researchers did, what they found and how to turn those insights into everyday meals.

How Was This Study Conducted?

Researchers analyzed data from the community-based Circulatory Risk in Communities Study (CIRCS), which enrolled 4,171 Japanese adults ages 40 to 69. Diet was assessed by trained dietitians using a standardized 24-hour dietary recall.

Participants were then followed for a median of 15.4 years. They tracked new cases of dementia serious enough to require daily help, using Japan's national long-term care insurance records—a trusted source researchers rely on. They compared people who ate the least B vitamins to those who ate the most and calculated their chances of developing dementia, accounting for factors like age, sex, body size, smoking, drinking, medications and diet.

What Did the Study Find?

Riboflavin stood out: Compared with the group with the lowest intake, the highest-intake group had about a 49% lower risk of disabling demen-

tia. People who got more vitamin B6 and folate also tended to have a lower chance of dementia (by about 20%), while B12 didn't stand out. The riboflavin and B6 connections were stronger among participants who had never had a stroke, hinting that these vitamins could be relevant for nonvascular forms of dementia.

Like all studies, this one had certain limitations. Diet was captured from a single 24-hour recall, B-vitamin supplements weren't recorded and the researchers couldn't distinguish Alzheimer's disease from other dementia subtypes. There were also gaps in surveillance timing in some communities—though sensitivity checks suggested the main findings were robust. As an observational study, the results show association, not causation.

How Does This Apply to Real Life?

While no single nutrient can prevent dementia, this study supports a food-first approach that regularly supplies B vitamin-rich choices. Some of those foods may already be waiting for you in your fridge and pantry—here are just a few:

Riboflavin (B2) is found in dairy (milk, yogurt), eggs, lean meats and fish, mushrooms, almonds and spinach.

Vitamin B6 can be found in poultry, salmon, potatoes, bananas, chickpeas and squash.

Folate is a key nutrient in leafy greens (spinach, romaine), asparagus, avocado, citrus, beans and lentils and fortified grains.

And there are plenty of practical ways to incorporate these foods and the beneficial nutrients they offer into your eating plan. For instance, you can build a grain bowl with lentils, sautéed greens and salmon and bring it along to work for lunch. Or try tossing chickpeas into a spinach salad or wrap.

At breakfast, choose fortified whole-grain cereal with milk and sliced banana, or opt for eggs with greens. For snacks, try yogurt with crushed almonds, or hummus with veggies.

Because the study didn't assess supplements and more isn't always better, check with your health care provider before starting a B-complex supplement. Focus on consistent, varied eating patterns rich in plants, whole grains and lean proteins. That pattern naturally delivers the B vitamins highlighted here along with fiber and other brain-supportive nutrients.



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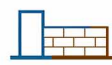


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Helping Hand for Relief and Development Raises Funds for Karachi Hospital as Younis Khan Urges Red-Ball Cricket Revival

Speaking as the guest of honor at a Helping Hand USA fundraiser in Houston, former Pakistan captain Younis Khan highlighted the lack of red-ball cricket as the root cause of the national team's recent struggles. The event raised substantial support for Karachi's KIND-R Hospital—including a \$100,000 donation from Syed Javed Anwar—and featured the announcement of five acres of land allocated in Houston for a proposed Younis Khan Cricket Academy.



PAGH Women Gather in Houston to Mark Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ

Houston women community leaders and members of the Pakistani-American community came together at a PAGH gathering commemorating the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal.



21,951 deportations expose Pakistan's Gulf jobs dependence

Economists warn remittances vulnerable to policy decisions abroad

Shazia Tasneem Farooqi

KARACHI: For Pakistani families, a job in the Gulf can mean the difference between financial security and economic hardship. But the sudden loss of that job can send a worker back to the same weak labour market that pushed him abroad in the first place – exposing a vulnerability that is increasingly visible as thousands of Pakistanis are deported from Gulf countries.

The recent deportations of 21,951 Pakistanis have also brought into focus a larger economic dependence that Pakistan relies heavily on overseas jobs to absorb its workforce and on the resulting remittances to support its external account.

The immediate financial impact of the latest deportations may be limited, but economists warn that the country's dependence on labour markets and policy decisions beyond its control leaves millions of households exposed.

Pakistan relying on jobs it does not control

"The immediate UAE impact remained limited, with deported workers' estimated annual transfers at about \$42 million, or less than 0.1% of total remittances," said Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri, an economist at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

He said remittances carry major advantages. They create no public debt, demand no profit repatriation and reach households directly. The weakness arises because Pakistan uses them to compensate for weak exports and low investment, while millions of workers remain subject to rules over which we have almost no influence.

"Remittances exceeded all export earnings in FY26, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE supplied nearly 45% of the total. The UAE deportations have not yet reduced national inflows materially. However, in a geopolitically fragile world, visa policies or other geopolitical decisions taken abroad can affect a Pakistani family's income overnight," Suleri said.

Remittances reached a record \$41.6 billion in FY26. Goods exports earned \$30.84 billion, while combined goods and services exports earned \$40.88 billion. Remittances also offset a trade deficit exceeding \$35.5 billion. Without them, and holding other flows constant, the current-account deficit would have approached \$41.7 billion. At the macroeconomic level, Pakistan has become overdependent on jobs it does not control, he said, noting that remittances were 9.9% of GDP in 2025.

Joblessness pushing young workers abroad

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) Professor of Economics and Registrar Dr Nasir Iqbal linked the vulnerability primarily to Pakistan's domestic labour market, particularly joblessness among young people.

"It is primarily joblessness in Pakistan that forces people to seek fortune abroad. We have high unemployment, especially among the young. There is no growth in the economy that led to a decline in real wages. All these factors push young workers to go abroad," he explained.

Iqbal described deportation as "a normal phenomenon," adding that "the number is not as high as it seems." He nevertheless called for better laws and enforcement mechanisms to prevent such incidents.



He also stressed the need to focus on future labour demand in Gulf countries and prepare Pakistan's workforce accordingly. "We need to focus on future labour needs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and prepare our workforce accordingly," he added.

Report warns of wider Gulf labour-market shock

A recent report by PIDE Professor of Economics Dr Shujaat Farooq warned that Pakistan's heavy reliance on the Middle East for labour exports and remittances remained a critical vulnerability.

In his Policy Viewpoint, "The Middle East Conflict and Its Implications for Pakistani Migrant Workers," Farooq noted that around 0.7 million to 0.8 million Pakistanis enter the Middle East each year, while around 6 million Pakistanis currently work in the region, which contributes 54% of Pakistan's total remittances.

The report found that around 8 million workers were placed in the Middle East during 2010-24, nearly one-third of the 25.9 million new entrants to Pakistan's labour market during the period.

Farooq warned that a prolonged regional conflict could prevent around half a million Pakistani workers from going to the Middle East in 2026, while more than half a million could be forced to return, placing serious pressure on the domestic labour market, particularly in Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa.

The report estimated that remittances could fall by \$3 billion to \$4 billion annually, potentially putting pressure on the exchange rate and widening the current-account deficit.

When an overseas job disappears

The vulnerability is most visible in the lives of workers who return. Sajid, a refrigeration technician from Karachi, moved to Dubai hoping to earn a better income. For months, he said, everything went well and he performed his job without any major problems. Then his circumstances changed suddenly when his supervisor noticed a small wire hanging from an air-conditioning system and fired him with immediate effect.

Sajid said his ordeal did not end with the loss of his job. The company subsequently reported him to the relevant authorities, leading to his deportation. Back in Karachi, Sajid had to start again from scratch, moving from shop to shop

looking for work and providing home services, trying to rebuild the livelihood he had established abroad.

His case shows how quickly the loss of overseas employment can turn into a domestic livelihood crisis. A worker may leave Pakistan seeking better earnings, but after deportation he returns to an economy where comparable employment may not be readily available.

Abdullah's experience offers a different outcome. He travelled to Dubai after a friend assured him that he would find a good job, but domestic issues in that household shortened his stay.

During his time there, he came across an old glue-making machine. He bought it and brought it back home, where he started his own small operation. He has turned his brief overseas experience into an opportunity for entrepreneurship at home.

The contrasting experiences of Sajid and Abdullah show that overseas migration can produce both vulnerability and opportunity. For one worker, returning home meant rebuilding a lost livelihood; for another, exposure abroad helped generate an idea for a domestic business.

Deportation data shows a mixed picture

The data presented in the National Assembly recently and seen by The Express Tribune showed that 21,951 Pakistanis were deported from Gulf countries between March 1 and July 13, 2026. Saudi Arabia accounted for the largest share at 15,495, followed by the UAE with 3,803 and Oman with 1,606.

Among the main reasons were "Other" cases (6,662), absconding (4,628), overstay/illegal entry or stay (2,811), jail cases (1,294), lost passports (1,155), blacklist cases (968), drugs (728) and visa violations (689).

The government has also rejected the impression that Pakistanis are being subjected to a blanket, country-specific deportation campaign, maintaining that deportations are linked to violations of host-country laws and immigration regulations.

The highest reported category of "Other," though not specified, could be the cases of bounced rental cheques – a serious offence which can trigger legal cases, travel bans and visa problems, potentially leaving Pakistanis unable to return, facing detention or, separately, deportation.

However, questions remain about the legal status of returnees, including whether some individuals remain in Federal Investigation Agency

(FIA) custody and whether particular cases require further legal proceedings. The Ministry of Interior was approached for clarification but had not responded.

The FIA could not be reached due to the end of working hours. "Questions pertain to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and FIA," said an official at the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also did not respond.

The bigger economic question

For Pakistan, overseas employment remains indispensable. It provides jobs to workers who might otherwise struggle to find employment, supports millions of households and generates foreign exchange without creating public debt or requiring profit repatriation.

The figures therefore tell only part of the story. Some Pakistanis seek opportunities abroad after prolonged financial hardship, hoping to escape mounting debts and repay borrowers by earning better wages.

For many, overseas employment is seen as a way to rebuild their finances and support families back home. In this pursuit, some, lacking sufficient resources or legal avenues, end up taking irregular routes or violating local laws, often driven by financial pressures and difficult circumstances.

The cost of dependence

As Suleri pointed out, Pakistan is relying on jobs it does not control. As Iqbal said, domestic joblessness and declining real wages are pushing young workers to seek those jobs in the first place. And as Farooq's PIDE report warns, a wider disruption in the Middle East could prevent hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis from leaving for work while forcing hundreds of thousands of existing workers to return.

The immediate deportation figures may not threaten Pakistan's remittance inflows materially. But they offer a glimpse of what could happen if the underlying dependence is tested on a much larger scale.

The policy response, therefore, cannot be limited to stopping deportations after they occur. Pakistan needs better recruitment oversight, stronger enforcement, clearer information for workers before departure and protection mechanisms for those already abroad.

At the same time, Iqbal's point about future GCC labour needs suggests that Pakistan must prepare workers for the jobs Gulf economies are likely to demand rather than simply sending more people abroad. And when workers return, their skills, savings and overseas experience need to be converted into productive activity at home.

Sajid is still looking for work from shop to shop. Abdullah, by contrast, brought back a machine and turned it into a business. Their stories capture the two possible outcomes of Pakistan's migration model. For now, the Gulf continues to provide an essential escape valve for Pakistan's labour market.

But the more Pakistan relies on jobs it does not control, the more vulnerable its workers – and the economy that depends on their earnings – become to decisions made elsewhere, at the mercy of their paymasters.

US halts all immigrant visa processing worldwide

Continued from front page

applicants that their interviews are canceled while consular staff complete mandatory retraining on public assistance rules.

Department officials confirmed on Tuesday that the global training initiative launched earlier this month aims to ensure diplomatic staff strictly assess whether foreign applicants might become a “public charge” or depend on U.S. public benefits after entry.

“To ensure all consular officers are fully equipped to evaluate every visa applicant comprehensively and consistently,” the officials explained.

The sudden suspension has thrown thousands of foreign nationals into bureaucratic confusion. Applicants who had cleared medical exams, compiled legal documentation, and spent thousands of dollars in preparation received emails stating their appointments were canceled, with no timeline provided for when interviews might resume.

The move affects applicants who are required under recent rules to process their immigrant visas in their home countries, even if they have been living or working legally inside the U.S.

For those who traveled abroad for scheduled interviews, the abrupt pause leaves them stranded outside the country, facing lost income and separated families.

The training hold fits into a broader push by the Trump administration to restrict legal pathways alongside unauthorized immigration.

Federal officials also outlined plans this week to revoke tourist and business visas for up to 200,000 foreign nationals currently seeking asylum inside the U.S., a measure being coordinated alongside the Department of Homeland Security that would mark the largest mass visa revocation in U.S. history.

State Department officials defended the pause, stating that comprehensive training is needed to ensure consular officers apply standards consistently.

However, immigration advocates and attorneys argue the administrative delay functions as a de facto ban.

The measure follows a ruling last week by U.S. District Judge Jeannette Vargas, who struck down a separate policy that had suspended immigrant visas for applicants from 75 nations.

Legal advocacy groups like the National Immigration Law Center warned they will continue challenging administrative policies that circumvent statutory limits set by Congress.

Joanna Cuevas Ingram, senior staff attorney at the National Immigration Law Center said in a statement last week that, “The court made clear that immigration laws cannot be used to justify discrimination. We are determined to ensure every person and family this ban harmed receives appropriate relief and will continue to hold this administration accountable to its obligations under the law.”

As of now, consular appointment systems remain locked, leaving legal applicants in limbo until the State

Department completes its staff training modules and establishes a timeline to reschedule canceled interviews.

Texas becomes flashpoint as anti-Muslim politics enters mainstream

Continued from front page

the most visible fronts in a broadening campaign on the American right that portrays ordinary Muslim communities and religious practices as threats — a shift Muslim advocates call the most severe wave of Islamophobia they have seen.

The rhetoric has grown explicit. Bo French, the Republican nominee for Texas railroad commissioner, wrote on social media in June, “I won’t rest until every Muslim is gone,” and earlier posted a poll asking whether Jews or Muslims were a “bigger threat” — prompting condemnation from senior Texas Republicans, including Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker, who called for his resignation as Tarrant County GOP chair.

At the state Republican convention, multiple panels reportedly warned of a “Muslim invasion.”

State action has followed the rhetoric: Governor Greg Abbott designated the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest U.S. Muslim civil rights group, a terrorist organization under Texas law — a step even the Trump administration has not taken, though Florida later followed — threatened to pull \$530,000 from the city of Grand Prairie over a private Eid celebration at a water park, and targeted ablution facilities, used for ritual washing before prayer, at Texas airports.

Much of the campaign treats routine religious practice as evidence of political ambition.

Officials have singled out Islamic arbitration for scrutiny, though, like Jewish and Christian religious arbitration, it is voluntary and subject to U.S. courts; and the East Plano Islamic Center’s proposed mosque, school, and housing development near Dallas has faced state scrutiny far beyond an ordinary land-use dispute. Some Texas lawmakers are exploring ways to define what qualifies as a religion — potentially placing Islam outside normal constitutional protection.

Advocates say the trend extends well beyond Texas, 25 years after the September 11 attacks, with figures such as Representatives Nancy Mace and Randy Fine making openly hostile statements.

“This is the worst wave I’ve witnessed,” said Shaimaa Zayan of CAIR’s Austin chapter.

The deeper danger, critics argue, is a precedent that religious protection can hinge on political approval: the First Amendment, they note, does not shield only popular faiths, and a standard used against Muslims today could reach other communities tomorrow.

ICE arrests hit record high under Trump with nearly 50,000 detained in July

Continued from front page

to the White House, according to newly obtained government data.

ICE recorded 49,571 arrests during the month, a 15% increase from the 43,021 arrests reported in June

and about 70% higher than the 29,241 arrests recorded in February. The figures were provided by ICE to the Deportation Data Project at the University of California, Berkeley and UCLA and analyzed by The Associated Press.

The numbers point to a shift in how the Trump administration is carrying out its immigration crackdown. After large-scale operations in major cities drew intense public attention and protests earlier this year, enforcement has increasingly moved into communities through traffic stops, cooperation with local police and arrests of people who had previously been protected from deportation.

The administration has also expanded ICE’s workforce and increased its reliance on state and local law enforcement agencies to identify and detain immigrants.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which supports tighter immigration restrictions, said the administration had not backed away from its enforcement campaign.

“They changed the tactics and are, if anything, being more effective,” Krikorian told the AP.

The scale of the increase is significant. In December 2025, ICE arrests surpassed 40,000, compared with just over 8,000 in the month before Trump took office. The increase followed changes that gave immigration officers broader discretion over whom and where they could arrest, along with billions of dollars in additional funding for the agency.

