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INNA LILLAH WA INNA ILAYHI RAJI'UN Houston Community Mourns the Loss of Akbarali Muhammad Hussain Narsi

Beloved father of Ameen and Ahmed Narsi and uncle of PAGH President Siraj Narsi remembered by family, friends and community leaders

Continued from front page
HOUSTON, TX — The Houston and Sugar Land communities are mourning the passing of Akbarali Muhammad Hussain Narsi, a beloved father, husband, grandfather, relative and respected member of the community, who passed away on September 5, 2026.

Continued on page 13

25 years after 9/11, Islamophobia endures as a lasting legacy

Muslim Americans mark anniversary confronting both memory of dead and quarter-century of discrimination

NEW YORK — Twenty-five years after the Sept. 11 attacks killed nearly 3,000 people, Muslim Americans mark the anniversary mourning the dead while reckoning with the fear, discrimination, and political hostility that followed in

their name.

For Sabinah Mohyuddin, preparing her children for school in Clarksville, Tennessee, that morning, the horror came with a personal dread once the attackers' claimed Islamic identity emerged. "It fell on me like a

heavy weight," she recalled. "What did this mean for the Muslim community? What did this mean for me?"

A quarter-century on, the question endures.

A Pew Research Center survey
Continued on page 13

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Texas aims to crack down on alleged birth tourism, as Trump's executive order hits legal barrier
Texas Republican leaders are pushing ahead with efforts to crack down on alleged "birth tourism," even as a federal district court has blocked an effort by President
Continued on page 13

US faith leaders regret appearing at Hindu nationalist RSS event
NEW YORK – Prominent Christian and
Continued on page 12

Trump's fortune climbs as his approval sinks and Americans pay more
WASHINGTON — even as his political standing falls, exposing a widening gap
Continued on page 12

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Why Another War Between India and Pakistan Is a Bad Idea

As we celebrate the Defense of Pakistan Day, September 6, with traditional national resolve to protect our homeland against any aggression, and while the memories of the May 2025 war are still fresh, the talk of another showdown between India and Pakistan continues to surface. An

objective analysis of the current ground realities in South and West Asia suggests that another military confrontation would be reckless, dangerous, and pointless. Keeping political and geographical disputes aside, a sober assessment of the problems faced everyday by people in both countries clearly indicates that another war between the two countries makes no sense at all.

To begin with, the stakes are existential. Pakistan views Indian aggression not as a routine border dispute, but as a direct threat to its very survival. Both neighbors are recognized nuclear powers. Pakistan has maintained a strict track record as a responsible nuclear state, refusing to use its

ultimate weapons in past conflicts. However, nobody can guarantee what happens if one nation feels pushed past the edge, and other driven by an ideological pipe dream. In a full-blown war, the actual use of key deterrence would be disastrous, with consequences that would reach far beyond the borders of South Asia.

The battlefield reality has also changed. The May 2025 clash proved that Pakistan holds a decisive edge in advanced military technology and operational skill. Pakistan's tactical approach caught military planners around the world by surprise, and today India may be trying to copy Pakistan's strategies and high-tech playbook to catch up. With Pakistan continuing to innovate and stay steps

ahead in this tech race, any Indian attempt to achieve an easy conventional victory is unrealistic.

Backing this technological capability is China.



By Siraj Narsi

As an "all-weather friend," China provides Pakistan with steadfast diplomatic cover and advanced military hardware, weapons and integrated aerospace technology. A fight with Pakistan is not an isolated local skirmish as it faces an integrated military structure backed by the manufacturing and technological weight of a global superpower.

On the diplomatic front, the balance has shifted sharply in Pakistan's favor. The landmark Mecca Pact fundamentally transformed regional security architecture, bringing key Middle Eastern Muslim countries closer to Islamabad. When war erupted between the US, Israel, and Iran,

Pakistan did not get dragged down. Instead, it stepped up as a respected and mature middle power, uniting a broad coalition of Muslim nations while keeping strong working relationships with

Washington, Beijing, and other major world

capitals. While Pakistan gained international recognition as a steady and constructive diplomatic player, India found itself increasingly isolated and sidelined in regional diplomacy, struggling to remain relevant in Middle Eastern and West Asia affairs.

Yet the most compelling argument against war is not based on military and/or diplomatic advantage. It is found on the streets of Delhi, Lahore, Mumbai, and Karachi, where our shared humanity makes the ground realities even more tragic. In both nations, millions of people do not

have clean drinking water, decent education and healthcare, reliable electricity, and three proper meals a day. In Pakistan, poverty rates remain stubbornly high, and a significant number of the population living below the poverty line amid persistent economic challenges. In India, despite high GDP growth numbers, a sizeable number of people still struggle under the lower-middle-income poverty line.

In both countries, tens of millions of young people are desperate for jobs. They are graduating without clear prospects, watching their dreams fade while billions of dollars are spent on missiles, fighter jets, and military hardware. How can two nations justify spending vast fortunes preparing to destroy one another when so many of their own citizens cannot afford a basic living?

Looking back over our shared history reveals an inescapable truth: both countries have already fought four wars, and not a single one has achieved anything for the progress and welfare of our people or the resolution of decades old disputes. All they have ever done is satisfy national egos and leave behind grief. War as a means to settle disputes is a wasted investment; it is an extraordinarily costly affair where even the "winner" walks away worse off.

There is no doubt that serious territorial disputes and deep ideological differences exist between the two countries. But the only sensible way to resolve them is through persistent negotiations and talks. Both sides must learn to cooperate as neighbors with a focus on improving the lives of their people. We share centuries of intertwined history, common aspects of culture, shared languages, art, and literature. When the toxic nationalist jingoism is set aside, everyday people on both sides still hold genuine warmth and affection for one another. Even during these most tense times, Indians eagerly binge Pakistani television dramas, and Pakistanis continue to enjoy Indian movies and music. The cultural bond has never truly severed.