The federal government has largely stopped releasing detailed immigration enforcement statistics since the start of Trump’s second term. As a result, data compiled by the Deportation Data Project through a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit has become an important source for tracking ICE activity.

Local police are also playing a growing role.

State and local law enforcement agencies working with ICE accounted for about 6,500 arrests in July, or roughly 13% of the agency’s total. A year earlier, those partnerships represented less than 5% of monthly ICE arrests.

Texas and Florida alone accounted for nearly 20,000 arrests in July, underscoring the importance of the two states to the administration’s deportation strategy. Both have expanded cooperation with ICE through 287(g) agreements, which allow state and local officers to perform certain federal immigration enforcement functions.

One recent case in Key West, Florida, illustrates how those partnerships can play out.

A 36-year-old Haitian asylum seeker who had worked as a cook and supervisor at the Half Shell Raw Bar was arrested by local police and later transferred to ICE custody, according to the restaurant’s manager, Bobby Kuchinsky.

Kuchinsky said the man had fled Haiti in 2017 after receiving death threats and was the primary provider for his family. He declined to publicly identify the worker, citing concerns about his safety while in custody.

“He was an excellent worker, he learned very fast, he never had any problem with the law,” Kuchinsky

Helping Hand USA Hosts Houston Fundraiser as Younis Khan Calls for More Red-Ball Cricket

Continued from front page

Pakistani-American community, philanthropists and cricket enthusiasts.

Former Pakistan cricket team captain Younis Khan, who is on a long visit to the United States, was the featured guest at the event and spoke about the challenges facing Pakistan cricket.

Younis said the national team’s recent disappointing performances cannot simply be blamed on groupings within the team or the selection process. He identified the shortage of red-ball cricket as a major concern and called for greater efforts to motivate players, particularly young cricketers, to play more red-ball cricket.

“The real issue is the lack of red-ball cricket,” Younis said, stressing that improving Pakistan’s cricket requires more than changes in team combinations.

The Helping Hand USA-organized fundraiser also generated significant support for KIND-R Hospital. Renowned Pakistani-American businessman Syed Javed Anwar donated \$100,000 to the hospital, while signed bats, jerseys and cricket balls associated with legendary cricketers were auctioned for thousands of dollars.

The event also featured former first-class cricketers and cricket personalities Naeem-ul-Haq, Sajid Riaz and Sajid Khan.

Speaking about his possible involvement with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Younis said he had recently held two or three meetings with PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi. He said the PCB had not placed any strict conditions on him and that he would be willing to work with the board if a meaningful plan was developed.

Younis said such a plan should focus on improving the national team while also creating opportunities for young cricketers to develop.

“If a good plan emerges that provides an opportunity to improve the national team, including young cricketers, I will definitely work on it,” he said.

The Houston gathering also brought an announcement concerning the future of cricket in the United States. Pakistani businessman Israr announced the allocation of five acres of land in Houston for the proposed establishment of a Younis Khan Cricket Academy.

The academy, if established, would provide young cricketers in the Houston area with an opportunity to develop their skills and further strengthen the connection between Pakistan’s cricketing heritage and the Pakistani-American community.

The Helping Hand USA fundraiser combined support for neurological healthcare with cricket and community engagement, highlighting the Pakistani-American community’s role in supporting humanitarian initiatives in Pakistan.

Houston Muslims say Republicans who courted them now target them

Continued from front page

Representative Troy Nehls formed a “Muslim Americans for Nehls” coalition in his 2020 campaign but this year co-sponsored the “No Shari’a Act” — despite Sharia, a religious and ethical framework, not being part of U.S. law.

Residents say the party has moved beyond policy debate to treat ordinary Muslim life — mosques, halal businesses, community developments — as evidence of an alleged “Islamic takeover.”

Governor Greg Abbott has called for a total ban on Sharia, dozens of Republican state lawmakers have joined a “Sharia-Free Caucus,” and officials have targeted the East Plano Islamic Center’s proposed EPIC City development and Muslim prayer accommodations at airports.

At the state Republican convention in Houston, anti-Sharia rhetoric was a prominent theme, with Muslim Republican delegates reportedly told they had no place in the party.

“We feel abandoned for sure,” said Fort Bend resident Faizan Atiq. Sameeha Rizvi of CAIR Action said the hostility is especially painful for Muslims born and raised in Texas.

The campaign has coincided with rising anti-Muslim incidents, including threats against Houston institutions and an incident in Conroe where Muslim women were told America was a “Christian country.”

US extends Middle East deployments into 2027 as Iran conflict drags on

Continued from front page

air-defence forces, fighter squadrons and Navy personnel operating in and around the Middle East, according to The Wall Street Journal.

The US military currently has roughly 50,000 troops in the region.

Quoting from a letter sent by military leaders to soldiers’ families, The Journal reported that elements of the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, one of the US military’s principal rapid-response forces, could remain in the region well into 2027.

“We do not share that lightly, and we understand that a longer tour weighs heavily on every household, including our own,” the letter said.

The extensions represent a significant shift from expectations at the beginning of the US campaign against Iran. Hegseth had presented the operation as a swift and decisive military action. Six months into the conflict, however, the Pentagon is preparing for deployments lasting a year or longer.

Army air-defence units responsible for intercepting Iranian missiles and drones have also had their normal deployment periods extended. Their standard nine-month tours have in some cases been stretched to a full year, while some units originally scheduled for assignments in Europe or the Pacific have spent more than a year in the Middle East.

Modi's restricted media landscape

In India, pressure on journalists isn't arrests or cases, but the exhaustion of an increasingly hostile environment



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All things considered, the case against me was a minor inconvenience. I did not go to jail, but under Modi, many others have

Supriya Sharma

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ

In the summer of 2020, Supriya Sharma was working from home when a fellow journalist called and asked her a question she had not been expecting. “Is there an FIR against you?” Yes, there was.

The police complaint accused Sharma, executive editor of Scroll, of misrepresenting the words of a woman from a marginalised community and making a false claim about her experience during the Covid lockdown. From the onset, Sharma knew the allegation was false. She had a recording of the interview that showed she had quoted the woman accurately. Still, an FIR meant the possibility of arrest. Her editor, Naresh Fernandes, called and suggested she leave her house in case the police were on their way. When Sharma refused, a lawyer involved in the case called her. “Why make it easy for them? At least let them look for you,” she told her. So, before dawn, Sharma left home. She did not know when she would be able to return. In the meantime, she began thinking about what she would need if she ended up in prison: a toothbrush, sanitary napkins, and books. She would spend the next two months living with the possibility of arrest before her lawyers secured protection from it.

The case eventually became, in Sharma's telling, a relatively minor inconvenience. She did not go to prison. But the fact that she had started packing for one stayed with her. At the Oslo Freedom Forum, organised by the Human Rights Foundation, this year, Sharma used the episode to explain what it means to be an independent journalist in Narendra Modi's India. The problem, she suggested, is not only that journalists can face arrest or legal action, but that after years of watching colleagues and activists go through it, the possibility begins to enter the ordinary calculations of newsroom life.

Sharma had evidence that her reporting was accurate, but that did not prevent a police case from being registered against her. For other journalists, the consequences have been much more serious. She referred to Siddique Kappan, who was arrested in Uttar Pradesh while travelling to report on protests following the alleged rape and killing of a young Dalit woman. He was later charged under India's anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and spent 28 months in prison. She also mentioned Mohammad Zubair, the fact-checker and co-founder of Alt News, who was arrested over a social-media post that authorities said offended Hindu religious sentiments.

For Sharma, however, these cases are not simply examples from the news. They form part of the professional environment in which a generation of Indian journalists now works. Their cases were different from Sharma's, and each involved its own legal proceedings and allegations. But to journalists watching them, they formed part of a pattern in which reporting, political criticism and social-media activity could bring consequences far beyond an angry response from a politician.

Sharma entered the profession in 2002, travelling around a country she describes as almost impossibly diverse. She encountered different languages, religions and political traditions and found that reporting gave her a way to understand a society that was much more complicated than the political arguments made about it. At the time, she said, journalists could question the government relatively freely. In the run-up to the 2014 election, she and other reporters scrutinised the Congress government and its record. The Congress lost that year. The Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, came to power, with Modi as its leader. Modi's political background was already closely tied to the question of Hindu nationalism, she noted.

In 1992, Sharma recalled being 12 when Hindu nationalist activists demolished the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The mosque's destruction was followed by communal violence across India. For Sharma, who grew up in a Hindu family, the episode was an early introduction to the tension between the idea of India as a secular, plural country and the vision of India promoted by Hindu nationalists. As a journalist, she later watched Hindu nationalist politics move from the margins of Indian political life to the centre of national government.

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An important change, Sharma believes, is ownership. India's largest media organizations are often owned by conglomerates with non-media interests. Sharma noted a network she worked for was acquired by a Modi-ally after it refused to fall in line politically

Modi had been chief minister of Gujarat during the 2002 communal violence, in which more than 1,000 people were killed, most of them Muslims. His government faced sustained criticism over its handling of the violence, allegations Modi has denied. When he became prime minister in 2014, Sharma argues, the relationship between the government and the media began changing in ways that went beyond the usual political hostility towards journalists.

One of the most important changes, she believes, has been ownership. India has some of the world's largest media organisations, but many are owned by large business groups whose interests extend well beyond news. Sharma pointed to the takeover of NDTV, a network where she had worked early in her career, after it failed to fall in line with the political establishment. She said it was subsequently acquired by billionaire Gautam Adani, an industrialist close to Modi. The importance of the owner, Sharma's account suggests, is that political influence does not always arrive as a government order. It can work through the business interests surrounding a newsroom. “A paper does not have to be shut down for its journalism to become harder. An owner can change its priorities, advertising can dry up, legal notices can start arriving and reporters can find themselves spending more time dealing with harassment and less time reporting. The publication may still appear every day. But the kind of journalism it can afford to do begins to change.”

Speaking about her own newsroom, Sharma said Scroll is now roughly a third of the size it was a decade ago. That number says something about the state of independent journalism that a discussion about censorship often misses. Investigative reporting is expensive and reporters need time to travel, find documents and persuade people to talk. Editors need time to check complicated claims and organisations need lawyers when reporting angers powerful people. A smaller newsroom, she noted, has less capacity to do all of that, regardless of how committed its journalists may be.

Sharma has a theory about why some independent outlets are still able to operate. Perhaps, she suggested, the Indian government does not mind having a small number of them around. Their survival helps preserve the impression that India remains a country with a free and pluralistic press. It is a provocative argument, and one that is difficult to establish as fact. But the contradiction she describes is real enough: independent journalism can continue to exist while becoming progressively weaker. The question is therefore not simply whether journalists are allowed to publish; it is whether they have the resources and freedom to do the kind of journalism that makes powerful people uncomfortable.

There is another measure of the changing relationship between India's government and its press. Since becoming prime minister in 2014, Modi has largely avoided the kind of open, unscripted press conferences in which journalists can freely question him. He gives speeches and interviews, but opportunities for journalists to ask him unscripted questions have been limited. Speaking before a global audience of media practitioners and activists at the Oslo Freedom Forum, Sharma mentioned Modi's recent visit to Norway, when a journalist tried to ask him why he does not take questions from the press. According to Sharma, the question went unanswered, while the journalist was subsequently subjected to online abuse and doxxing.

For Indian journalists, online attacks have become another part of the job. They can be particularly vicious when a reporter is perceived to have challenged the government or Hindu nationalist politics. Women journalists, Sharma noted, are frequently targeted with threats and abuse that are personal as well as political. The harassment does not have to result in physical violence to affect the work. It takes time to deal with. It follows journalists outside the newsroom and it tells other reporters what may happen if they attract the same attention.

But Sharma does not describe the journalists at Scroll as frightened. She describes them as tired. That may be the most

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For Indian journalists, online attacks have become another part of the job. They can be particularly vicious when a reporter is perceived to have challenged the government or Hindu nationalist politics

revealing word in her entire talk. The political environment is more hostile in India. The legal risks are higher and the public has become accustomed to a steady stream of stories about journalists, activists and critics facing police cases or online attacks. After a while, she said, it becomes difficult to summon the same reaction every time. Sharma called this numbness one of the biggest challenges facing her newsroom.

It is an unusual problem for journalists because the work itself depends on paying attention. A reporter has to notice what other people have stopped noticing: a family going hungry in a village that was supposed to be a model of development; a prisoner who has spent years awaiting trial; a government decision that receives little scrutiny; a law that changes what citizens are allowed to say.

Sharma's own FIR came from a story about Mala Devi, a woman with five children who struggled to feed her family during India's Covid lockdown. Millions of Indians faced hunger during those months. What made Devi's situation worth reporting was the village where she lived. It had been adopted by Modi as part of a programme intended to develop model villages.

The contradiction was the story. A village connected to one of India's most powerful political leaders still had a family struggling to find enough food. Sharma went on to report it and the police case followed. Devi herself, Sharma said, could not read the story. She was unlikely to have been the person offended by it. The episode nevertheless raised a larger question: what, exactly, was the FIR protecting?

Sharma does not pretend to know who was offended. What she does know is that the case changed her life for two months. And it changed the way she thought about the distance between doing journalism and being punished for doing it.

India remains a democracy with competitive elections, opposition parties, an independent civil society and a media landscape far too large and diverse to be described simply as controlled by the government. There are still reporters who investigate, courts that intervene and citizens who challenge those in power. That is precisely why Sharma's argument is more complicated than a claim that journalism has disappeared. It has not. Independent journalists are still working. The question is how much space they have to work in, how many of them can afford to keep doing it and what happens to a society when the cost of independent reporting continues to rise.

For Scroll, Sharma said, there are two problems: money and numbness. The first is straightforward. Independent journalism needs financial resources, and those resources are increasingly difficult to find. The second, she said, is harder. How do journalists continue to care when every new arrest, threat or attack begins to resemble the last one?

Sharma's own answer seems to lie in continuing to report. The morning she left her home in 2020, she did not know whether she would be arrested. She packed the things she might need and left anyway. Two months later, she came back and she has continued working.

That is not a story about a journalist who was fearless. Sharma's account suggests something more ordinary and, in some ways, more difficult: she was frightened enough to prepare for prison and determined enough to keep reporting afterwards. At the Oslo Freedom Forum, she ended with a commitment to continue bearing witness and speaking truth to power, even when power is not listening.

The phrase can sound grand when separated from the details, but it is those details that make it convincing: a woman struggling to feed five children, a recording kept by a journalist because she knew what she had actually reported, a phone call before dawn, and a toothbrush packed for a prison cell she never had to enter. There is also the newsroom itself, now a third of the size it once was, still trying to find the money and the energy to keep asking questions. For Sharma, that is what fighting numbness means: continuing to notice what is happening around you, even after you have seen it happen many times before.

Houston Emerges as a Hub for Pakistani and Indian Cuisine

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

A Strong Pakistani Culinary Presence

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

diners from across the metropolitan area.

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

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

Indian Restaurants Offer Regional Diversity

Indian cuisine in Houston reflects a wide range

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

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

Fine Dining and Modern Fusion

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

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

A Reflection of Community Growth

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

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

Here is the list:

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

. Phone: (832) 786-8000

. Dine-in and takeout; Halal Indo-Pak cuisine. Known for its halal goat chops, beef kebabs and chicken lollipops , plus classics like biryani and mango lassi.

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

. Phone: (832) 999-4490

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

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

. Phone: (832) 593-0110

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

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

. Phone: (832) 915-0898

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

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

. Phone: (281) 800-5880

Indo-Pak (dine-in/takeout). Offers flavorful Pakistani grills – rich karahi and karahi fries, mixed grills and biryanis – plus giant naan and spice-forward curries, all Halal.

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

. Phone: (281) 477-7897

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

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

. Phone: (346) 594-2097

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

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

. Phone: (281) 240-0786

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

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

Javed Nihari – 14631 Beechnut St, Houston, TX 77083

. Phone: (346) 330-4240

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

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

. Phone: (713) 587-9300

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

Chai Shai – 6632 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (832) 939-8112

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

. Halal meats and sweets.

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

. Phone: (281) 741-2571

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

Himalaya Restaurant – 6652 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 532-2837

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

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

. Phone: (713) 952-0606

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (832) 500-4618

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

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7398

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

Shalamar Restaurant – 15142 Highway 3, Webster, TX 77598

. Phone: (281) 488-4151

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 496-3232

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

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

Maharaja Bhog – 8338 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 771-2464

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

Shiv Sagar – 6662 Southwest Fwy, Houston, TX 77074

. Phone: (713) 977-0150

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

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

. Phone: (346) 266-1626

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

inspired thali buffet and a variety of healthy veggie dishes.

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

. Phone: (281) 888-7806

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

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

. Phone: (713) 864-6667

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

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

. Phone: (713) 960-8472

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

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

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

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

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

. Phone: (281) 955-9878

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

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

. Phone: (713) 522-2022

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

. Uses local ingredients and has bakery items.

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

. Phone: (713) 242-8087

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

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

. Phone: (832) 886-4291

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

. Creative cocktails and vegetarian options also featured.

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

. Phone: (713) 334-5555

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

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

Middleton leads Johnson in race for Texas attorney general, but the contest is unusually close

Early voting for the general election begins in less than seven weeks, and while the U.S. Senate fight has drawn national attention, there's another contest on the ballot that's at least as consequential for Texans: the race to succeed Republican incumbent Ken Paxton as state attorney general, featuring state Sen. Mayes Middleton, R-Galveston, and state Sen. Nathan Johnson, D-Dallas.

Texas' attorney general serves as the state's top law enforcement official. The attorney general's office oversees a range of critical programs affecting ordinary citizens, including child support collection and enforcement. However, the office is perhaps best known for its role in litigation involving the federal government, as well as lawsuits by the state of Texas against private

"A very dynamic race"

The latest snapshot of the race comes from a poll conducted by the Texas Politics Project, released last week. According to the poll, some 40% of registered voters said they plan to support Middleton, compared to 35% who said they will vote for Johnson and 3% who back Libertarian candidate Tom Oxford.

"This is a very dynamic race," Henson said. "At five points, it's indicative of how the two parties are fairly competitive in this race and certainly more competitive than we usually expect them to be in Texas."

A five-point lead is uncomfortably close for a Republican running statewide in Texas. Henson said that, ordinarily, a Republican candidate for statewide office

should be leading the Democrat by between nine to 12 points.

"I expect that this race will continue to poll pretty closely," Henson said. "And it's a race that we'll be watching as it unfolds, because we've got two very competitive candidates running for an office that's very important, and a lot of people that have not really started thinking about it yet, but they will have their attention drawn to it."

Perhaps just as significant as Middleton's relatively narrow lead is that the poll shows 22% of respondents have yet to decide which candidate they will support. That comes after Middleton, who is independently wealthy, put millions of dollars into his own campaign, in part to build statewide name recognition.

"Mayes Middleton is going to have a lot more money to spend than Nathan Johnson," Henson said. "But Nathan Johnson is a solid candidate, which has not always been the case in these down-ballot races for Democrats."

"A spiritual battle for the future of our state"

Middleton was not the automatic favorite to capture the Republican nomination for attorney general. He emerged from a field that included state Sen. Joan Huffman, R-Houston — a former Harris County prosecutor and state district judge who most recently chaired the state Senate Committee on Finance — and U.S. Rep. Chip Roy, a hard-right congressman from Central Texas, who forced Middleton into a May 26 primary runoff.

Middleton defeated Roy in the runoff

by more than 10 percentage points, but that victory didn't come cheaply. According to records from the Texas Ethics Commission, Middleton donated more than \$3 million to his own campaign between late February and mid-May. He also loaned his campaign an additional \$5,000,000 between mid-April and mid-May.

That money was almost all spent as of the end of June. The most recent campaign finance data showed Middleton had less than \$118,000 in cash on hand. Johnson closed out the reporting period with more than \$290,000 in the bank.

Middleton won the Republican nomination campaigning as "MAGA Mayes Middleton," arguing he was the most-conservative, most pro-Donald Trump candidate running. Middleton, who did not respond to multiple interview requests from Houston Public Media, indicated he would follow the same strategy in the general election during an interview with CBS News.

"We're in a spiritual battle for the future of our state. They're trying to destroy Texas. And I mean that they, the left," Middleton said. "They want to drag us down, like they've done in New York, California, all the others."

Middleton cast himself as the "law-and-order, tough-on-crime candidate," and he said he wants to expand the powers of the office.

"I also support adding powers to the attorney general's office to prosecute any state crime. And the reason why that's important, you've got to ask the question,

are these things being enforced in blue counties?" Middleton said. "And the answer to that is, of course not."

Middleton repeatedly claimed his Democratic opponent, Dallas State Senator Nathan Johnson, would not enforce the law if elected. He pointed to Johnson's stance on a recent piece of legislation Middleton had authored, requiring that transgender individuals use the restrooms and locker rooms of their gender assigned at birth.

"He actually had a debate in his primary," Middleton said. "And he said the number one law he would not enforce and not follow is one I authored and passed, the Women's Privacy law, which kicks men out of women's restrooms and locker rooms. Right? This is common sense right here."

Johnson did say in a January debate with his Democratic primary opponent, former Galveston mayor Joe Jaworski, that he considered the Texas Women's Privacy Act to be "a dumb law" and unenforceable. If he elected, Johnson said, the phone line the Attorney General's Office had set up to take tips from the public about alleged violations of the law "will not have anyone answering it."

"A check on the abuse of power"

However, Johnson, who spoke with Houston Public Media last month, turned Middleton's argument on its head. He said Middleton has given little if any indication that he's prepared to fulfill the responsibilities of the office of attorney general.

"I'm not hearing how he's going to work with district attorneys instead of against them to make streets safer,"

Johnson said. "I'm not hearing how he's going to investigate political corruption. I'm not hearing how he's going to investigate the coziness with preferential contracts between [the government and] the private sector. I'm not hearing how he's going to advise agencies. I'm not hearing how he's going to keep the federal government from encroaching upon states' rights or individual rights. I'm not hearing any of that stuff. And those are the things that you'd expect from an attorney general."

Johnson argued that Middleton's determination to target the left makes him unfit to be attorney general. He said that Paxton had deliberately polarized the office and that Middleton is promising more of the same.

"I want people to understand that that office was conceived of as a check on the abuse of power in the private sector and in the public sector," Johnson said. "And it has been used instead by Ken Paxton, and Mayes Middleton has pledged to use the office the same way, as a political tool, not as a check and a balance like our country was founded upon."

Paxton regularly sued the federal government during the administration of Democratic President Joe Biden over a range of issues, not all exclusively related to Texas — something he has not done at all under President Trump. When Abbott was attorney general — and Barack Obama, also a Democrat, was president — Abbott described his workday as, "I go into the office, I sue the federal government and I go home."

Brothers for Life By Ghulam Bombaywala Zeenat Foundation

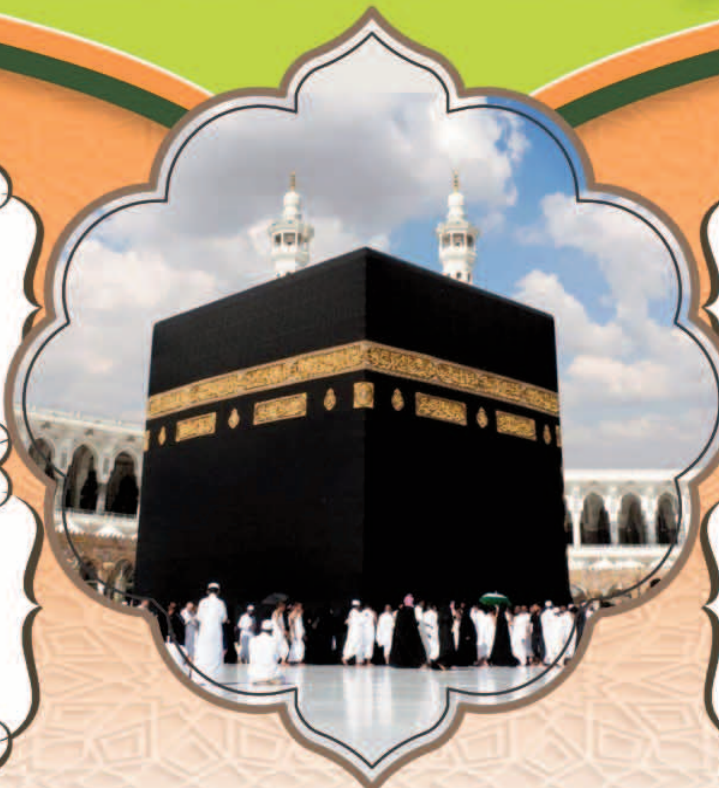
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BE SELECTED
TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS
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JOURNEY



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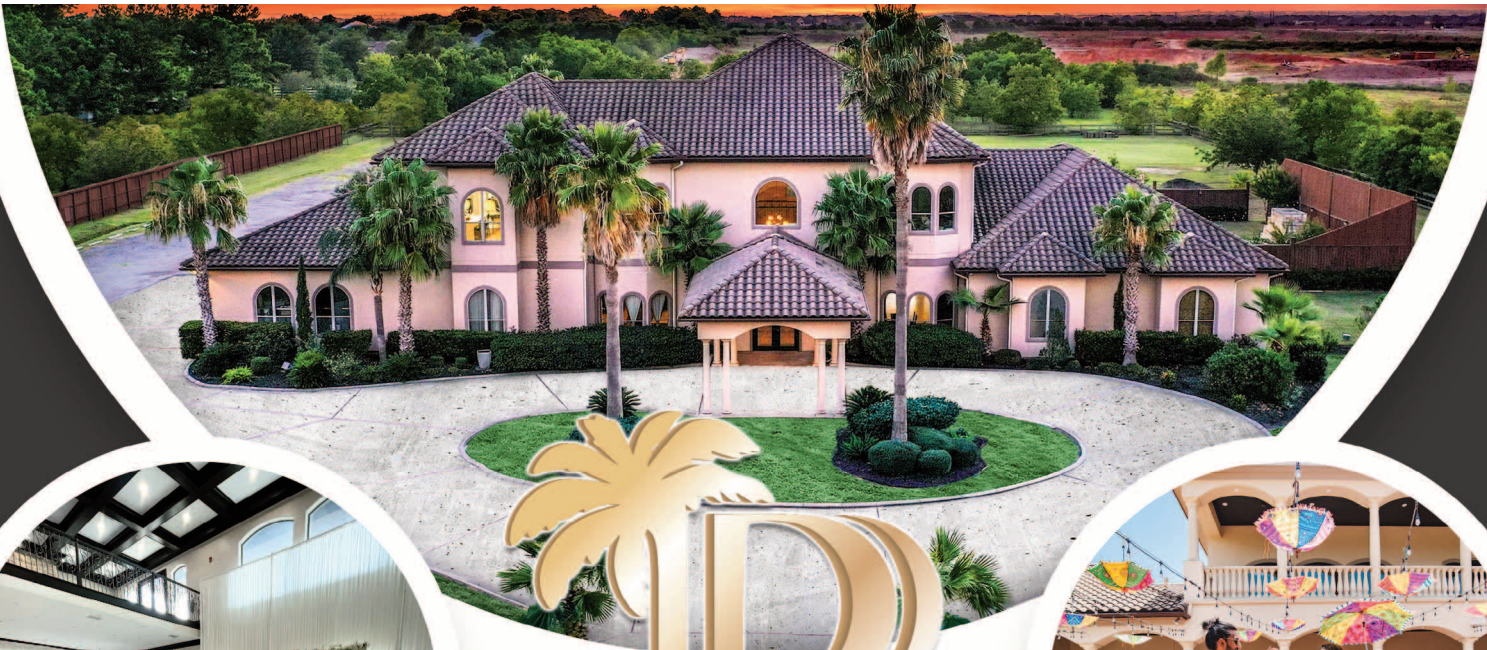
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Houston Symposium Examines Prophetic Lessons on Pluralism, Compassion and Civic Life



By Hasnain Walji

At a time when religious and political differences increasingly divide communities, a gathering of Houston-area civic, faith and inter-faith leaders turned to a seventh-century example to ask a distinctly modern question: How can people with



deeply different beliefs learn to live together?

That question was at the heart of a symposium organized by the ARK Initiative on Aug. 29 in Sugar Land, held in celebration of the birth anniversary of the Prophet

continued on page 28

HHRD Leadership Meets Houston Humanitarian Partners to Review Longstanding Relief and Rehabilitation Collaboration



Houston, Texas: A special meeting of humanitarian and community partners was held in Houston to welcome Mr. Javed Siddiqui, CEO of Helping Hand for Relief and Development (HHRD), along with

senior HHRD officials, including Mr. Ilyas Chaudhry and other members of the visiting delegation. The meeting was coordinated and chaired by Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, Coordinator of the Alliance for

Disaster Relief (AFDR) and President of the Houston-Karachi Sister City Association (HKSCA).

The gathering brought together leadership from AFDR's

continued on page 28

PAGH Women's Milad Gathering Marks Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ in Houston



HOUSTON, TX — The Pakistan Association of Greater Houston (PAGH) organized a women's Milad gathering in Houston to mark Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ, the annual commemoration of the birth anniversary

of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Eid Milad-un-Nabi is observed by Muslims on the 12th day of Rabi-ul-Awwal. The occasion is traditionally marked with religious gather-

ings, prayers, recitation of naat and programs highlighting the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

The PAGH gathering brought together women from the Pakistani-American community, including leaders and members of various local women organizations. The event featured religious observances and provided an opportunity for women to gather and participate in the commemoration.

The venue was decorated for the *continued on page 28*

Houston Celebrates 190th Anniversary, Honoring Diversity and a City Shaped by Its People



HOUSTON, TX — Houston marked its 190th anniversary Saturday with a celebration at the Heritage Society's museum gallery in downtown Houston, bringing together community members to reflect on the city's history, growth and future.

Mayor John Whitmire joined the festivities as Houston commemorated the anniversary of the city's founding. The event highlighted the

continued on page 28

Trump plan may end H-4 spouse work permits

The Trump administration is considering ending employment authorization for some spouses of H-1B visa holders, a move that could affect working families and household incomes while changing a policy that has allowed eligible H-4 spouses to work legally in the United States for more than a decade.

The proposal, posted on the website Reginfo.gov, under the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, is titled "Removing H-4 Dependent Spouses From the Classes of Noncitizens Eligible for Employment Authorization."

It proposes to remove H-4 dependent spouses from the category of foreign nationals eligible to receive Employment Authorization Documents, or EADs.

The proposal would reverse a policy introduced in 2015 under the Obama administration that allowed certain H-4 spouses of H-1B workers to apply for work authorization.

The abstract posted on the site states that the proposal would "restore DHS's long-standing policy of not extending eligibility to request employment authorization to

continued on page 28

Asian American admissions bias case moves forward

A federal judge has allowed part of a civil rights lawsuit brought by a California family alleging anti-Asian discrimination in college admissions to move forward, giving the case a potentially significant path toward discovery of university admissions data.

The lawsuit was filed by Nan Zhong and his son, Stanley Zhong, whose experience has become a focal point in the broader debate over whether highly qualified Asian American students face disadvantages in the admissions processes of

selective U.S. universities.

Stanley Zhong, now 21, was rejected by 16 of the 18 colleges to which he applied after graduating from Henry M. Gunn High School in Palo Alto, California, in 2023. His academic record included a 1590 SAT score, a 4.42 weighted GPA and a ranking in the top 9% of his graduating class. He had also developed a free electronic-signature startup and participated in coding competitions.

Soon after the college rejections, Google hired Zhong as a full-time software engineer. According to his

family's lawsuit, the position typically requires a Ph.D. or equivalent practical experience. Google had first identified Zhong's programming abilities when he was 13.

The contrast between Zhong's college admissions results and his subsequent employment has become central to his family's argument that academic and professional qualifications alone do not explain how some Asian American applicants fare at highly selective universities.

The lawsuit alleges that

continued on page 29

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Between talent and glory

Our junior netballers are winning. The bigger challenge is developing and retaining them for the senior side



By Nabil Tahir

Women's sport in Pakistan has rarely had a long list of success stories to choose from. There have been individual athletes and teams who have broken through from time to time, but sustaining that success, particularly from junior to senior level, has often proved more difficult.

Netball is beginning to offer an interesting exception.

The sport has quietly developed a presence among girls at schools, colleges and universities, with competitions running across different age groups before players move into open and senior categories. According to former Pakistan Netball Federation president Mudassar Razak Arain, there are currently around 990 female players competing across the U-12, U-14, U-16, U-18, U-21 and open categories.

More importantly, some of those young players have started producing results internationally.

At the recent Asian Youth Netball Championship in Jeonju, South Korea, Pakistan went unbeaten through seven matches and won the Plate Division, defeating Maldives 60-35 in the final and finishing sixth overall in Asia. Five junior players, Sumayya Safdar, Jasmine, Hamna, Haya Gul and Leya Raza Shah, have since also made their way into the senior national setup, according to Arain.

There are reasons why netball has been able to find a place among young female athletes. It is traditionally a women-dominated sport internationally and has long been played through schools. It also does not require the kind of specialised infrastructure associated with some other sports. But getting girls onto a court is only the beginning.