It is time for the leadership on both sides to face the reality. We can change our friends, but we cannot change our neighbors. The real test of statesmanship is not beating war drums on television to win domestic cheers, but having the courage to build bridges, open trade, and accept one another as permanent neighbors. This demand falls especially heavily on India's leadership, which must abandon the dangerous, outdated ideology of "Akhand Bharat." Fantasies of regional domination only breed instability in the region.

South Asia cannot afford another war. Peace, dialogue, and mutual respect are the only sensible way forward—for the people of Pakistan, for the people of India, and for the security of the entire world. Lasting peace would bring prosperity to both peoples and the region.

About the author: Siraj Narsi is a Business Finance professional, a filmmaker, writer and an active community volunteer. He sits on the executive and advisory boards of several non-profit organizations, and serves as President of Pakistan Association of Greater Houston.

Message from Nepal

Ali Tauqeer Sheikh

THREE features of the catastrophic flood that tore through Nepal on Aug 16, 2026, do not fit Pakistan's mountain disaster strategy: it started without rains; it originated across the border; it had huge compounding factors. None of these three is a one-off. They describe a disaster category that has been forming across the region for over a decade, growing more frequent, widespread and severe. But Pakistan's climate planning has stayed focused almost entirely on the monsoon.

A mass of rock and glacier ice broke away from an altitude of about 5,200 metres in the upper mountain range, generating seismic energy equivalent to a 5.2-magnitude earthquake. The fall produced enough friction to melt the ice on the way down, turning a dry avalanche into a slurry of mud, ice and boulders moving at up to 167 kilometres an hour at a height of 9m. The debris choked the river and formed a dam. When that gave way, a second surge followed; both hit settlements and the hydropower works below.

It started above the cloud levels. Slopes at this altitude are held up by permafrost gluing the rock and glacial ice buttressing the valley walls. Warming removes both: thawing permafrost raises pore pressure and cuts shear strength, while retreating glaciers stop bracing the slopes from outside. The rock fails on

temperature's schedule, not the monsoon's, which is why Chamoli in Uttarakhand in India went down under clear skies in 2021 and Langtang followed five years later.

The record before both confirms a trend, not two isolated events. The 2015 avalanche off Langtang Lirung, the 2016 Gongbatongsha outburst crossing from the Tibet area into Nepal, and the 2024 Thame outburst in the Everest region struck without warning, each widening the geography of a hazard.

In Pakistan, the 2010 Attabad collapse dammed the Hunza River and submerged 24 kilometres of the Karakoram Highway. The Shisper Glacier's ice-dammed lake breached without rain in 2022 and destroyed the highway bridge at Hassanabad. Each event has moved higher in elevation, wider in geography, and heavier in what it destroys, from one buried village in 2015 to a cascading event spread over several kilometres.

Pakistan keeps no comparable dataset on its own landslide activity. But a study in the National Science Review, covering more than 8,000 landslides across the eastern Himalayas, found a five-fold increase in high-elevation slope failures over three decades, tracking a doubling of Hindu Kush Himalaya glacier mass loss since 2000. Failures are also rising and entering the 5,000m-6,000m band that was once too frozen to fail.

The Langtang collapse struck Gyirong Port, before the debris continued into Nepal's own river systems. The direction of travel is not new. Nearly half of the more than 25 major glacial lake outburst floods recorded in Nepal since the mid-20th century have originated across the same border, arriving from a stretch neither country monitors jointly. This event was not itself a GLOF — no lake burst before the collapse — but the debris dam it left behind and the discharge that followed sit inside the same unmonitored corridor.

Pakistan belongs to the same geography, through the Kyagar Glacier's periodic surges in the Shaksam Valley. But China is not just Nepal's or Pakistan's upstream neighbour. It is South Asia's upper riparian. It is the source plateau for the Indus, the Sutlej and the Brahmaputra — the headwaters of most of South Asia's major rivers. That makes bilateral arrangements structurally insufficient. What this event calls for is a South Asia-wide early warning architecture, built and shared across every state whose rivers begin on that plateau, not a patchwork of separate deals each covering one border and missing the rest.

None of Nepal's responses fixed the underlying failure. Built for a slow monsoon rise, its flood sensors were destroyed before they could warn of a moving slurry. Existing bilateral arrangements track slow glacial lake outbursts,

not sudden ice-rock collapse. Nepal had no real-time alert before the surge. Pakistan, sharing the same upstream geography, has the identical gap.

What Pakistan needs: Dasu, Diamer-Bhasha and Mohmand are located in river corridors engineered for a monsoon flood profile, not the debris slurry that trapped 500 workers in Nepal. The Karakoram Highway has already been severed once at Attabad and once at Hassanabad. A third closure is not hypothetical.

Nepal rewrote its school-siting rules before rebuilding, not after. It accepted specialised help without inviting chaos. Pakistan's community-based disaster risk management networks in Gilgit-Baltistan and KP already have the local trust that saved lives on the Trishuli corridor before state machinery arrived. What they lack is a local government signal to act on before the water reaches them.

Four steps are needed. First, convert the existing weather arrangement with China into automated, real-time information sharing on slope deformation and barrier-lake formation in the Shaksam and Xinjiang zones — the exact category the Nepal-China arrangement missed.

Second, focus on joint satellite monitoring with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, ICIMOD and Suparco, using synthetic aperture radars across the Karakoram, Pamirs and Hindu Kush structured from the outset as a Saarc-

wide facility that India, Bhutan and Bangladesh can draw on since all sit downstream of the same plateau.

Third, install seismic and hydrological sensors along the Indus and Shyok corridors calibrated for a slurry, not a rising river, so that downstream infrastructure gets lead time measured in hours instead of minutes.

Fourth, join the consortium undertaking primary technical monitoring, satellite radar analysis, and field assessments, led by ICIMOD, the United States Geological Survey, Integrated Research on Disaster Risk, Nepal Environment Society, and academic glaciologists from such institutions as the University of Michigan. They are combining real-time remote-sensing satellite tracking with ground-level hydrological stations. These entities are quantifying the initial collapse volume, utilising synthetic aperture radar to monitor adjacent unstable slopes, assessing secondary barrier-lake outburst risks, and advancing regional hazard-mapping protocols — areas of critical importance to Pakistan.