Pakistan sport has seen talented juniors before. The more difficult years often come afterwards, when a young athlete has to move from age-group competition into the senior game. Training becomes harder, opposition gets stronger and sport begins competing with university, employment, finances and family responsibilities. A player who looked exceptional at 16 or 18 does not necessarily arrive at 23 as an international athlete.

That is the stage Haya Gul is now approaching.

Haya first encountered netball at school when she was 14. She had already competed in throwball and tried volleyball, javelin and shot put, but netball was the sport that stayed with her. She moved through college and university competition before reaching the junior national team, and is now among the young players beginning to break into the senior setup.

For Pakistan, then, the question is no longer simply whether it can find talented young women who can play netball. This generation has already provided some evidence that it can.

The question is what happens to them next.

Talent only gets you so far

For Haya, the difference became clear only after she stepped outside Pakistan.

Playing internationally with the junior team exposed her to players who approached familiar positions differently. The rules were the same and so was the court, but the way opponents moved, defended and read the game gave her things she had not experienced



regularly in domestic competition.

"When I returned to Pakistan and played at nationals, I felt like I understood netball in a completely different way," she says. "I was still playing the same sport, but I wasn't playing it the same way."

Her decision-making had become quicker, her defensive strategies had improved and, perhaps more importantly, she had started seeing possibilities in the game that she had not seen before.

That experience also points towards one of the problems facing the current generation. Pakistan may have found talented junior players, but talent at that age does not automatically translate into a senior international player. Even established netball systems treat the transition as a period requiring progressively stronger competition alongside technical, tactical and physical development.

Karima Khan, an Asian Level 1 coach working with Pakistan's junior players, does not believe talent is where Pakistan falls short. "There is no shortage of talent," she says. "Talent, commitment and team spirit are very strong, and in these areas we are no less than any country or any other team."

What separates Pakistan from stronger netball nations, she says, begins to show elsewhere. International exposure, tactical maturity and experience of playing high-level matches.

The difference becomes greater as players move towards senior netball. The game gets faster and more physical, opponents become stronger and skills that appear comfortable during training have to be executed under pressure. Karima points to passing, shooting and ball control as examples. A player may perform them repeatedly in practice, but doing the same thing with an opponent closing her down, a crowd around the court and the pressure of an international match is another matter.

"Practice temperament is different and the temperament of the match is different," she says.

For Karima, that gap cannot be closed through training camps alone. Players need to repeatedly face different opponents and different styles of netball. International matches are where they learn to make decisions under pressure, develop confidence and understand where their own game stands.

The problem is how rarely that opportunity comes.

According to Arain, a female player in Pakistan may get around two opportunities to compete at national level in a year and perhaps one international tournament.

Karima believes that is not enough for a player trying to make the jump from junior promise to senior international competition. "In Pakistan, a team participates once a year or twice a year," she says. "They learn and forget. That thing does not continue."

For the current junior group, then, winning matches is useful, but what happens between tournaments may matter just as much. They have already shown that they can compete at their present level. Over the next few years, the opposition will become stronger, the game quicker and the margin for mistakes smaller.

But will their opportunities to develop grow at the



same pace?

When talent meets real life

The journey of Quratul-ain, the former Pakistan captain, shows that the route from domestic netball to the Pakistan team has existed for more than two decades. It also shows how difficult staying on that route can become.

She started playing at district level before moving into college netball in 2002. The same year, she represented Sindh at the National Netball Championship, where her performance earned her a place in the Pakistan camp. She eventually made the national team and, after years of playing as Goal Attack, went on to captain Pakistan.

Getting there, however, did not always mean that the basic problems had been solved.

Quratul-ain remembers preparing for a tour to England in 2002 through a camp that lasted around three months, only for the team to struggle to arrange tickets because there was no government support and sponsors were difficult to find. The federation eventually managed to send the team, she says, but similar problems followed.

Her more difficult memory is of an Asian Championship in 2005. According to Quratul-ain, a lack of financial support meant Pakistan travelled with only seven players. Some became ill during the tournament, including Quratul-ain herself, but there were no reserves to replace them.

"We still had to play because we didn't even have reserve players," she recalls.

Not every player she started alongside remained in the sport long enough to face those problems. Quratul-ain remembers talented teammates gradually dropping out, sometimes because their families could no longer see a reason for them to continue. "They would be asked, 'What is the benefit of playing? What are you actually getting from it?'" she says.

That question becomes harder to answer as a player gets older. At school and college, sport can still fit around a relatively structured routine. University brings examinations that can clash with tournaments. Employment brings another problem: getting leave for camps and competitions is not always easy. Marriage and family responsibilities can add another layer.

Quratul-ain managed to continue through those stages, but she does not pretend it was simple. "After marriage, the responsibilities increase considerably," she says. "Managing all of that while continuing to give time to netball is a major task."

Karima sees similar pressures among players coming through today. For her, one of the biggest concerns is not whether Pakistan can discover talented girls, but whether it can retain them. Education and family commitments play a part, but so do injuries, limited opportunities and financial pressures.

"Many talented players get out of the system before reaching the senior level," she says.

There are cases, she adds, where a player may have the ability to go further but also has to complete her education or contribute financially at home. Without enough support, sport eventually becomes the thing that has to give way.

There is another cost that is less visible. Karima says players sometimes continue playing domestic matches with injuries rather than having the time and support required for proper rehabilitation. Nutrition, strength and conditioning, injury management and psychological support become increasingly important as the level rises, but they cannot be limited to the weeks when a national camp is being held.

For women who remain in the system, there can be opportunities at the other end. Quratul-ain points to departments such as WAPDA and the Army that have employed athletes, while university players can benefit from sports scholarships. Her own sporting background eventually became part of her professional life, she entered government service in health and physical education and is now a Grade 18 lecturer.

So, the problem is not that netball offers nothing beyond the court. It is that a young player has to keep going long enough to reach those opportunities.

For the girls coming through today, that may be as important as anything they learn during training. Talent can get a player noticed at 15 or 16. It cannot, by itself, make university easier to manage, pay the bills, heal an injury or create another international match.

And those are precisely the years in which Pakistan needs its best juniors to become senior players rather than former ones.

A pathway, but is it enough?

On paper, there is a route for a young netball player to follow.

A girl can start at school, club or academy level, move into college and university competition, represent her province and eventually compete at the national championships.

That pathway runs through different age categories, from U-12 through to U-21, before players enter the open or senior game. And as the recent movement of junior players into the senior setup shows, there is a route upwards.

The concern is what is available to players while they travel through it.

Arain says a female player may get two or three tournaments through school or college, around two opportunities at national level and roughly one international competition in a year. The federation also holds competitions across different age categories, allowing players to move upwards as they become over-age for one level.

But competition is only one part of what is required to develop a player.

Infrastructure remains another problem. The federation does not have a dedicated netball ground of its own. In Karachi, Arain says, the PSB National Coaching Centre previously allowed the federation to use its facilities for training camps, but that access has not been available for around two years. The federation has applied for permission again but, according to him, the request remains pending.

Until then, camps have to be arranged at rented venues. Money creates another limitation. Arain says the federation does not have a permanent sponsor or regular

Continued on Page 21

The power of nostalgia

He-Man's return to the big screen for the first time since 1987 is both a triumph and a missed opportunity



By Omair Alavi |

The first English phrase I memorised with real meaning and proper understanding was not a nursery rhyme or a classroom lesson. It was not even a film dialogue that sticks with most people with a filmi mind. It was the opening narration of the animated series He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, which aired in the 1980s and was available to us on video cassettes.

Long before I understood grammar, long before I realised the magic words can play, I knew about Eternia, Castle Grayskull, and the most powerful man in the universe. That should tell you how much this franchise means to me and how much I was looking forward to He-Man's return in live action.

When I walked into the theatre, my mind told me to keep expectations low because other reviewers didn't like the film, while my heart said that as a reviewer, I should watch the film and decide for myself. So, with equal parts excitement and caution, I saw Travis Knight's reboot of Masters of the Universe and ended up somewhere between relieved and disappointed.

Let me first talk about the relief – finally, they showed Prince Adam's transformation into He-Man, a moment they missed in the last film due to budget constraints. As for the disappointment, it stemmed from multiple factors, the most prominent of which was that the film works in patches. It is very good when it wants to be, and frustratingly bad when it isn't.

I must call out the filmmakers for squandering an opportunity that has existed for more than four decades. The original animated series never truly provided origin stories for He-Man, Man-At-Arms, The Sorceress, or even Skeletor, making it the perfect time to explore that angle. However, the writers thought that creating their own Thor-esque storyline for He-Man would be better, and that's where they faltered.

No film works without a younger audience, especially one as big-budget as Masters of the Universe. Gen Z has no idea who He-Man is, why he claims to be the most powerful man in the universe, what makes him so integral to Eternia's politics, or why they should even care to watch a half-naked hero when they have other fully clothed superheroes to follow. The writing team could have used this

film to explore Eternia's history, explain its politics, flesh out its heroes and villains, and give newcomers a reason to care. Instead, the film rushes through its mythology, assuming audiences are already invested.

Also, there is a reason I haven't discussed the film's plot, characters, performances, etc., in this piece until now. That's because I am doing exactly what the director did in the film – he wastes the first half hour establishing that Adam Glenn is an alien from outer space in the most boring way imaginable. Hopefully, I didn't waste time; I am just warming up to the possibility that my analysis was more thoughtful than the director's performance.

The new Masters of the Universe begins strongly with an introduction to the characters, followed by a fight sequence in which Skeletor (Jared Leto) dethrones King Randor of Eternia, injures Queen Marlena, attacks the Sorceress, and forces Prince Adam to flee for his life with the Sword of Power. Like Superman, Prince Adam (Nicholas Galitzine) lands on Earth but loses his sword. To search for it, he uses something he didn't have on Eternia -- the World Wide Web. When he finally gets the sword in his hand, it attracts both Teela (Camila Mendes) and Beast Man, who fight over it while Adam looks on as if he has no clue what is happening.

The battle then shifts to He-Man's home planet, Eternia, where Prince Adam finally embraces the Power of Grayskull and announces his arrival in style. They also rescue Man-at-Arms from his cell (he was imprisoned for no clear reason), and together they decide to take on Skeletor, but not before realising that the master villain has many cards up his sleeve.

Good triumphs over evil, as usual, but many questions linger throughout the film. What exactly makes Eternia worth fighting for? Why is Skeletor so obsessed with ruling it? What are the deeper relationships among the characters in this world? Why was Prince Adam chosen as Grayskull's saviour when he wasn't even fit to fight a girl? It seems the director was more interested in moving pieces around the board than in explaining why they matter. Fortunately, what it lacks in storytelling, it often compensates for with spectacle, casting, and, of course, the



action scenes.

My main argument remains simple: Why does everyone on Eternia know that Prince Adam is He-Man? Had the writers not watched the original animated series? Weren't they being paid to write, or was it a pro bono job? There is a reason Prince Adam keeps his alter ego separate: he wants people to think he is lazy and stupid, which is why, whenever he transforms into He-Man, he brings hope. The opening narration of the original animated series (the one I memorised) also emphasises that 'only three others share this secret – our friends The Sorceress, Man At Arms and Orko'. Duh!

Let's talk about the performances. Nicholas Galitzine is easily the film's greatest strength, appearing in most of the scenes. His Prince Adam strikes the right balance of vulnerability, charm, and heroism, and he looks entirely believable when transformed into He-Man. However, he bears a strong resemblance to Chris Hemsworth's Thor and even sounds like him. The only difference between his Prince Adam and He-Man is the armour, which isn't something to be taken lightly. When John Erwin voiced both characters, he made sure that Adam sounded scared and goofy, while He-Man was the perfect man.

Camila Mendes delivers a first-rate Teela, who seems to have transitioned from the animated series to the live-action one. Casting her is one of the producers' best decisions, as she resembles Morena Baccarin (The Sorceress) in some scenes. For the uninitiated, she is The Sorceress' daughter, as explained in the animated series episode 'Teela's Quest,' but the director doesn't explore that here. In fact, The Sorceress doesn't have much to do in the film, which is disappointing, considering she is the guardian of Castle Grayskull. The scene where her alter ego Zoar speaks to Prince Adam shouldn't have made it into the final cut, since it looks more comic than serious.

The only person in the film with a proper character arc is Duncan, aka Man-at-Arms, played by the leg-

endary Sir Idris Elba. At the beginning, he is shown as the King's most trusted man, but he later falls into bad habits before being rescued by the very boy he trained.

As for the bad guys, only two people seem to have understood the assignment – Jared Leto's Skeletor and Alison Brie's Evil-Lyn. Although neither character's voice resembles the one in the animated series – Skeletor had a shrill voice; Evil-Lyn's was husky – they managed to step out of the shadows of supporting characters and establish themselves as the bad guys we wanted to lose.

Rather than reinventing the villain, Jared Leto leans into the theatricality that has always made Skeletor memorable. His backstory demands another feature-length film, but the director is the boss and chose not to use it. As for Alison Brie, her character also deserved more screen time because she was that good, and one hopes she gets it in future sequels.

Let's talk about the supporting characters the filmmakers seem to have unloaded onto the screen, straight from the Mattel brochure. Ram Man, Mekaneck, Trap Jaw, Fisto, and several other familiar faces finally make the jump to live action. Orko was missing, which was odd, since modern effects could have easily made him an integral part of the flick. After all, he does make an appearance at the very end in the signature He-Man and the Masters of the Universe ending.

The fight sequences are the saving grace of the film -- from watching He-Man ride the Sky Sled to seeing him dismantle the opponents' spacecraft with his bare hands, everything looks great. If the director had taken a leaf from classic Hollywood flicks, a three-tier fight featuring He-Man and Skeletor, Teela and Evil-Lyn, and Battle Cat and Panthor (who wasn't in the film) would have made the climax more interesting.

The special effects were impressive as well, and for the first time in live action, Castle Grayskull is appropriately imposing, and Eternia itself bursts with colour in ways modern

fantasy blockbusters often avoid. This is where Masters of the Universe comfortably outshone the 1987 live-action film starring Dolph Lundgren, which took place mostly on Earth at night, for some odd reason. By the way, the only former actor to play He-Man in live-action does have an interesting cameo in this version.

The film isn't without its faults. Some are narrative problems, while others are issues only longtime fans will notice. For starters, why doesn't He-Man lower his sword when he says "I have the power"? The transformation is complete only when he lowers the sword and says the magic words, but here he keeps pointing to the heavens, as if no one knows what to do. Also, he is referred to as Adam by everyone, even when he is transformed, and the only time he calls himself He-Man is at the very end, meaning there is no He-Man theme throughout the movie.

If I knew Teela's mother was the Sorceress, why didn't the writers incorporate that into the script? Because they were busy penning cheesy jokes for newer fans instead of connecting with the real fans who have been building a mental checklist for a long time, the film doesn't tick half the boxes on that list.

Then there are the story choices that feel fundamentally off, even though everyone knows Prince Adam is He-Man. Cringer somehow becomes Battle Cat without the classic transformation, and the same goes for He-Man, who reverts to Adam after being hit on the head. King Randor's fate raises more questions than it answers. The revelation that Randor and Skeletor are brothers – yes, they are -- is treated as unimportant by the makers, who conveniently forget about it rather than using it as a twist.

The film's greatest problem, however, is its length. At over two hours, the story begins to repeat itself long before the finale. The action remains competent, but the emotional investment never deepens. The Earth scenes were quite boring; the lack of an origin story was disappointing; and the absence of the He-Man chant in the background was frustrating. Perhaps the director thought that was the best way to describe Masters of the Universe as a whole. It understands what fans want to see, but not always why.

As someone who grew up reciting He-Man's lines before I could speak English properly, I wanted this film to be definitive. Instead, it settles for being intermittently entertaining. Should you watch it? If you're over 40 and want He-Man to remain a viable live-action franchise for years to come, absolutely. Buy a ticket, support Eternia, and enjoy the nostalgia. However, if you have no idea who the most powerful man in the universe is, this film may leave you wondering what all the fuss is about.

The writer is a freelance contributor who writes about film, television, and popular culture

All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

SOCIETY: A KARACHI THAT BELONGS TO NO ONE

What connects impatient car horns at a red light, a gleaming signboard on a grimy building and open sewage beside the beach is a single missing conviction: that the city belongs to the people in it



Dilapidated buildings on a littered road in Karachi's FB Area: across the city, residential and commercial façades stand unwashed and unpainted, sometimes for decades | Photos by the writer



The creek running beneath the Mangrove Biodiversity Park's boardwalk shows visible contamination — dark, sediment-heavy water carrying the combined odour of industrial effluent and raw sewage. The stench reaches you before the view does

Suhaib Ayaz

In Karachi, I stopped at red lights and Karachi found this unreasonable.

The horns would begin within seconds — long, aggrieved blasts from motorcycles and cars that could see the signal as plainly as I could. Around me, vehicles slid past the stop line and settled on to the zebra crossing, then into the intersection itself, packed together with nowhere to go, waiting for a green light they had already declined to honour.

Nobody looked embarrassed. The embarrassment, such as it was, belonged to me: the man obstructing traffic by obeying it.

I had come to the city midway through a 16-day road journey: Lahore to Rahim Yar Khan, on to Hyderabad and Karachi, before heading home along the Indus Highway.

A long drive is a peculiar instrument. It shows you a country at ground level, without the anaesthetic of airports and hotel lobbies. You stop reading the place through headlines and begin reading it through its roads, shopfronts, pavements and walls. Mile after mile, one question kept returning: how people behave in the spaces they hold in common. Nowhere did that question press harder than in Karachi.

The city must first be given its due. Karachi is furiously alive. It works the way a great port city works: goods move, markets churn, restaurants fill, towers rise, and millions of people get up every morning and go out to earn. Its commercial vitality has no rival in Pakistan; its coastline, food, layered architecture and diversity would be the envy of the region. Nothing that follows is written by someone immune to any of this.

But somewhere along the way, Karachi appears to have settled for functioning at the minimum level required for survival, and to have made everything above that level negotiable. The city moves — whether it moves with order is negotiable. Commerce thrives — whether it thrives amid filth is negotiable.

The evidence is cumulative. Broken pavements stay broken for years. Manholes go uncovered until pedestrians learn their positions by heart. Garbage gathers wherever gravity and habit deposit it. Construction material lies across footpaths long after the project it belonged to has stalled, so that rubble and ordinary life coexist without friction.

Whole stretches of the city manage to look under construction and abandoned at the same time — a strange trick, since building implies a future and neglect implies the future has been called off.

The buildings say it most plainly. Across the city, residential and commercial façades stand unwashed and unpainted, sometimes for decades: peeling paint, stained concrete, balconies furred with grime, wiring strung across frontages like an improvised nervous system.

This is hardly confined to the poorest neighbourhoods, where the explanation would at least be obvious. I passed businesses that had spent handsomely on illuminated signboards bolted on to buildings nobody had cleaned in years — money for the advertisement, none for the thing advertised. Even corporate towers, where resources plainly exist, have glass that clearly has not been washed in months and frontages that have not even been swept.

It is tempting to file all of this under poverty, and dishonest to do so. Poverty prevents people from doing what they might otherwise do. But not all neglect can be explained by poverty. A man who cannot afford paint is poor; a prosperous trader operating out of a soiled building beneath a gleaming signboard reflects a different type of failure: a condition that becomes so normal that it no longer demands attention.

The state's failure is real, and I do not discount it. Karachi has been governed badly, and often barely, for decades; its municipal systems were outrun long ago by its own growth, and its people have every right to their grievance.

But institutional failure, endured long enough, stops being a circumstance and becomes a teacher. People adapt to it; the adaptation hardens into habit, the habit into culture and, in time, the culture reproduces the failure faster than any government could. A red light that requires a policeman beside it to mean anything has already ceased to be a red light. It is a suggestion with electricity.

Sea View supplied the image I have not been able to shake. On one of the city's best-loved waterfronts, an open channel of sewage ran across the sand towards the sea — dark, foul-smelling, in plain sight of families out for the evening and a McDonald's doing brisk trade a few yards away.

Nothing about the scene was hidden and nothing about it was treated as scandalous. Children played on one side of the discharge; the Arabian Sea received it on the other. Karachi has reached a point where both facts can coexist indefinitely, with no one in particular answerable for the arrangement.

A few days later, at a mangrove biodiversity park, I found the same arrangement in more decorated form. The mangroves

were dense and improbably green, and the wooden boardwalk winding through them was handsome. The water beneath was another matter: grey-black and oily, carrying what appeared to be sewage and industrial waste into the roots of the very ecosystem the park exists to celebrate.

We had raised a monument to biodiversity over the slow poisoning of it. The trees, for now, survive. The water asks how long a city can keep congratulating itself on things it is simultaneously destroying.

The easy verdict — dirty city, failed city — is also the lazy one, and it misses what makes Karachi's condition genuinely painful. A building does not need to become a museum to possess dignity; often it needs only to be cleaned and painted. A shopfront needs no streetscape scheme, only an owner willing to sweep the few metres outside his own door. Watching so much of this go uncared for is harder to bear than outright ruin would be, because ruin at least has the decency to be finished.

What connects the horns at the red light, the signboard on the filthy building and the gutter beside the beach is a single missing conviction: that the city belongs to the people in it.

Belonging is the hinge on which everything else turns. A man who feels some responsibility for the street outside his shop is more likely to sweep it without being ordered to. A man who believes that the street belongs to the government, or to no one, may step over its garbage for years without feeling responsible for it.

And when a society lives with disorder long enough, the eye retires from it. The missing manhole becomes normal, as does the blackened façade. The same is true of the sewage reaching the beach. Chaos, at least, announces itself as an event; Karachi has drifted past it into something quieter — chaos as climate, permanent, ambient and attributable to no one.

I do not believe the remedy begins with another grand project. Karachi has seen master plans before and will see more; the sewage has outlived most of them.

Cities are made of millions of small behaviours repeated every day, and they are unmade the same way. The rebuilding of this one, if it comes, will start smaller than any plan: a shopkeeper sweeping his own frontage, a driver holding behind the stop line with no policeman in sight, a resident looking up at the building he lives in and deciding it deserves paint — anyone looking at the city around them and thinking: this belongs to me too.

Between talent and glory

Continued From Page 19

grant and has, at times, had to find sponsors for individual championships. For a sport trying to build players over several years, that makes long-term planning more difficult.

There have been attempts to widen the system beyond Pakistan. An elite Pakistan netball academy operates in the UK, where players within the Pakistani diaspora can

train and potentially enter the national setup. The federation has also brought international coaching experience into the programme. But for the larger pool of girls developing inside Pakistan, regular access to competition and training remains crucial.

For Karima, what is needed over the next few years is not particularly complicated to identify. She lists three priorities: regular international exposure, high-performance coaching with sports-science support, and a clear development

pathway in which players know what comes next and how their progress is being measured.

"Players have to become complete athletes," she says.

That is where Pakistan's recent junior results become both encouraging and difficult to judge. Winning at youth level shows that there are players capable of competing. It does not, however, guarantee what those players will look like three or five years from now.

The pathway exists. The harder task is giving players enough along the way

to make sure that reaching the senior team is not the end of their development.

The next step

For Haya, there is little uncertainty about where she wants netball to take her. "I see myself representing Pakistan for as long as I am able to play at the level required," she says.

She has already made much of that journey. The 14-year-old who first tried netball at school has gone on to play internationally at junior level and is now beginning to find a place in the senior setup. For her, the next few years will be

about staying there and becoming good enough to compete at a level where talent alone will no longer separate one player from another.

Pakistan's recent junior results have shown what can be produced at the beginning of that pathway. What they cannot tell us yet is how many of these players will still be around when this generation is expected to carry the senior national team.

For Haya, the ambition is already there. The more important question is whether the opportunities around her will last as long as it does.

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ARK Initiative Symposium Explores Prophetic Lessons on Pluralism, Compassion and Civic Life

Scholars, civic leaders and faith representatives gathered in Sugar Land for an ARK Initiative symposium examining the Prophet Muhammad’s legacy of compassion, human dignity, coexistence and responsible leadership in diverse communities.



More than a million Texans are on voter suspense lists, face Oct. 5 deadline to update addresses

Voters on suspense lists who don't meet the Oct. 5 deadline may still vote in the midterm elections, but they will have to fill out additional paperwork on Election Day to confirm their new addresses.

Roughly 1.2 million Texans — including roughly 300,000 residents of Harris County — have been placed on voter suspense lists, following failed efforts by their respective counties to verify their current addresses by mail. They now face an October 5, 2026, deadline to confirm their addresses ahead of the midterm elections.

"It's a great idea for all voters to check their voter registration information and ideally do it before the October 5 registration deadline. You can do that by going to votetexas.gov and using the My Voter Portal," said Alicia Pierce, spokesperson for the Office of the Texas Secretary of State. "From there, you can also find a link to update your registration address online."

Texas does not have online registration for brand new voter registration, but the site does allow people to update their addresses if they have moved.

"If you have any trouble with that, you can also contact your county registrar directly," Pierce said.

Voters who do not confirm their registrations with their correct addresses before the October 5 deadline will have to fill out additional paperwork on Election Day to cast their ballots.

"If for some reason you can't update before the voter registration deadline of October 5 for...this upcoming November election, you can still show up at the polls and, when you check in to vote, and the poll worker pulls up your record, they're going to see that you're in suspense, and they're going to ask you to complete a statement of residency to



Early voters line up on the last day of early voting at the Southpark Meadows Mega-Center in South Austin on Nov. 4, 2022.

confirm your address is correct," said Annette Ramirez, Harris County tax assessor-collector and voter registrar.

Ramirez said there are three reasons people typically wind up on a voter suspense list. One is that when the registrar mailed out voter registration cards earlier this year, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) returned a voter's card as non-deliverable and unable to forward. A second is that the county district clerk sends the voter registrar a list of all jury summonses that have similarly come back as non-deliverable. A third is that the county has received a change of address notice for a resident from

the USPS.

"When we do a mass mail out of 2.7 million voter registration cards, we anticipate receiving over 100,000 of those back," Ramirez said. "So, this isn't unusual. This is what we normally see on this cadence at this time."

Alicia Pierce said that voter suspense lists are nothing new.

"The voter suspense list is actually a tool to protect voters," she said. "It was created in response to the 1995 Voter Registration Act and it's a way to make sure that voters are still able to cast their ballot and [that] we maintain

a clean updated voter registration roll."

While winding up on a county's voter suspense list doesn't immediately suspend or cancel a person's voter registration, it can have consequences if people wait too long to update their information.

"If voters don't take action to correct an erroneous addition of the voter to the suspense list, then the voter will be purged in two years," said David Froomkin, an assistant professor of law at the University of Houston Law Center. "The state imposes that legal obligation on the county registrar."

In response, the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector's Office noted that a voter is only removed from a county's voter rolls after not voting through two federal election cycles — or four years. Alicia Pierce also noted that anyone mistakenly removed from the rolls following two election cycles can be immediately reinstated and still vote.

Regardless, Froomkin said there are reasons to be concerned the voter suspense lists, and resulting voter purges, could be discriminatory.

"These kinds of programs that states have habitually adopted can be troubling in themselves," he said. "There's a political science literature suggesting that these programs for purging the voter rolls operate with high degrees of error and with a disparate impact that affects Hispanic voters more than other voters."

Note: This story has been updated to include responses from the Office of the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector and the Office of the Texas Secretary of State.

Thousands of Texas families are waiting for help paying for childcare — and the list is growing

Data shows the number of Texas children on a waiting list for childcare payment assistance has spiked in recent years, and advocates worry the pressure on the system isn't letting up.

The number of Texas families waiting for financial assistance to help pay for childcare has grown drastically in recent years.

Data collected by The Associated Press shows 31,728 Texas children were on the state's childcare assistance list in 2020. By 2023, that number had more than doubled to 66,410.

Data shared with KERA by the National Women's Law Center showed that by August 2025 the waitlist had grown to 194,892 Texas children.

All of the data comes from the Texas Workforce Commission, the state agency that oversees the federal dollars that subsidize childcare for eligible families.

Tori Mannes is president and CEO of ChildCareGroup, which manages the federal childcare assistance program in Dallas County.

She said the growing list reflects a real affordability problem.

"Families that may be making quite a middle-class income are increasingly needing support for childcare because the cost of care has gone up so dramatically," Mannes said.

She said what is commonly called a waitlist is more accurately an "interest list." Families can sign up for assistance before the state determines whether they actually qualify.

Once funding becomes available, families must submit information about their income, employment and other eligibility requirements. But, by the time they are contacted, Mannes said, some may no longer need care or may ultimately earn too much to qualify.

This year a family of four can earn up to about \$92,000 a year and still fall within the program's income limit. But meeting the requirements doesn't mean help is immediately available.



"I would say potentially several months," Mannes said of how long families can wait for an application to be processed. "In some cases, maybe up to a year."

The wait can be shorter for families who fall into state-designated priority groups, including children experiencing homelessness, children in foster care and the children of childcare workers.

But, Mannes said lack of funding is still the main reason that the waiting list is long.

During the pandemic, billions of dollars in temporary federal relief helped states expand childcare assistance. Much of that money has now expired, while the cost of providing care has continued to climb.

Texas lawmakers tried to ease the pressure last year by directing \$100 million in unused federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF, funds to childcare scholarships.

The Texas Workforce Commission initially estimated the money could help serve about 10,000 additional children over

two years.

But it hasn't worked out that way, Mannes said.

Most of the \$100 million "was taken up with inflationary costs," she said.

But Mannes said there's a positive reason the cost of subsidized care is increasing. More Texas childcare providers are participating in Texas Rising Star, the state's quality rating program. Higher-rated providers receive higher reimbursement rates.

"Part of the increased cost of care is because we have more providers delivering higher quality care," Mannes said. "And that is a very good thing for Texas. It's just that we need more money in the fund to cover more children and more quality programs."

Dominique McCain, CEO of the Dallas nonprofit Educational First Steps, said providers are also paying more for basics such as food, utilities and staffing.

"It is not that the state of Texas is saying, 'We want to serve fewer children,'" McCain said. "They are forced to serve fewer children, because the cost of things have gone up so extremely."

The Texas Workforce Commission sets targets for how many children can be served based on available funding and the cost of care. As childcare costs rise, McCain said, those dollars don't stretch as far. In Dallas County, the number of children expected to receive childcare assistance is projected to fall by more than 1,000 by next year.

McCain worries the demand for childcare assistance could grow further if a proposed overhaul results in fewer children being served through the federal Head Start program.

"There's a connection between this and the Head Start potential cuts," McCain said. "Those families now have to get on the subsidized list. The wait list grows even more."

NPR spent 2 years tracking deaths from heat. We found a staggering hidden toll

An NPR investigation found that people in the U.S. are dying from heat much more often than official counts show. We explore the reasons why — and how lives can be saved.

Thousands of Americans die every year from a chronically underreported cause: heat.

As summer heat intensifies because of human-driven climate change, the United States' official tally of heat-related deaths does not come close to capturing the full human toll. The data feeding into nationwide death counts is collected inconsistently and rarely thoroughly.

The result is a vast undercount of the number of people who die because of heat. And experts say failing to recognize and address this may cost more people their lives.

So NPR set out to create a more comprehensive national count.

We partnered with Boston University to find the total number of deaths influenced by heat every year in the United States. The investigation took two years and involved building a statistical model that assessed nearly every county in the country. The full analysis will soon be published in a scientific journal.

An accurate assessment of the true scope — as well as understanding who is affected, where and why — is critical for developing lifesaving solutions, says Quinn Adams, a research scientist at Boston University's Center for Climate and Health and the lead partner in the joint NPR-BU investigation.

Beyond the statistical assessment, NPR set out to find people whose deaths slipped through the cracks — those who might not have died if heat hadn't pushed them beyond their breaking point — to understand exactly how heat could be missed as a factor. We will be bringing you their stories in the coming days.

But first, here are three key takeaways from our research — and why it matters.

How big is the undercount?