This catastrophe combines rapid- and slow-onset — the compound hazard now falling inside the mandate of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage.

The writer serves on the Board of the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage.

Clichés we use

Arifa Noor

CONVERSATIONS about Pakistan easily and comfortably slide into clichés. The phrase ‘land of the pure’ is a personal favourite. Different generations — from boomers all the way down to the millennials — are perhaps equally familiar with ‘Pakistan at a cross-roads’. Used as a headline or caption, it can be comfortably deployed to describe the state of affairs within, regardless of the context — be it the time of the Cold War, or the post 9/11 world, or from democratic interludes to hybrid times.

The guilt is not just of Pakistanis but also the rest of the world which sees the country through a fog of clichés. Within this hard country, or the most dangerous country in the world, are the leafy streets of Islamabad, the port city of Karachi and Lahore with its Mughal past. Politics is military-dominated, and people have a penchant for strongmen in uniform, while political parties are family enterprises. KP is known as the province of the warrior-like Pathans, and Balochistan is tribal. Sindh is feudal territory where

generations of peasants have worshipped Sufis and the Bhuttos. While the descriptions may vary a bit, they all portray societies frozen in time where little has changed, politically and socially.

Agreed that many of these clichés are the result of foreign coverage of a country that has been, for various reasons, open to the storytelling by others. But at this point, it is hard to say if the storytelling by others has shaped our thinking and analysis or vice-versa. Whatever the case, clichés now shape so much of opinion that even society at large has been oblivious to the changes taking place under their very noses. For instance, it took 20 years of an insurgency in Balochistan for most people to realise that the sardars were no longer in charge in the province; the cliché has yet to be abandoned in discussions and by those who want to control politics.

Indeed, clichés are used not just to describe but also to define how the country’s politics is run. The latter continues to be dominated by dynasties; people are uneducated and don’t know how to vote for the right people — which is

why democracy doesn’t work. For they don’t vote for ‘good’ people but for those who can help them with gali, mohallay ki siyasat, or local issues. Or they voted for personalities and cult leaders. The cliché might alter a bit here and there but the inability of the people to make the right choice doesn’t. It’s enough to try the patience of a saint. Or many among our stability-seeking saints.

But the politicians have their own set of clichés, convinced that only their capability can save the country — be it the ability to make a deal, a road (or rather, many roads), or end corruption. No one else is good enough. To their credit, none of them think they can aspire to learn the art a rival may have mastered. With their one skill, they can save Pakistan, much like the heroes of yesteryear who wore shorts over skinny pants and worked alone to save the Metropolis or Gotham. But this is an old cliché — before Hollywood discovered that they could all be made to fly together to confront the bad guys.

Others, too, view them through clichés — cults, populists, experi-

enced politicians, deal makers. And then the favourite is about how all of them were born in the same nursery (of the green and brown kind). Or as the latest version in Urdu goes, they passed through the same gate, the point being that none of them is authentic or genuine enough. Till, of course, they suffer at the same hands. The cycle repeats itself each time — with a new Pygmalion; a new flower seller.

And then come the clichés about how to fix this country. These, too, have not changed. In one of the clichés, the problem is always the older, more established politician. And their removal is the answer. Minus one at times, minus everyone at others. It was Bhutto back in the 1970s and Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s. And these days, it seems it’s Imran Khan. Another is to rid the country of ‘kruption’; so what if each such effort seems to have done little to stop the scourge, which is growing by leaps and bounds. It’s a cliché, not reality.

But there is an even better one. The effort to ensure a better, truer democracy. And it is never the

politicians who are interested in this cliché; others always have it on hand to help the people, and give them better leaders and a rosier future. Its name keeps changing but not the good intentions. Sometimes, it means party-less elections, sometimes empowered local governments, one unit or more provinces. Call a rose by any other name and all that.

It is so familiar and yet so different. For the dream hasn’t changed even though the times have. So it appears the old system needs more than a reset. It needs an overhaul so powers are devolved and people are helped at their doorstep. And this time around, we don’t just need random educated, middle class people in power, but those who can be compared to say Sadiq Khan in London or Zohran Mamdani in New York. There was a time when Mustafa Kamal was what the people of Karachi (and beyond) deserved as nazim but now the aspiration is not as local as it was then. Times have changed — or have they, in the land of the pure, also known as Cliché-istan?

The writer is a journalist.

A new dark age?

A nagging frustration stalks Narendra Modi’s battle to project himself to the world as a visionary from India.

Jawed Naqvi

IS India a weak link that worries the architects of the Shanghai club and the BRICS group? The question is as urgent today as it ever was, its importance underscored further by a potentially crucial BRICS summit that Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosts later this month. Several factors may be at play to determine if India is indeed a weak link for BRICS. Every country has its core interests and India’s foreign policy today seems to be based on two key factors, one being the calculation as to who or what can best help deliver the core interest of the ruling elite, namely the consolidation of a majoritarian state, the Hindu rashtra.

It’s all too well known that the financial foundations of Hindutva lie in the West, a fact that became even more obvious with the recent visit by the head of the RSS to the US and Canada. Russia and China have scant interest in the ruling party’s ideology as long as it does not disturb the political furniture the two groups have worked hard to set up. The West, too, couldn’t care less about the dominant worldview of a country as long as it is a trusted ally. A classic indication here is the silent acceptance of Israel’s genocide of Palestinians.

When Western human rights

groups mount pressure on India over its treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, it’s more of a leverage to extract political outcomes than a pursuit of moral tenets. A second factor in framing foreign policy is the interest of major business houses aligned with the Modi government. A typical episode showed India’s vulnerability in the Adani affair in the US. The political quid pro quo to get relief in the corruption case would be hard to assess, but it would be equally hard to ignore.