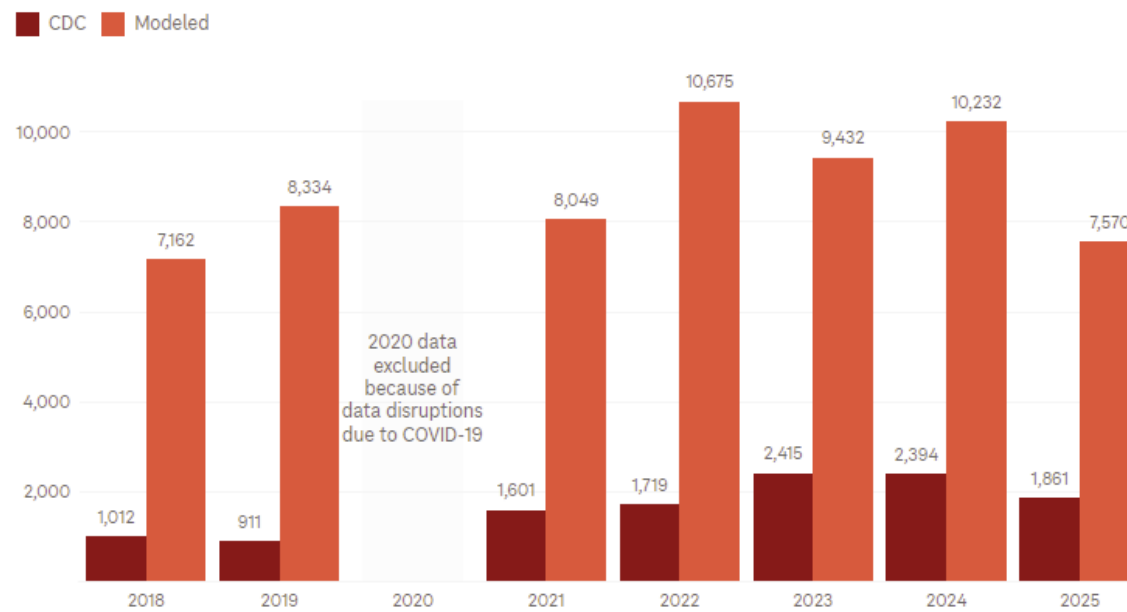
The scale of the undercount is significant.

The primary keeper of cause-of-death records in the U.S. is the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). It keeps an annual tally of heat-related deaths in the U.S., which is compiled from state reports based on whether heat is noted on individual death records.

From 2004 to 2018, the national number of heat-related deaths compiled by the CDC was low: on average, around 700 a year. The number has crept up in recent years, averaging around 1,700 but sometimes topping 2,000, as heat risks grow and counting strategies evolve.

But even that number is an underestimate, according to NPR and BU's analysis. On average between 2018 and 2025, we estimate that some 9,000 deaths each year in the country are impacted by heat — a factor of five higher than the official average over that same period.

Some years, heat-related deaths can top 10,000.

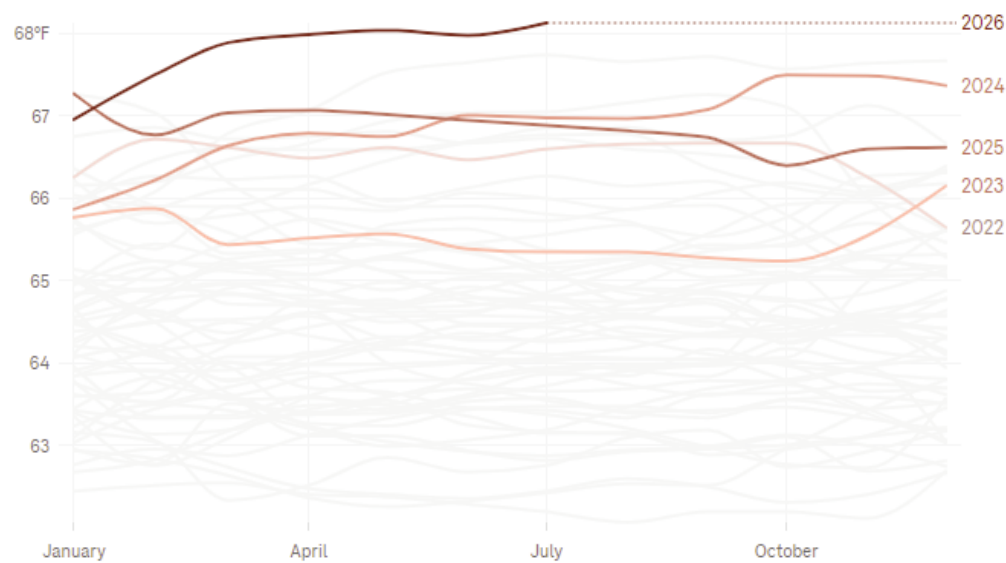


Notes

Modeled estimates are scaled to the contiguous-U.S. population; year 2020 data excluded.

Source: CDC's WONDER database; ERA5-Land weather database

Credit: Analysis by Boston University's Center for Climate and Health and Alejandra Borunda/NPR. Graphic by Brent Jones/NPR



Notes

Average daily high temperature over the previous 12 months, contiguous U.S.

Source: National Centers for Environmental Information

Credit: Analysis by Boston University's Center for Climate and Health and Alejandra Borunda/NPR. Graphic by Brent Jones/NPR

The true figure could be even higher, says Adams, because of some limitations in the data and the conservative nature of our analysis.

The dangers from heat are growing every year because of human-caused climate change. The heat wave season has extended by a month and a half since the 1960s. In 50 of the country's biggest cities, the number of heat waves has doubled since the 1980s. Heat domes that settle over the country regularly expose tens of millions of Americans — sometimes well over 100 million at a time — to dangerous heat.

"The frequency and the duration of these heat events has been expanding very rapidly," says Adams. "That's what we can expect moving forward into the next few decades: having more heat waves, and having them last longer, and having them be more intense such that people don't get the escape from the heat that they need to physiologically reset."

The reasons for the undercount are complex. But a crucial issue, says doctor and researcher Sameed Khatana of the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, is that

heat's role in a death is often masked by other more obvious causes of death, like a heart attack.

"Heat is what people often call the silent killer, compared to things like hurricanes and typhoons," says Khatana.

Heat, he says, can often be the trigger that pushes someone's health condition — like cardiovascular disease — from manageable to fatal. "The heart starts beating faster and harder," he explains, to shunt blood to the skin to cool the body. And eventually, if someone's heart is already weak, it may not be able "to keep up with the demand that was required of it," he says. That can lead to something like a heart attack.

But often, Khatana says, because heat leaves no obvious mark behind for doctors or coroners to examine, the cause of death gets marked down only as a heart attack. Heat isn't noted on the death certificate, and therefore it is not included in the tallies reported to the municipality, the state and eventually the federal recordkeepers.

Such omissions are understandable, Khatana says. But repeated thousands of times, in all parts of the coun-

try, they create a blind spot that obscures the scale of heat's danger.

National risks — even in unexpected places

The NPR and BU investigation found that heat is killing people in nearly every corner of the country.

Our analysis finds that Florida and Texas have the most heat-related deaths overall. That is in part due to their large populations. But those states remain among the most impacted even when adjusted for their size.

But the losses are not limited to states historically considered hot.

Our model finds that more than 100 people die from heat-related causes in Michigan every year, 10 times the official reported numbers. In Massachusetts, official records say only about 5 people die from heat each year, but our estimate suggests that number could be more than 60.

And in Florida, the difference is even more dramatic: We estimate more than 1,900 deaths each year, about 40 times as many as reported.

Heat can be particularly dangerous for people who are not already used to it. And in many parts of the country that were not historically hot,

infrastructure to keep cool is less common. Nearly all homes in Alabama have some form of air conditioning, for example. But in Washington state, only 53% of homes do. In Maine, 70% do. Yet the risks of heat exist, and are growing, in those states as well as those where it is a more entrenched problem.

Counts are getting more accurate — but not everywhere

The official national counts from the CDC have trended upward in recent years, rising from an average of roughly 700 between 2004 and 2018 to about 1,700 between 2018 and 2025.

That increase is due in large part to two things: Heat is simply getting worse, according to the most recent National Climate Assessment, and also there is better counting of heat-related deaths in some parts of the country.

Arizona's Maricopa County — home to Phoenix — has developed sophisticated protocols for sussing out the subtle influences of heat on people's deaths. Maricopa County trains "death investigators" to look for signs of heat stress, such as asking about the state of the deceased's air conditioning system, their ability to pay electric bills to run ACs, their use of medications that increase heat sensitivity, and more.

But Maricopa County is something of an outlier. In contrast, the counties home to Los Angeles and Houston report very few heat-related deaths. Yet our model finds hundreds of people likely die in each of those counties because of heat each year.

Los Angeles recognizes the problem, says Nichole Quick, the chief science officer at the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. The county's official numbers "are vast undercounts," Quick says. "The true impact of this is higher than I think a lot of the numbers show."

But solving the counting problem isn't simple. It took Maricopa County years to fine-tune its strategies for more accurately assessing heat's impact on deaths. And many doctors who certify deaths in emergency rooms and hospitals, or for patients who die at home, don't have protocols for confidently identifying heat impacts, says Khatana.

Until such issues are addressed, says Adams, the undercount will remain, and heat's true toll will remain obscured — making it harder for policymakers, planners and families to understand the urgency to protect themselves.

"Most people do not see themselves as vulnerable to heat. They're like, 'Oh, that's someone else. It's not me,'" says Adams. But the data is clear: Heat can take anyone, anywhere in the country. "But then, you know, push comes to shove and it actually is you."

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The silence that kills

As child sexual abuse continues to devastate lives, parents and advocates say body safety education is a necessity

By Wisal Yousafzai

"Sometimes, far away in the night, a wolf howled. Then he came nearer and howled again. It was a scary sound. Laura knew that wolves would eat little girls." — From *Little House in the Big Woods*.

In her classical children's book, Laura Ingalls Wilder used these words to describe the monstrous inclination among wild carnivores to attack defenceless little girls in the anarchic forests of the 1870s in pre-modern America.

More than a century later, the landscape has changed, but the fear has not. To our utter dismay, little girls in modern, heavily policed Pakistan still face predators—only now, they are not wolves in the wilderness, but members of their own species, hiding in the shadows of supposedly civilized society.

Once again, the nation confronts the devastating consequences of failing to teach boys the most basic lesson of humanity. The alleged rape and murder of an 18-month-old baby girl, Aizel, by a close relative in Karachi's Qayyumabad area has shattered public conscience and highlighted a painful reality: for many girls, the greatest danger comes from the very spaces and people they are taught to trust.

Yet there is another disturbing reality that accompanies these tragedies: the alarming ease with which we as a society have become desensitised to such unthinkable horrors. Reports of children being abducted, sexually assaulted and murdered appear with such alarming frequency that each new case risks becoming another headline, another social-media outrage and, eventually, another forgotten story.

What should horrify society into action has instead become part of the daily news cycle. The repetition itself is a warning—not only about the scale of the problem, but about our growing inability to sustain outrage long enough to demand meaningful change.

The Aizel case came months after the appalling case of seven-year-old Muntaha Zahra—but just days before the abduction, sexual assault and murder of five-year-old Ayat Noor miles away in Haripur. These devastating events have reignited a difficult question: how can children be protected before abuse turns into another tragedy?

Every afternoon, after returning from preschool, four-year-old Ayesha Khan settles beside her mother on the living room floor. Instead of beginning with the alphabet or counting numbers, her lesson starts with a different conversation—one her mother never imagined she would have with a child so young.

"Your body belongs to you," Shagufta Bibi gently tells her daughter. "If anyone tries to touch you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, you should say no, move away and tell Mama immediately." The conversation lasts only a few minutes, but for the 35-year-old mother from Peshawar, it has become one of the most important lessons she teaches.

"I pray that my daughter never experiences such a situation," she says quietly. "But if she ever does, I want her to know she has the right to say no and that she should never remain silent." Her fears reflect those of countless parents across Pakistan, where child sexual abuse

remains one of the country's most disturbing yet least discussed crimes. Behind every reported case lies another childhood interrupted, another family devastated and, experts believe, many more incidents that never come to light.

According to the latest half-yearly report by an Islamabad-based watchdog that documents child abuse, 1,914 cases of violence and abuse against children were reported across Pakistan between January and June 2026. On average, around 11 children were reported as victims every day. Sexual abuse remained the most prominent category, with 1,015 cases, followed by 558 cases of child abduction. The report recorded 101 missing children and 35 child-marriage cases.

It also documented 98 cases of child pornography linked to sexual exploitation and 49 incidents involving infants found abandoned. Girls accounted for 58 per cent of reported victims and boys 42 per cent. In child pornography cases, however, boys accounted for 59 per cent of victims compared with 41 per cent girls.

Punjab reported nearly 80 per cent of the total cases, Sindh 15 per cent, while the remaining incidents came from Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Islamabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Faisalabad topped the district list with 337 cases, followed by Multan 185, Lahore 121, Gujranwala 111, Kasur 110, Rahim Yar Khan 97, Rawalpindi 78, Vehari 70, Sialkot 64 and Toba Tek Singh 61.

Data released by the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission (KPCPWC) shows that hundreds of children across the province were affected by a wide range of protection concerns. The commission recorded 402 cases involving 33 different forms of abuse, violence and neglect, including 40 cases of sexual abuse, 40 missing children, 26 children who ran away from home, 17 cases of child labour, 16 incidents of forced begging, 14 cases of corporal punishment, 13 reports of physical torture, seven child murders and two cases involving child pornography.

Breaking the silence

For generations, silence has surrounded conversations about children's safety. Parents avoided difficult questions, families feared social judgement and many children grew up without the words to describe when something felt wrong. In a country where abuse cases continue to emerge, silence can itself become dangerous.

Shagufta once believed discussions about personal safety and private body parts were meant for older children. That belief changed after a steady stream of heartbreaking reports describing young children who had been sexually abused, assaulted or murdered.

"I used to think children were too young to understand these things," she says. "But every time I saw another story on television about a five- or six-year-old child being abused, I realised predators do not wait for children to grow up. They target innocence."

Like thousands of parents across Pakistan, Shagufta has reached a difficult conclusion: teaching children about body safety is no longer optional. It is becoming as essential as teaching them how to cross a busy road, avoid strangers or call

for help in an emergency.

One major misconception is the confusion between "sex education" and "body safety education". While the former can trigger cultural resistance, the latter focuses on giving children the knowledge and confidence to recognise unsafe situations and seek help.

Body safety education teaches children that their bodies belong to them, explains private body parts and personal boundaries, and encourages them to identify trusted adults. Experts say these basic lessons can help children recognise inappropriate behaviour and speak up.

Yet such conversations remain difficult in many Pakistani households. Parents may fear they conflict with cultural or religious values, while others simply do not know where to begin because they were never taught these concepts themselves.

Child rights activist Imran Takkar believes this lack of awareness continues to expose children to unnecessary risks.

"Most reported victims are between five and 10 years of age," he says. "Children at this age often cannot understand abusive behaviour or explain what has happened to them. This makes them particularly vulnerable."

Takkar says Pakistan has made encouraging progress over the past decade.

"There was a time when families preferred to hide such incidents because of social stigma. Today more parents are speaking out, more cases are being reported and awareness has increased. While the rising number of reported cases is alarming, it also shows that more survivors and families are finding the courage to seek justice."

However, he warns that society must move beyond reacting after a tragedy.

"Our focus must shift from responding to abuse to preventing it. That means educating children before they become victims, supporting parents and training teachers to recognise warning signs."

Takkar says Pakistan has child protection laws in every province, but implementation remains inconsistent. He calls for coordinated action involving government departments, schools, police, healthcare professionals, religious scholars, media and local communities, while awareness campaigns should respect cultural and religious values.

Religious scholar Mufti Adnan Khan believed protecting children's dignity, privacy and safety is entirely consistent with Islamic teachings. Teaching children to protect themselves from harm, he says, should not be confused with promoting inappropriate behaviour; safeguarding children is a moral and religious obligation.

When protection falls short

Pakistan has introduced child protection laws and institutions, yet experts say the gap between legislation and implementation continues to leave vulnerable children without adequate protection.

Education specialist Dr Basharat Hussain, Chairman of the Department of Criminology at the University of Peshawar, says schools must play a greater role.

"Our curriculum teaches mathematics, science and languages, but it does not adequately teach children how to protect

themselves," he says. "Body safety education should become part of age-appropriate learning in schools."

He says such lessons can respect Pakistan's social, cultural and religious sensitivities.

"People often assume that body safety education means discussing explicit sexual matters. That is simply not true. Young children only need to understand that some parts of their bodies are private, that nobody has the right to violate their personal boundaries and that they should immediately tell a trusted adult if something makes them uncomfortable."

Dr Hussain also believes parents need practical guidance.

"Children should be encouraged to communicate openly instead of being taught blind obedience. When a child believes adults must always be obeyed, they may remain silent even after abuse."

Advocate Mehwish Mohib Kakakhel believes Pakistan's greatest weakness lies not in legislation but enforcement.

"The real challenge is not the absence of legislation but the poor enforcement of existing laws," she says. "In many cases, influential individuals exploit weaknesses in the system, while poor investigations prevent victims from obtaining justice."

For many families, seeking justice is lengthy, expensive and emotionally exhausting. Low-income families may struggle to afford lawyers and repeated court appearances, while community pressure can force them to withdraw FIRs or accept settlements.

"In several cases, victims' families are pressured into withdrawing cases because they simply cannot continue the legal fight," Kakakhel explains. "Unless investigations are professional, transparent and free from outside influence, many offenders will continue to escape accountability."

She calls for stronger police investigations, better prosecution and speedy trials.

Ijaz Khan, Additional Director of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission, says many children fail to recognise abuse because they have never been taught their basic rights or personal boundaries.

The commission has established child protection centres in Peshawar, Mardan, Charsadda, Swabi, Abbottabad, Kohat, Bannu, Buner, Swat, Upper Dir and Chitral, with additional centres planned in Nowshera, Malakand, Shangla, Mansehra and Dera Ismail Khan.

The centres provide temporary shelter, legal assistance, counselling, psychological support and referrals. However, specialists say the network remains insufficient for a province with millions of children, particularly in remote areas where trained psychologists, social workers and child protection officers remain scarce.

Beyond the crime

Sexual abuse can leave lasting psychological scars. Children may develop anxiety, depression, fear, shame, guilt, low self-esteem, sleep problems and difficulty trusting others. Some may also experience behavioural or academic changes.

Dr Hazik Ali, consultant psychiatrist at Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar, told The Express Tribune that age-appropriate sex education helps children understand

body boundaries, private body parts, safe and unsafe behaviour, consent and how to seek help.

"Children should know they have the right to say 'No', move away and tell a trusted adult. Such education can also reduce vulnerability to grooming by helping children identify secrecy, manipulation, inappropriate requests and boundary violations," noted Dr Ali.

However, Dr Ali stressed that preventing abuse remains the responsibility of adults and education alone cannot guarantee a child's safety.

He recommends that parents and teachers discuss these issues calmly and in age-appropriate language. Children should understand the difference between safe, appropriate contact and behaviour that violates boundaries, and be reassured that they are never to blame for abuse or punished for speaking up.

Shah Nawaz Khan, a lecturer at Islamia College Peshawar, says teachers are often among the first adults outside the family to notice changes in a child's behaviour.

"Unexplained fear, declining academic performance, aggression, withdrawal or reluctance to attend school can all signal that something is wrong."

Yet teachers receive little training on recognising warning signs or responding when a child discloses abuse.

"Every school should establish child protection policies, train teachers regularly and create confidential reporting mechanisms where children feel safe seeking help."

He says schools can incorporate age-appropriate lessons about personal boundaries, trusted adults, unsafe situations and emergency reporting into existing life-skills education.

An official of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Education Department, speaking on condition of anonymity, says the department has incorporated age-appropriate lessons on good touch and bad touch into the school curriculum and trained teachers to deliver them.

"Our primary objective is to ensure that children are aware of personal safety from an early age and are able to recognise inappropriate behaviour," the official says. "By educating students about good touch and bad touch, we aim to protect them from abuse and help them develop the confidence to report any uncomfortable or unsafe situations."

The official says progress has been made but more comprehensive child-protection and personal-safety lessons, teacher training and public awareness are needed.

While Pakistan has strengthened child protection laws and awareness has improved, experts agree that legislation alone cannot keep children safe.

Until families feel empowered to have open conversations, schools make body safety education routine, institutions enforce existing laws and survivors receive timely psychological and legal support, child sexual abuse will continue to expose the gap between protection on paper and protection in practice.

Safeguarding children begins not after abuse occurs, but by giving every child the knowledge, confidence and trusted support needed to speak before silence becomes tragedy.

Houston Celebrates 190th Anniversary, Honoring Diversity and a City Shaped by Its People

Continued from page 17

transformation of Houston from a small settlement into one of the nation's largest and most diverse metropolitan areas.

During the celebration, Whitmire emphasized the role diversity has played in shaping Houston's identity. The city has grown into an international center for energy, medicine, technology, culture and the arts, attracting residents from across the United States and around the world.

Houston's development has also been closely connected to the contributions of its immigrant and ethnic communities. Over the decades, communities from across Asia, Africa, Latin America and other parts of the world have established roots in the city and contributed to its economic, professional and cultural life.

The Pakistani American community is among the many immigrant communities that have become an established part of Houston's diverse population. Pakistani Americans contribute to the city in fields including medicine, business, technology, education, retail, professional services and community organizations.

The anniversary celebration also focused attention on the younger generation of Houstonians, whose education, ideas, talents and civic participation will influence the city's future.

Participants reflected on Houston's history while also looking ahead to the challenges and opportunities facing the city. The anniversary provided an occasion to recognize the people and communities that have contributed to Houston's development over nearly two centuries.

From its early foundations to its present role as a major global city, Houston's 190-year history reflects a continuing process of growth and change. The anniversary celebration underscored a central theme of that history: Houston has been shaped not only by its institutions and industries, but also by the diverse communities and generations that call the city home.

As Houston enters its next chapter, the city's anniversary offered an opportunity to celebrate its past while looking toward a future increasingly defined by its diversity, growth and younger generation.

PAGH Women's Milad Gathering Marks Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ in Houston

Continued from page 17

occasion, with arrangements coordinated by Naheed Ahmed, Falak Zahra and members of their organizing team. The team worked on the event preparations and coordination, while women community leaders and attendees participated in the program.

The gathering also brought together a number of Houston women community leaders, with photographs taken throughout the event capturing participants and different moments

from the Milad.

The women's Milad was part of PAGH's community activities and provided an opportunity for members of the Pakistani-American community to observe Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ together in Houston.

Trump plan may end H-4 spouse work permits

Continued from page 17

H-4 dependent spouses."

The potential change has drawn attention because many H-4 spouses have built careers and contributed to household incomes while their partners work in the United States on H-1B visas. The proposal, however, has not taken effect. Existing H-4 employment authorization remains valid under current rules, subject to the terms and expiration dates of individual EADs.

What the proposal could change

H-4 status is generally available to spouses and unmarried children under 21 of H-1B visa holders. Under current rules, certain H-4 spouses can obtain work authorization if their H-1B spouses meet specific requirements. This includes having an approved Form I-140 immigrant petition or qualifying for an H-1B extension beyond the normal six-year limit under the employment-based green card process.

If the administration moves forward with the proposed rule, qualifying H-4 spouses could lose their ability to obtain or maintain employment authorization under the existing H-4 EAD program.

The change would potentially affect spouses working across industries, including technology, healthcare, education, finance and other professional fields.

For families dependent on two incomes, the loss of a spouse's work authorization could have a direct effect on household finances.

Potential impact on H-1B families

The H-4 EAD program has been particularly significant for families who spend years waiting for employment-based green cards.

H-1B workers and their families can face lengthy immigration processing times, particularly when employment-based green card categories are backlogged. The ability of an H-4 spouse to work has allowed some families to maintain dual incomes during those periods.

Ending the program could therefore create financial pressure for households that have come to rely on the second income. Supporters of ending H-4 work authorization argue that removing the program could make additional jobs available to U.S. workers.

A figure of roughly 600,000 jobs has been cited by proponents of the proposed change, with claims that the positions could become available within weeks. But that number represents an estimate and should not be treated as a confirmed number of jobs that would immediately open if the policy changes.

The ultimate economic and employment effects would depend on the details of any final rule and how employers and workers respond.

No immediate cancellation

For H-4 spouses currently working with valid EADs, the proposed policy does not mean their work authorization has been immediately canceled.

A regulatory proposal must go through the federal rulemaking process before it can become a final rule. Depending on the process, a proposal can be published for public comment before the administration considers whether to issue a final regulation.

That means H-4 spouses with current employment authorization should continue to follow existing rules unless and until a final policy changes them.

The potential rollback comes amid broader efforts by the Trump administration to tighten immigration rules and increase scrutiny of employment-based immigration. The H-1B program itself has been the subject of renewed debate over the use of foreign workers and the protection of U.S. jobs.

For H-1B families, however, the H-4 EAD issue extends beyond the employment of individual spouses. It also raises questions about family financial stability, career continuity and the ability of highly skilled immigrant workers to remain in the United States while navigating the long-term immigration system.

For now, the H-4 EAD program remains in place. Any change would depend on the administration completing the regulatory process and issuing a final rule.

HHRD Leadership Meets Houston Humanitarian Partners to Review Longstanding Relief and Rehabilitation Collaboration

Continued from page 17

collaborating organizations, including Mr. Sajid Nasri, Dr. Mansoor Zaidi, Mr. Mahmood Ahmed, and other community partners. Discussions reviewed more than 15 years of collaboration with HHRD, with particular focus on the extensive Pakistan flood relief and rehabilitation campaigns of 2022 and 2025, during which substantial humanitarian assistance, medical supplies, equipment, and relief containers were delivered to affected communities.

During the meeting, Mr. Ilyas Chaudhry provided an update on the 2025 flood rehabilitation efforts, including relief containers coordinated during President Sheikh's recent visit to Pakistan. He also highlighted the development of a 25-home community in Punjab for flood-affected families, scheduled to be inaugurated and formally handed over to deserving beneficiaries by HHRD leadership in October.

The meeting concluded with a special presentation recognizing HHRD's humanitarian service and its landmark neurological rehabilitation initiative in Karachi. On behalf of Honorable Houston Mayor John Whitmire, Muhammad Saeed Sheikh, joined by collaborating community leaders, presented the City of

Houston's ceremonial recognition to Mr. Javed Siddiqui in appreciation of HHRD's continuing service to vulnerable communities and its longstanding partnership with Houston-based humanitarian organizations.

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to continuing this collaboration and expanding future humanitarian, healthcare, disaster-relief, and community development initiatives in Pakistan and beyond.

Houston Symposium Examines Prophetic Lessons on Pluralism, Compassion and Civic Life

Continued from page 17

Muhammad ﷺ. The gathering brought together civic leaders, clergy, academics and representatives of Houston's interfaith organizations for an evening examining the Prophet's life and legacy through the themes of leadership, compassion, human dignity and coexistence.

Two scholars approached the subject from complementary perspectives.

Professor Hassan Abbas, Distinguished Professor of International Relations at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies in Washington, examined the Constitution of Madinah and its relevance to contemporary plural societies.

Dr. Payam Mohseni, director of the Project on Shi'ism and Global Affairs at Harvard Divinity School, explored compassion as a defining feature of the Prophet Muhammad's leadership and its implications for civic life today.

Abbas focused on the society that emerged in Madinah after the Prophet's migration from Mecca.

Rather than treating Madinah simply as an episode in Islamic history, he examined it as an effort to build a common civic order among communities with different religious, tribal and social identities.

The questions remain strikingly current. Can people retain strong religious identities while participating in a shared civic framework? What responsibilities do communities have toward one another?

Abbas emphasized trust, consultation, collective responsibility, conflict resolution and the rights and obligations of different religious communities.

The larger point was not that difference disappears in a plural society. It does not.

The challenge is learning to live with difference without turning neighbors into adversaries.

That has particular resonance in Houston, one of the country's most religiously and culturally diverse metropolitan areas.

We use words such as diversity and inclusion with admirable frequency. The vocabulary is doing rather well. The practice is more demanding.

Mohseni's presentation shifted the discussion from the architecture of society to the character of the individual.

His subject was compassion, but the discussion moved well beyond compassion as sentiment or simple

kindness.

Prophetic compassion, Mohseni argued, carries particular meaning when exercised under pressure: toward the vulnerable, toward people outside one's own community and, most significantly, when one has the power to retaliate but chooses restraint.

The symposium explored compassion not only as a religious virtue but as a civic ethic.

How do people speak when they disagree? How should leaders exercise authority? Can justice coexist with mercy? And what happens when opponents are no longer seen simply as people with different views, but as people undeserving of dignity?

Those questions have acquired new urgency in an age of political polarization and rapid public reaction.

Together, the two presentations offered a clear connection.

The Madinah model concerned the structures that allow diverse communities to live together. Compassion concerned the moral temperament required to make those structures work.

Laws can define rights and constitutions can establish obligations. Neither can manufacture empathy.

The evening also broadened into a discussion of interfaith relations in America and the wider challenge of building trust across religious and cultural differences. Speakers stressed that dialogue does not require agreement, nor does respect demand the surrender of religious conviction. The greater challenge is learning to disagree without dehumanizing one another.

The audience reflected that emphasis on pluralism. Houston-area Muslim leaders were joined by representatives of other faith traditions, interfaith organizations, academics and civic leaders, making the event a broader conversation about shared public life as well as a commemoration of the Prophet's birth.

The occasion also received civic recognition, including a proclamation from State Rep. Suleman Lalani, M.D., and a Certificate of Recognition from Harris County Precinct 4 Commissioner Lesley Briones.

The evening concluded on a cultural and devotional note with a multilingual celebration marking the Mawlid, the birth of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Renditions in Farsi, Turkish, Urdu, Arabic and Spanish underscored the cultural breadth of Muslim devotional traditions and the many ways in which communities around the world, including right here at home in Houston, commemorate the Mawlid.

The closing program also reinforced one of the themes running through the evening: that ideas about community are carried not only through laws and institutions, but through memory, language, poetry and shared cultural expression.

The ARK Initiative is a Houston-based platform devoted to fostering dialogue, understanding and civic engagement across faith and cultural communities. More information about its work and programs is available at www.ark-initiatives.org.

Asian American admissions bias case moves forward

Continued from page 17

universities have used admissions practices that disadvantage highly qualified Asian American applicants because of their race. The allegations have not been proven in court, and the universities have disputed them.

Court ruling opens door to admissions data

The latest development concerns the University of Washington. U.S. District Judge James L. Robart denied the university defendants' motion to dismiss Zhong's Title VI claim while dismissing several other claims. The decision allows the case to proceed in part, potentially permitting the family to seek internal university communications, admissions records and statistical data.

Nan Zhong described the ruling as a major development because discovery could provide information about how applicants were evaluated.

The University of Washington, however, said the court dismissed many of the claims and emphasized the highly competitive nature of its Allen School. The university also said it prioritizes Washington residents, meaning that most out-of-state applicants are not admitted regardless of their qualifications.

The case therefore enters a stage where the allegations can face greater scrutiny against the university's actual admissions records.

A larger Asian American admissions debate

For Asian American families, the case touches on a question that has been at the center of U.S. college admissions debates for years: whether students from a group that performs strongly on conventional academic measures can nonetheless be disadvantaged by selective admissions systems.

The issue received national attention during the litigation involving Harvard College and the University of North Carolina.

In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the race-conscious admissions programs used by Harvard and UNC violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The Court held that the programs could not use race in the manner challenged in those cases.

The Harvard litigation had also included allegations that Asian American applicants were disadvantaged by the university's admissions process. The Supreme Court's ruling, however, focused on the broader legality of race-conscious admissions and did not establish that Harvard had intentionally discriminated against Asian American applicants.

That distinction remains important in evaluating the Zhong litigation. The Supreme Court's decision changed the legal landscape for universities, but it did not eliminate every potential dispute over racial discrimination in admissions. A university can face allegations that its admissions practices discriminate against applicants even when it says race is not directly used as an admissions criterion.

The Zhong family's lawsuits seek

to test that question through specific university admissions practices.

Why the Zhong case matters to Asian American families

Zhong's father has said the lawsuit is not simply about his son's college experience.

He told Fox News Digital that the family wants to prevent the same experience from affecting his younger son and future generations. He also said that numerous Asian American families contacted the family after Stanley's story became public, describing their own experiences with highly qualified students being rejected by selective colleges.

That response illustrates why the case has resonated beyond one Palo Alto family.

For many Asian American parents, academic achievement has traditionally been viewed as the clearest route to educational opportunity. The possibility that race could still influence an admissions outcome therefore raises concerns about whether traditional measures of merit receive equal weight for all applicants.

But selective college admissions are also extraordinarily competitive. A high SAT score, strong grades or impressive extracurricular achievements do not guarantee admission to an elite institution. Universities routinely reject large numbers of applicants with exceptional credentials, and individual rejection decisions cannot by themselves establish racial discrimination.

That is why the discovery phase of the Zhong case could become important.

If admissions data and internal communications are produced, they could provide a more detailed picture of how Asian American applicants were evaluated and whether race played a prohibited role.

Beyond one student's rejection

Stanley Zhong's story presents a striking contrast. A student rejected by most of the highly selective colleges he applied to was nevertheless recruited by one of the world's most prominent technology companies and hired as a software engineer.

His experience does not, by itself, prove that universities discriminated against him because he is Asian American.

But it has raised a question that has persisted among Asian American families: what happens when a student's measurable academic and technical achievements appear to conflict with the outcome of highly selective college admissions?

The answer may depend on what the evidence shows.

The University of Washington has defended its admissions process, while Zhong's family argues that the only way to determine whether discrimination occurred is to examine the university's admissions data and decision-making process.

As the lawsuit moves toward discovery, the case could become another important test of how universities balance holistic admissions, diversity objectives and the legal requirement not to discriminate on the basis of race.