In the middle of this equation, a nagging frustration stalks Narendra Modi’s battle to project himself to the world as a visionary from India, most recently in the image of Mahatma Gandhi and Gautam Buddha. Last week, Modi cast himself in the role of the two visionaries he cited to Vladimir Putin in Bishkek, telling the Russian leader to terminate the war in Ukraine so that the world could live in peace and prosperity. Putin is always inclined to be patient with India given the importance he attaches to New Delhi’s membership of the Shanghai club and the BRICS orbit amid the groups’ sharpening battle with the US dollar and Donald Trump’s revulsion at a multipolar world, which much of Asia, Africa and Latin America seeks.

Putin heard out Modi, eyes lowered and feet tapping in lieu of rudely looking at his wristwatch. Donald Trump, too, wants Russia to terminate the war as does Europe, preferably by weakening Moscow and, if possible, by delivering a strategic defeat. They pine for the elusive outcome without leaning on any moral principles, though. To them, as for much of the world, wars are politics by other means.

What is less discussed in the Indian media is the fact that the war between Russia and Ukraine was set off by the US and its European satellites, which had ignored Putin’s red lines and sought to plant Nato’s battle formations right on Russia’s borders. The war became imminent when the West staged a colour revolution to oust a Russia-friendly government in Kiev and installed one that would eventually lead to Volodymyr Zelensky’s elevation as the West’s costly catspaw.

Modi’s message of peace in elliptical geometry — “move from unending war to end of war” — did not go unnoticed by those who witnessed India’s bruising conflict with Pakistan in May last year. Initiated as revenge for an unconscionable terror attack on Hindu tourists in Pahalgam, the war was curiously

suspended with Trump’s self-proclaimed intervention but not closed. War or no war, hostility to Pakistan remains a major input in the consolidation of Hindutva.

In other words, the tensions with nuclear-armed Pakistan and India could go kinetic at the time of nuclear-armed India’s choosing, Buddha’s and Gandhi’s moral tenets notwithstanding. Both revered legends were the eminences grises in the Nehruvian concept of the modern welfare state he wanted India to become. And Nehru’s idealism flowed equally from his belief in the Soviet system of a command economy as the one best suited to alleviate mass poverty created and deepened by the colonial plunder of India. Mao’s China, too, was moving along the path Nehru extolled, except that Nehru placed his quest in the framework of democracy. A similar path was followed by Deng Xiaoping’s economic liberalisation and Xi Jinping’s market consolidation, with neither leader loosening the grip on the command economy. “Horse racing will continue, stocks will continue to be traded, and dancing will continue,” Deng prophesied with the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997.

Nehru’s fear of untethered cap-

italism sprang from his astute assessment that a system instinctively rooted in private profit was unworthy of trust for the impoverished masses. How true his instinct was can be glimpsed from the 800 million Indians on the food dole despite four decades of a World Bank- and IMF-prescribed free-market system.

Modi’s desperation to be deemed a worthy heir to his iconic compatriots relies on his near-total control of the media. The frustration with failing to fit into the oversized shoes of Jawaharlal Nehru as statesman and prime minister, respected and admired widely at home and abroad, however, is particularly galling. The self-advertised image as a culturally inclusive leader banks on the goodwill earned by India’s freedom heroes, none of whom came from the Hindutva fold.

Modi’s dual personality charge is occasionally reflected in his angry frown at home together with a free flow of invectives hurled at opponents and the ready laughter and embraces abroad. China and Russia would not be too worried by Modi’s dual personalities. What might perhaps concern them more is Hindutva’s deeply fraught investment in the West.

The writer is a Journalist from Delhi.

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A new dark age?

Communication technology offers immense opportunities but has serious unintended consequences.

Maleeha Lodhi

RECENT years have seen a surge of books and articles on the impact of technology on people's lives and thinking. While communication technology has opened new vistas and opportunities it has also created its own problems in our digital age. Some works celebrate its benefits. Others warn of its damaging consequences especially those of social media. James Marriott's *The New Dark Ages: The End of Reading and the Dawn of a Post-Literate Society* joins this debate from another angle. The British journalist's work falls within the genre that emphasises the harmful consequences of digital technology.

The book's principal concern is that people aren't reading anymore and that a screen culture is displacing a print culture. For Marriott, the spread of literacy and the kind of thinking nurtured by the world of print drove progress in economic development, scientific advancement, and the emergence of modern democracy. In a print culture, he argues, knowledge is organised, understood, and contextualised. "Books make arguments, propose theses and develop ideas." This process, he contends, develops the power of reasoning.

For Marriott, this is getting lost in an era where the smartphone has taken over our lives and become the main reason for the decline of read-

ing. There has never been a technology quite like the smartphone, which has so much distracting content that it keeps people's attention endlessly on the screen. He maintains that a hostile environment for learning has been created by this digital distraction. Screens are changing human behaviour. Smartphones are shaping a "fragmented, trivialised and angry new world", in which conspiracy theories and mad ideas are spread at terrifying speed. The spread of knowledge is impeded by this and is actually breaking down. Political discourse once grounded in logical argument now takes place "amid the moronic inferno of social media".

Marriot attributes much of the 21st century's disorder and unreason to the fading of the written word and the "colonisation of culture" by addictive screens. He sees the intellectual hollowing of society as a consequence of the decline of reading and the world becoming a less rational place. Public discourse today, he claims, has become trivial to the point of dysfunction. It has affected politics too as this environment encourages the rise of mediocre politicians with little understanding of history, whose appeals to the public are emotional and do not rest on rational propositions. Politics, Marriott argues, is growing "angrier, stupider and

more obsessed with personality". He laments the fact that the full ramifications of the onset of what he calls a post-literate society are not fully understood.

Marriot may be overstating his case and exaggerating the damaging impact of digital technology. But he is no outlier in this assessment. Last year in a compelling book *Superbloom: How Technologies of Connection Tear Us Apart*, Nicholas Carr surveyed how digital technology — including smartphones, the internet, social media and artificial intelligence — is transforming both people and societies. He argued that instead of broadening minds, expanding empathy and fostering harmony, this technology has had the opposite effect. It is eroding understanding and trust and contributing to strife and social disharmony.

For Carr, speed and intensity in the flow of information and stimuli compel people to rely on intuitive thinking based on biases. It deprives them of the ability to tap into deeper analysis. As a result, it has undermined reasoned analysis, methodical evaluation and contemplative inquiry. As he puts it "Attention splinters, understanding grows thin". This results in mental shortcuts and shallow thinking. Thus "rather than levelling barriers to knowledge, it becomes a barrier itself".

For both Marriott and Carr, the information spread through digital vehicles does not foster knowledge but detracts from it. "More informed does not mean better informed." The fragmented nature of information provided by the screen makes much of it useless, according to Marriott. Social media further dumbs down the public conversation. Marriott sees social media and short-form videos producing junk content and misleading posts. He also finds a connection between video platforms like TikTok and increased vote share for populist and far right parties. That's because feeds by such parties play on emotions and abjure reasoning.

Carr's book devotes far more attention to social media. His criticism is unsparing. He also takes tech companies to task. In his view, social media amplifies falsehoods and hostility rather than promote facts and truth. Because it is shorn of communication barriers, it brings out people's worst instincts. He also blames the "ugly content that pervades the social media" on tech companies and on algorithms. As he puts it, "Social media churns out information that's been highly processed to stimulate not just engagement but also dependency." By encouraging excessive and unchecked self-exposure to a mass audience, it shatters all boundaries. The result is discord, not harmony.

An earlier book also warned of a world of fractured attention. In *The Lonely Century*, economist Noreena Hertz had a different focus, but she also addressed the harmful effects of communication technology and social media. She assigned a central role to social media and smartphones in making people "more angry and tribal". Drawing on research, she argued that technology and social media were also fuelling a global loneliness crisis, both personal and political. Smartphones "fragment our attention", estrange us from people and "create a splintered self". Hertz saw social media trapping people into isolated digital bubbles and creating a meaner, more aggressive world. This is evident in trolling and other forms of online abuse. As a result, she urged the acknowledgement of the dangers of "tech addiction" and making social media platforms accountable.

Communication technology has brought immense benefits to society. At the same time, it has involved serious unintended consequences. Where there is promise there is also peril. Managing the negative effects of new technologies remains a difficult challenge without easy solutions. With artificial intelligence the risk is even greater as it is growing much faster than our ability to control it.

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

Redrawing the map

IT has been quite something to watch a whisper become, in a matter of weeks, the state's new "number one priority". The trigger was the interior minister's surprising admission at the Pakistan Economic Summit in late July that the present system had "collapsed", and that new provinces and administrative reform were therefore urgently needed.

The political earthquake was immediate. For the PPP, already fuming over the AJK election, it was an insult added to injury. The president's abrupt departure for London has since fed a good deal of speculation. Some believe that he went to press his allies in government to drop the idea altogether. Others have pointed out that his exit echoes another, years ago, when the PPP was being asked to

make choices it considered political suicide. What can be said with certainty, however, is that an impasse has been reached.

The president had met the interior minister in London. Their interaction was recorded and shown in the media. It does not seem to have gone fruitfully. On his return, the minister doubled down on the need for new administrative units. The PPP answered with a Sindh Assembly resolution rejecting new provinces, and with speeches declaring "no compromise" on the province's geographical unity.

The Sindh Assembly resolution deserves much more attention than it received given the implications for the drive for more provinces. Under Article 239(4) of the

Constitution, the limits of a province cannot be altered unless the amendment is first passed by that province's own assembly by a two-thirds majority. Sindh seems to have made its position plain by, at least symbolically, vetoing the proposal before it arrived at its door.

Before the country is dragged through another ugly crisis, those pushing for new provinces must explain how they intend to clear the bar set by the Constitution. They should also share what the new assemblies, secretariats and offices will cost, and where the money is to come from when citizens' own pockets are already empty. There is no question that Pakistan needs better administrative management, but the stated end of

restructuring — ie, better service delivery at the grassroots — is already provided for in Article 140A, and could be achieved far more cheaply by reviving, resourcing and actually holding elections for local governments.

Here, the political parties also share blame. They have spent decades hollowing out the LG system and alienating the citizenry. Any party that is unwilling to empower even a district council should not be arguing that the province is the only unit that matters. Therefore, though the LG system remains a less politically toxic option, it will only be considered an option if the political parties themselves make a renewed commitment to it. This is something they, too, must understand.

Pitfalls of referendum

No move to restructure governance should be separated from the democratic process.

Zahid Hussain

THE plot thickens. What the ubiquitous interior minister said makes at least one thing clear: restructuring the existing administrative framework is inevitable. It was apparent that he was not voicing the view of the civilian dispensation but that of the powers that be. “New administrative units will have to be created. No one can stop it,” he declared. There was also a clear hint that a referendum might be held to determine the “will of the people” on the issue.

Mohsin Naqvi, a man of all seasons, appears to have been handed yet another political project — added to a portfolio that already ranges from overseeing internal security to running cricket affairs and occasional diplomatic troubleshooting. What makes him so powerful is that he answers to neither the prime minister nor parliament. His new assignment, however, looks exceptionally challenging. The proposed ‘administrative restructuring’ plan — its contours still unclear — has generated a political maelstrom that threatens the existing political order.

It has not only divided the federal cabinet but also ruptured the ruling alliance. The PPP has already launched a campaign against any attempt to divide Sindh under the pretext of administrative restructuring. A strongly

worded resolution against the plan, passed by the Sindh Assembly last week, offers some insight into the volatility of the situation in the country’s second-largest province. The brewing conflict between the province and the federal government has now exploded, threatening to bring down the present political set-up. The rupture is hard to mend.

More intriguing, however, is the response of the prime minister and the ruling PML-N on the proposed administrative restructuring — said to be floated by the establishment. While there is no word from the PM, the differing voices from the PML-N and other cabinet ministers on the proposed plan presented by the interior minister make the entire issue extremely complicated. It is a house divided on a proposed plan whose framework remains obscure.