For Asian American students and their families, the stakes extend beyond Stanley Zhong. The litigation could help determine whether concerns about unequal treatment in elite college admissions are supported by

evidence or whether individual outcomes are being interpreted as proof of a broader pattern without sufficient data.

Either way, the case has reopened one of the most contentious questions in American higher education: whether a system designed to create a diverse student body can do so without unfairly disadvantaging applicants because of their race.

Tarrant County removes 92 polling sites ahead of November election

Tarrant County commissioners voted 3-2 Tuesday to approve a list of polling sites for the November elections that included 92 fewer sites than the 2022 midterms.

The approval came after commissioners heard testimony from more than 100 speakers, the majority of whom were opposed to the site cuts, during a meeting that lasted over eight hours. Voting rights advocates and representatives of 30 civic groups rallied outside the county courthouse Tuesday morning, demanding that commissioners approve a list with the same number of sites as the 2022 midterms.

The adopted list includes 224 sites for Election Day and 47 for early voting. The 2022 list included 316 Election Day sites and 50 for early voting.

"I'm confident that what is proposed is going to give everybody that wants to vote the opportunity to vote," said county elections administrator Clint Ludwig, who proposed the reduction.

Commissioners voted along party lines, with Republicans — County Judge Tim O'Hare and commissioners Matt Krause and Manny Ramirez — supporting the list, and Democratic commissioners Alisa Simmons and Roderick Miles Jr. voting against.

"It's not about cost. This is about power. This is very political. This is campaigning from the dais," said Simmons, who is running against O'Hare for the county judge seat.

Ramirez, who is seeking reelection in November, said he asked Ludwig to present a list that included all of the sites used in 2022. Ludwig said several of the sites were unavailable, unwilling or unable under statutory requirements to be used this year.

Miles and Simmons suggested several revisions to increase the number of sites, but their Republican colleagues rejected each of them.

Krause described requests for 316 sites as "arbitrary," questioning why his Democratic colleagues would be satisfied with that total instead of a higher one, such as 400 or even 700. Miles said he wants as many sites as possible.

At the morning news conference and throughout the meeting, speakers urged commissioners to increase, rather than decrease the number of places for voters to cast a ballot. They also asked to reinstate specific sites that Ludwig suggested eliminating, such as the Maverick Activity Center at the University of Texas at Arlington.

"We understand the power of the vote. We are deciding whether to preserve our democracy or continue to crumble it," said Brianna Brown, executive director of the Texas Organizing

Project, a grassroots group aimed at organizing Black and brown communities in Texas.

More than 1.3 million people are registered to vote in Tarrant County. Local Republican and Democratic leaders framed the November midterms as the "most important of our lifetime."

Historically a Republican stronghold, Tarrant County has shown occasional signs of trending purple as voters narrowly supported Democratic candidates at the top of the statewide ballot in recent elections. Democratic Sen. Taylor Rehmet's landslide victory in the northern half of Tarrant County in a special election in January, followed by unusually high voter turnout in the March primaries, spurred Democrats' hopes of victory in November.

Thirty miles east, Dallas County commissioners also considered a list of polling sites Tuesday. Their proposal includes 85 early voting sites and 448 Election Day sites.

Ludwig told commissioners last week his proposed map of sites concentrates locations "where voters choose to vote" based on past election cycles and where facilities meet operational standards and disability accessibility requirements.

Commissioners voted on the list after 5 p.m. Immediately after the vote, attendees still in the room began chanting "shame."

Several speakers, including Cinnamon Hall, argued that commissioners should increase rather than decrease voting sites on one of the same premises the court's Republicans used to justify county redistricting last summer: population growth. Hall also criticized the loss of polling sites in Black and brown neighborhoods across the county, such as the 76104 zip code, which would have no sites under the current proposal.

"If you accept this, you're basically saying that our votes don't matter," Hall said. "All votes matter. Vote 'no' on this."

Joan Gonzalez told commissioners she supports the proposal in the name of cutting costs for taxpayers, dismissing concerns about the reduction impacting voters' ability to cast a ballot.

"My personal feeling is if you can find this commissioners court, you can find a polling place," Gonzalez said. "You have early voting also for weeks at a time."

Emeri Callaway, vice president of the Tarrant County Young Democrats, urged commissioners to restore the sites Ludwig proposed cutting, especially the MAC at UTA. They spoke of college students across the county calling the organization "panicking" about where to vote.

"This should not be a controversial issue to add these locations. It should not be partisan," Callaway said. "Do not make it hard for students of Tarrant County to vote on their campuses."

During the meeting, Simmons repeatedly attempted to get UTA added back to the list. Republicans argued that students had easy access to the nearby county subcourthouse in Arlington.

Commissioners were scheduled to finalize voting sites in early August, but agreed unanimously to table the decision until September after agreeing that Ludwig's first proposal included too few sites. That list included 42

early voting sites and 176 on Election Day.

The Aug. 4 commissioners court meeting drew dozens of speakers, the majority of whom testified against a reduction in polling sites and demanded an increase in sites to accommodate population growth since the 2022 midterms.

During the nearly seven-hour meeting, O'Hare made all attendees leave the courtroom after some speakers continued talking after their allotted time to address the courtroom ran out and others shouted or used profanity. One speaker was arrested and carried out by his ankles and wrists. Another who left voluntarily was arrested a week later.

At the start of the Sept. 1 meeting, O'Hare advised attendees to follow the commissioners court rules of decorum they agree to follow when they sign up to speak during public comment. Those who violate the rules, which he read aloud, could be removed by sheriff deputies and possibly arrested, he warned.

"The last thing I want to see is anybody removed from the chambers. The last thing I want to see is anybody arrested. The last thing I want to see is a circus," O'Hare said. "Last month, we had a circus."

As of 5:30 p.m., O'Hare ordered sheriff deputies to remove three attendees from the meeting. One of them used profanity during his allotted time to speak, and the others spoke from the audience after O'Hare repeatedly ordered them to be quiet.

Robbie Hoy, a spokesperson for the sheriff's office, told the Report no arrests were made during the meeting. One speaker was given a criminal trespass warning after speaking from the audience and directing a profane word at O'Hare as he left.

The county judge endorsed Ludwig's new proposal last week shortly after it was released.

"As I've said from day one, no Tarrant County voter should ever feel they don't have enough time to vote," O'Hare said in a news release. "This is a sensible plan designed to ensure that, and I'm grateful to our elections staff for the work that brought us here."

From the dais, Miles showed attendees the framed poll tax receipt of his wife's great-grandmother, who he described as a housewife and mother of 10 who "understood how important her vote was, and the voice and the power it came along with." He compared the site reduction to poll taxes, a Jim Crow-era fee voters were required to pay in order to cast a ballot.

"Just know that you are creating poll taxes, modern day poll taxes, for people to go and vote and do what they have the right to do," Miles said, addressing Republican colleagues. "You may not see it, and I can't help you see, but it is what it is."

Simmons hosted a news conference Sunday with State Rep. James Talarico of Austin, the Democratic nominee for U.S. senator. Both warned that cutting polling sites could reduce access for voters.

Last month, Fort Worth City Council members unanimously approved a resolution opposing a proposed reduction in polling sites. They urged county officials to consider alternatives and ensure that voting sites are evenly distributed across the four commissioner precincts.

LIFE INTERRUPTED

We are not simply losing focus; our attention is being harvested by an industry designed to keep us distracted

By Rabia Khan

Take a look at the screen in front of you. How many tabs are open on your browser? Or how many windows open in your phone. How many unread emails glow softly on your phone like digital embers? When was the last time you sat in silence, uninterrupted, and simply thought?

Every morning, before many of us have properly opened our eyes, we reach for our phones, nestled against our soft pillows.

With sleep still in our eyes, we begin to check notifications. Before getting out of bed, we scroll through headlines, messages, reels and updates from people we may not have spoken to in years. We tell ourselves that we are only checking the time, yet somehow fifteen minutes disappear. Then the day begins.

A student sits down to study but keeps her phone beside her. A notification arrives, she checks it, one message becomes a video and one video becomes several. When she finally returns to her textbook, the words seem strangely difficult to absorb.

A professional begins an important task but repeatedly moves between email, WhatsApp and social media. At dinner, a family sits around the same table while several members look at different screens. Nobody has physically left the room, yet attention has.

We live in an age of miracles. We carry the sum of human knowledge in our pockets. Yet, we have never felt more scattered, more fragmented, more absent from our own lives. We are suffering from a collective crisis of attention, and it is not merely costing us our productivity; it is costing us our very sense of being.

The common narrative suggests we are simply lazy or lacking in willpower. The solution, we are told, is to download another productivity app, set timers, or lock our phones in a drawer. But this is a superficial remedy for a profound wound. The problem is not just our gadgets; it is a philosophical crisis about what it means to be human in an age of infinite stimulation.

The attention economy

We call it the "attention economy," but this phrase is a lie. An economy implies exchange, value, mutual benefit. What we are actually experiencing is a "distraction extraction industry." The business model is simple: the longer you look, the more they earn. Every red notification badge, every autoplay video, every "pull-to-refresh" mechanism is engineered by brilliant minds to hijack your brain's reward system.

A traffic signal becomes a chance to check Instagram. A pause during a conversation becomes an excuse to open WhatsApp. We have almost eliminated empty space from our lives. Yet empty space is not necessarily wasted space. It is often where reflection begins. A mind that is constantly stimulated has little opportunity to wander, connect ideas or simply observe. We have become so uncomfortable with silence that we immediately fill it.

The ancient Stoics and Buddhist philosophers warned us about this. Epictetus taught that we suffer not from things themselves, but from our judgments about them. The Buddha spoke of the "monkey mind" restless, jumping from branch to branch, never at peace. Today, we have built an entire civilisation that feeds the monkey mind that monetises restlessness which profits from our inability to sit still.

We are not failing to pay attention; our attention is being systematically harvested. We are not weak; we are fighting a multi-trillion-dollar machine designed to break our con-



sciousness into tiny, sellable fragments.

What does it mean to pay attention?

Before we ask how to fix our attention, we must ask a deeper question: What is attention, and why does it matter?

The French philosopher Simone Weil wrote that, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." To pay attention to something truly and deeply is to give it the gift of your presence. It is an act of love. When we cannot pay attention, we cannot love. We cannot understand. We cannot be fully alive.

The crisis of attention is not just about productivity or focus. It is about our capacity for meaning. When we are perpetually distracted, we live on the surface of life. We skim, we scroll, we consume but we do not inhabit our experiences. We are like tourists in our own existence, always photographing the moment but never living it.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger warned of this. He spoke of "calculative thinking", the mode of mind that sees everything as a resource to be optimised, measured, and exploited. He contrasted this with "meditative thinking", the slow, contemplative awareness that lets things reveal themselves. We have become masters of calculative thinking and amateurs of meditation. We know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Faiza Khan, a psychologist, argues that the attention crisis among young people is not simply a matter of excessive phone use; it is also a failure of guidance. "We give children smartphones before teaching them how to manage their attention," Khan explained, while talking to The Express Tribune. Parents often focus on limiting screen time, but do not teach children why certain content is difficult to resist or how algorithms keep them engaged. Schools, too, rarely teach students how to manage digital distractions. "Young people need guidance, not restrictions. They need to learn when to disconnect, how to recognise unhealthy digital habits and how to use technology without allowing it to control their daily lives, which requires parents and teachers to become role models rather than simply imposing rules."

Reading a book feels slow, studying feels boring and listening to another person feels demanding. Aristotle's lesson would be that a good life is not necessarily the life containing the greatest amount of stimulation, but one in which our faculties are directed towards worthwhile ends.

At the root of this crisis is our terror of being alone with our thoughts. We reach for our phones in elevators, in checkout lines, even while the kettle boils. We have lost the capacity

to bear boredom. But boredom is not an emptiness to be filled; it is a space to be inhabited.

The philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote in the 17th century: "All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." This was true three hundred years before the smartphone. Today, it is our daily reality.

Boredom is the doorway to creativity. It is where the mind wanders, where unexpected connections form, where the soul speaks. When we fill every moment with stimulation, we starve our inner life. We become hollow, reactive creatures, always responding but never reflecting.

The solution, therefore, is not another app. It is a philosophical reorientation. We must learn to see boredom not as an enemy but as a friend. We must cultivate what the ancient Greeks called *ataraxia*—a state of tranquil equanimity that is not dependent on external stimulation.

The ethics of attention

We must also recognise that this is not merely a personal problem. It is an ethical one. We have built a society that treats attention as a commodity to be extracted, rather than a sacred capacity to be nurtured.

The philosopher Byung-Chul Han argues that we live in an "achievement society" where we exploit ourselves in the name of productivity. We answer emails at midnight and boast about how little we sleep. We wear our exhaustion like a badge of honour. This is not virtue; it is a form of collective self-harm.

The solution requires a shift in values. We need to champion what the psychologist Cal Newport calls "deep work" the ability to focus without distraction on cognitively demanding tasks. But more than that, we need to champion "deep living" the ability to be present, to listen, to love, to create, without the constant hum of digital noise.

We need to teach our children and ourselves that reading a long, complex book is more valuable than skimming a hundred headlines. That a single hour of focused conversation is richer than a thousand text messages and that a walk in the woods without headphones is a form of meditation.

The education sector has an important role to play. Digital literacy should go beyond teaching students how to use technology. They should learn how algorithms shape what they see, how misinformation captures attention, and how constant multitasking affects concentration. Being digitally literate means not only knowing how to find information, but also understanding why it is being shown to you.

There is also a key responsibility of technology companies. If certain design features encourage compulsive use, responsibility cannot rest entirely with the individual user. Healthier defaults, greater transparency around recommendation systems, stronger protections for young users and easier ways to disable autoplay and unnecessary notifications can all help. The digital environment is designed, and what is designed can also be redesigned.

The light at the end of the screen

So, is there a solution to the crisis of attention? Yes, but it is not a quick fix. It is a slow, deliberate act of rebellion against the machinery of distraction.

It is choosing to read a physical book while your phone charges in another room. It is going for a walk without headphones and listening to the wind. It is looking someone in the eye during a conversation instead of glancing at the screen buzzing in your pocket.

It is reclaiming your right to be bored, to be silent, and to be still. It is recognizing that your attention is not a resource to be harvested but a gift to be given to your work, to your loved ones, to yourself.

The Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote: "The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts." In an age of infinite distraction, the quality of our thoughts is under siege. But we have a choice. We can continue to be passive consumers of noise, or we can become active stewards of our own consciousness.

The world is loud. It is trying to sell you panic and distraction at every turn. The solution is not to shout louder. The solution is to turn down the volume, take a breath, and remember that the most valuable real estate in the world is not on a screen; it is between your ears.

Mindfulness revolution

Here is my honest view: I believe we are at a crossroads. The same technology that connects us also fragments us. The same tools that inform us also numb us. We cannot simply reject technology that would be naive and impractical. But we also cannot continue to surrender our attention without a fight.

I think the solution lies in a kind of philosophical mindfulness. We need to be aware of the forces shaping our minds, and we need to consciously choose how we engage with them. This is not easy. It requires discomfort. It requires saying no to the dopamine hits and yes to the slow, patient work of living.

But I am optimistic. I believe that more people are waking up to this reality. I see a quiet revolution brewing: people putting down their phones, rediscovering the joy of silence, reclaiming their attention as an act of defiance. This revolution will not be televised. It will not trend on social media. It will happen in living rooms, in parks, in libraries, in the quiet spaces between thoughts.

And that, perhaps, is exactly the point. The solution to the crisis of attention is not something we will find by looking harder. It is something we will find by looking away by turning off the noise and turning inward. It is a practice. It is not a product but a way of being.

Reclaim your attention. Reclaim your life. And before giving your attention to anything, ask:

Is this worth a piece of my life?

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All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

Linda Howell Launches Texas House Campaign in Fort Bend with Strong GOP and Local Support

HOUSTON — Republican candidate Linda Howell officially kicked off her election campaign for Texas House District 76 with a well-attended event at a local restaurant in Fort Bend County, drawing a significant crowd of political figures and party workers. The gathering aimed to outline a clear strategy for the upcoming elections while

strengthening ties between Republican leadership and the public, with addresses delivered throughout the program adding strong political momentum to the campaign launch.

During the event, Fort Bend County Precinct 3 Constable Ali Sheikhani addressed attendees, emphasizing the importance of

upholding the rule of law, public safety, and strong community engagement. Also present on the occasion was Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong, who delivered a speech focusing on local governance and community development. In her main address, Linda Howell outlined her core priorities for District 76, focusing

on economic stability, tax relief, business opportunities, and local infrastructure, while speakers highlighted that the campaign aims to foster unity across the community. The event concluded with attendees expressing strong support for the candidates and committing to work together toward campaign success.





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