There seems to be complete confusion in the ranks of the ruling party. While some PML-N cabinet members and party officials appear supportive of the administrative restructuring, the party’s top leadership has maintained a conspicuous silence over the proposed plan. A big question also hangs over whether the PML-N leadership is prepared to support a plan to divide Punjab — its main power base.

Matters are getting murkier, with the establishment appearing adamant to go ahead with its plan

with or without political support, as Naqvi has warned. With its governments in Islamabad and Lahore fully dependent on the establishment’s support for survival, the PML-N has no choice but to toe the line.

As for the PTI — the main opposition party, arguably the most popular in the country, which also governs the troubled province of KP — it may not oppose administrative restructuring on principle, but it will not support any imposed plan. With its mandate stolen and its leaders imprisoned, one cannot expect the party to accept any proposal that would strengthen the establishment’s control.

In this scenario, it will be extremely hard for the establishment to push through a plan requiring a two-thirds majority in both parliament and the provincial assemblies, as the Constitution demands. Even a constitutional amendment would need a two-thirds majority in both Houses, and with the PPP refusing to come on board, things could get messier.

Yet it seems the powers that be are not willing to back down. Their only choice, then, would be to go for a referendum, as Naqvi has hinted. With the PML-N and other coalition partners on board, it may not be difficult to get a referendum resolution passed by parliament with a simple majority.

Pakistan has a history of referendums being used by military dictators in an attempt to legitimise their unconstitutional rule. Who can forget the infamous referendum held by Gen Ziaul Haq to perpetuate his illegitimate government? Interestingly, the question was not whether Zia should stay as president, but whether voters would like an Islamic system to be established — a ‘yes’ vote was to count as validation of Ziaul Haq as president. Ballot boxes were stuffed to cover up the thin turnout, and the mockery further exposed the illegitimacy of military rule.

Gen Pervez Musharraf held a similar referendum to legitimise his rule, though there it directly asked voters to approve his presidency. While turnout remained low, the official statement declared massive support for the military ruler. Will the present dispensation resort to the same kind of fraudulent exercise to carry out its so-called restructuring plan? There is also a strong apprehension that a referendum could be used to enshrine a constitutional role for the security establishment in the power structure — a recent bill passed by parliament has only reinforced that speculation.

There are no two views that the country needs major restructuring to improve governance, but it cannot be separated from the

democratic process. In a situation where the legitimacy of the entire system is questionable, no measure, however feasible it may sound, can be acceptable. Indeed, devolution to the lower tier of local government is essential if the system is to deliver, but in the absence of democracy, any administrative restructuring would likely strengthen authoritarian rule. No referendum can confer legitimacy on an imposed administrative structure. The proposal, though still unclear, has already polarised the country, and any referendum will only intensify chaos and instability.

The best thing for the country is to hold free and fair elections and let an elected parliament decide on the critical issues of administrative restructuring and devolution of power to local governments. The present establishment-backed rule, with its questionable mandate, cannot be expected to bring democracy to the grassroots. The lessons of the past must not be forgotten — of authoritarian regimes that tried to strengthen their control in the name of reform. A reminder to the interior minister who referred to Zohran Mamdani and Sadiq Khan: the two mayors are the products of democracy, and no leader like them can emerge under semi-authoritarian rule.

The writer is an author and journalist.

Hidden barriers

Family planning programmes must be designed around the woman’s complete journey.

Naween A. Mangi

PAKISTAN is the fifth most populous country in the world. Nearly seven million babies are born in Pakistan each year — approximately 19,000 every day. The urgency of family planning is difficult to exaggerate. Yet the scale of the crisis can tempt us into believing that the solution is simple: create awareness, provide contraceptives and persuade couples to have fewer children. The reality in Pakistan is far more complicated.

When my organisation began facilitating family planning services in villages in Larkana district, we initially referred women to a government reproductive health services centre in Larkana city. There, they could receive contraceptives or undergo tubal ligation, a permanent method commonly described as having one’s ‘tubes tied’. The services were free. At one stage, women were even offered a few hundred rupees as an incentive to undergo tubal ligation. On paper, the system appeared accessible. In practice, getting through it could become a test of endurance.

A woman would travel from her village to Larkana, only to be told that she first needed a medical test. She would have it done and return a week later. This time, she might be told that the doctor was absent and she should come again. On her next visit, there could be another administrative or medical impediment. For a middle-class urban patient, a postponed appointment is an inconvenience.

For a poor rural woman, it may end the process altogether. Every visit requires transport money, permission or cooperation from her family, arrangements for the children left at home and the sacrifice of an entire working day. She may need someone to accompany her. If she or her husband is a daily-wage worker, the household also loses income.

We then changed our approach. Instead of referring women and expecting them to negotiate the system themselves, we began taking them through the process. Our team picks up the

woman from her village in our vehicle and takes her to the facility. We handle documentation and consultation so that the procedure appears less daunting and is completed that day. We also provide nutritional support and take her back home. A team member visits the following day to check on her recovery and ensure that she receives the pain relief, antibiotics or other medicines prescribed by the doctor. Further visits are made for wound care and the removal of sutures.

This is what access actually looks like in a rural setting. The procedure may be free, but reaching it is not. Someone must bridge the distance between the village and the hospital, help the woman navigate the institution and remain responsible for her aftercare. We were once told that the Population Welfare Department had vehicles available to transport women. Yet that arrangement never worked reliably for our patients. We were told the vehicle has been deployed elsewhere, needs repair or will only come if several women meet at one location. A vehicle listed in a departmental inventory is meaningless if a woman cannot depend upon it on the day she needs it.

Transport and bureaucracy, however, are only part of the difficulty. The deeper barriers are social. We encountered cases in which doctors refused to perform tubal ligations on women who had no sons, only one son, or a son younger than 10. When questioned, the doctors described cases in which a woman underwent sterilisation and later lost her only son to illness or an accident. Her family then expected her to produce another boy. If she could no longer conceive, her husband might marry again, diminishing her status and security within the household. Some women later returned, desperate to have the sterilisation reversed. Reversal is complex, expensive, available only at specialised centres and does not guarantee that fertility will be restored.

These concerns reveal the cruel consequences of son preference and women’s dependence within marriage. But they also raise a difficult question: should a doctor protect a woman from

a possible future injustice by denying her control over her body today? Surely, the answer cannot be a blanket refusal based on the number or ages of her sons.

The appropriate response is careful, private and informed counselling. A woman should understand that tubal ligation is intended to be permanent. She should also receive information about long-acting reversible methods. Community health workers and doctors must ensure that her decision is voluntary and free from pressure. Once an adult woman understands the implications and gives informed consent, her reproductive choice should not depend upon whether she has produced a son.

Modern contraceptive use among married Pakistani women remains low, while around one in six has an unmet need for family planning. Distance, cost, unreliable services, the need for permission or accompaniment and limited decision-making power all reduce contraceptive uptake.

We will not overcome these barriers through awareness campaigns alone. Family planning programmes must be designed around the woman’s complete journey. Who will counsel her in terms she understands? Who will take her to the hospital? Who will ensure that the doctor is present, the tests are completed and her chosen method is available? Who will bring her home and respond if she develops a complication? Unless these questions have reliable answers, we do not have a functioning family planning programme. We have services on paper and women stranded many miles away from them.

Pakistan’s population challenge is urgent. But urgency must not produce coercion or an assembly-line approach to women’s bodies. The last mile of family planning is covered only when a woman can make an informed choice, reach dependable care and return home safely. Until we build that bridge, we should not be surprised when women fail to cross it.

The writer is a rural development specialist, writer and social entrepreneur.

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Feeling Tired? New Study Says You Might Need More of These 2 Nutrients

Good news: There are plenty of ways to add them to your dinner routine this week.

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is a long-term, debilitating illness that can have some devastating effects on quality of life, including missed work days, digestive and sleep issues and muscle or joint pain.¹ It can negatively affect mood, your ability to think and relationships—and may result in expensive medical bills while trying to find a diagnosis. That's because there is no specific test for CFS.

But you don't need an official diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome to experience long-term underlying fatigue. If you feel like you're dragging most of the time, you're not alone. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 14% of U.S. adults say they have felt very tired or exhausted on most days or every day of the week for the past three months.³

While there can be many reasons for feeling chronically fatigued, researchers in Japan took a nutritional approach to the condition, assessing blood levels of nutrients in 602 participants (204 men and 398 women).⁴ They found that two nutrients, in particular, align most with fatigue. Let's break down what they discovered.

How Was This Study Conducted?

Participants provided blood samples and completed fatigue assessment questionnaires that measured the intensity of both fatigue and motivation, as well as a questionnaire measuring psychological distress. In addition, questionnaires on lifestyle, height, weight, medical history and supplement and medication use were completed. The lifestyle assessment included questions on sleep, work, exercise and dietary habits.

The bloodwork focused especially on homocysteine levels and levels of vitamin B12 and folate. They chose these vitamins because they've been shown to influence blood levels of homocysteine—as levels of vitamin B12 and folate decrease, homocysteine levels tend to go up.

Homocysteine is a type of amino acid, a building block used to make protein in our bodies. When you have adequate levels of vitamin B12 and folate, homocysteine levels are low. But when you're lacking these nutrients, homocysteine levels rise. This can damage arteries and increase the risk of blood clots, which in turn increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Too much homocysteine may also cause anemia, a condition in which your body doesn't produce enough red blood cells.⁵ When your body is lacking red blood cells, fatigue persists. And while low iron intake is connected to certain types of anemia, so are low levels of vitamin B12.

What Did This Study Find?

Researchers ran statistical analyses to see if there were associations between homocysteine levels, fatigue and motivational outcomes. They looked at male and female results together, as well as separately, as homocysteine levels are known to differ according to sex. They also grouped results into three tertiles according to homocysteine levels, with tertile 1 (T1) being the lowest levels of homocysteine and tertile 3 (T3) being the highest.

Researchers found that participants with higher homocysteine levels generally had lower levels of vitamin B12 and folate, regardless of sex.

When sex and factors that could potentially influence fatigue—including age, eating habits, sleep duration and workload—were taken into consideration, the results suggested that women with elevated homocysteine levels had less motivation, whereas men with higher homocysteine levels were more likely to report greater physical fatigue.

How Does This Apply to Real Life?

Homocysteine levels have long been studied as a potential risk factor for cardiovascular disease.⁶ But this study offers more information about how homocysteine may be associated

with fatigue and motivation—and how these associations relate to vitamin B12 and folate. If you've been struggling with a lack of motivation or feeling fatigue, consider seeing a health care provider to get your blood levels of B vitamins and homocysteine checked.

Adults need at least 400 micrograms (mcg) of folate per day, while pregnant or lactating women require 500 to 600 mcg per day.⁷ Foods that are rich in folate include leafy greens, legumes, fruits (including avocado, oranges and papaya), vegetables (like asparagus and seaweed) and fortified foods (cereal and bread).

Vitamin B12 is naturally found almost exclusively in animal-based foods, including meat, poultry, eggs, dairy and seafood. Nutritional yeast, fortified cereals and plant-based milks are vegetarian- and vegan-appropriate sources of vitamin B12. Adults need 2.4 mcg of this vitamin per day. If you're pregnant or lactating, the recommended amount increases to 2.6 mcg and 2.8 mcg, respectively.⁸

If you're not sure if you're eating enough of these B vitamins, consider having bloodwork done or consulting with a registered dietitian, who can help you assess your diet and integrate more foods rich in folate and vitamin B12. Whether you choose to work with a dietitian or not, try out our 7-Day No-Sugar High-Protein Meal Plan for More Energy. It's loaded with fatigue-busting recipes that will fuel you with the energy you need to conquer your day.

Other lifestyle factors may also influence

fatigue, starting with doing what you can to consistently get a restful night's sleep. Create a sleeping sanctuary in your bedroom, limiting the amount of light coming into it at night and keeping your temperature on the cooler side. Moving your body often and reducing stress levels can also play pivotal roles in banishing fatigue.⁹ Choose physical activities you enjoy and will stick to, and get up and move more often throughout the day, even if it's just to walk around your house or workplace.

Our Expert Take

This study suggests that homocysteine levels may be related to subjective ratings of fatigue and motivation—the higher the homocysteine, the higher the fatigue and the lower the motivation. In addition, vitamin

B12 and folate levels have been linked with homocysteine levels, with higher homocysteine being related to lower levels of these B vitamins. If you feel you're constantly dragging and lacking energy and motivation, consider having your homocysteine and B vitamin levels checked. A registered dietitian can help you incorporate the foods you need and help you decide if supplementing is warranted.



What Happens to Your Blood Sugar When You Eat Fruit

You don't need to give up fruit to improve your blood sugar management.

When it comes to managing your blood sugar, fruit has stirred up an online debate. Some armchair experts claim that fruit is “bad” because your blood sugar goes up when you eat it. But that doesn’t mean you need to give up fruit! It’s actually normal for your blood sugar to fluctuate during the day, whether you have diabetes or not. The goal isn’t to avoid any food that raises your blood sugar but rather to prioritize foods (and fruits) that will have a gentler impact on blood sugar.

To clear up any confusion about fruit and your blood sugar, we asked dietitians to share their thoughts as well as tips on how to enjoy fruit while keeping your blood sugar in check.

How Fruit Impacts Blood Sugar

It Can Raise Your Blood Sugar

“Fruit contains natural sugar, so it can raise blood sugar, but differently than foods or drinks with added sugar,” says Kaitlin Hippley, M.Ed., RDN, CDCES. “The fiber, water and plant compounds in whole fruit help slow digestion, leading to a more gradual rise in blood sugar compared to sugary beverages or sweets,” she adds.¹ That low and slow rise in blood sugar is ideal since dramatic swings in blood sugar can be taxing on your body.

Even though fruit has a less significant impact on blood sugar compared to other carbohydrate-rich foods, portion size still matters. “Too much fruit at one sitting, even with fiber, can increase the carbohydrate load and spike blood sugar in those with insulin resistance and diabetes,” says Erin Palinski-Wade, RD, CDCES. Think of it this way: the bigger the portion, the bigger the potential impact on your blood sugar.

The Fiber Helps Prevent Blood Sugar Spikes

The fiber in fruit plays an important role in regulating blood sugar levels. “[Fiber] slows stomach emptying and helps reduce how quickly sugars are absorbed, which can flatten the post-meal glucose curve,” explains Palinski-Wade.² “This is why whole fruit tends to be much better for blood sugar than juice. When you remove the fiber matrix, the natural sugars are absorbed much faster,” she adds.

But here’s the thing: not all fruit contains the same amount of fiber, so the overall impact on your blood sugar can vary. Research suggests that the carbohydrate-to-fiber ratio is a better predictor of a fruit’s impact on your blood sugar than total carbohydrates alone.¹ For example, watermelon has a high carbohydrate-to-fiber ratio, so it may cause a greater rise in your blood sugar than raspberries, which have a much lower ratio. Opt for higher-fiber fruits like berries, passion fruit, kiwi, pears and pomegranate more often or incorporate fruit into meals rather than as a standalone snack.

It Provides Antioxidants That May Improve Insulin Sensitivity

Eating the rainbow is easy when you include plenty of fruit in your diet. Those vibrant hues aren’t just pretty to look at; they’re also a good indicator of the polyphenol concentration—i.e., plant-based compounds that offer health benefits. “These plant compounds may help slow carbohydrate digestion and reduce the size of a blood sugar spike,” says Palinski-Wade.

Research suggests that the benefits of fruit extend beyond an hour or two after eating it. Those helpful plant compounds may also improve long-term insulin sensitivity, a key factor in blood sugar regulation.⁴ In fact, consuming plenty of polyphenol-rich foods like fruit is associated with a lower risk of developing diabetes.⁴

How to Eat Fruit to Support Blood Sugar

Pair fruit with protein and fat. “Pairing fruit with a source of protein and/or healthy fat can help reduce blood sugar spikes compared to eating fruit alone,” says Kimberley Francis, RD, CDCES. She suggests pairing fruit with foods like Greek-style yogurt, cottage cheese or nuts to support steady blood sugar levels.

Prioritize eating whole fruit. Foods like apples, kiwis and nectarines all contain valuable fiber and antioxidants in their skin. Peeling them would mean missing out on valuable nutrition. “Whole fruits with edible skins and seeds tend to have a gentler effect on blood sugar because the fiber slows how quickly glucose enters the bloodstream,” Hippley adds.

Spread out your servings. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend 1 ½ to 2 ½ servings of fruit per day (~1 cup per

serving). Ideally, your fruit consumption should be spread out over your meals or snacks rather than eating multiple servings in one sitting.

Our Expert Take

You don’t need to give up fruit to improve your blood sugar management. “Whole fruit can absolutely fit into a blood sugar-friendly diet. The key is choosing fruit in its whole form, keeping portions reasonable, and balancing it within the meal,” says Palinski-Wade. The fiber and antioxidants found in fruit play a role in mitigating its impact on blood sugar levels compared to other carbohydrate foods. In fact, there’s plenty of evidence to suggest that fruit doesn’t inherently have a negative impact on diabetes and may even improve blood sugar management in the long term. For those with diabetes, talk to your health care provider about the best way to incorporate fruit into your rou-

tine.

Houston Veterans Salute Pakistan's Defence Day with Families and Friends

Pak Veterans Association Houston brought together military veterans, families, community leaders and distinguished guests in Sugar Land to commemorate Pakistan Defence Day with an evening of fellowship, community spirit and dinner.



How You Exercise May Decrease Your Dementia Risk, New Study Says

Researchers dug into several studies—here's what they found.

We've long been told that physical activity is good for your brain. And while that's certainly true, a major new study suggests that where and why you exercise may be just as essential as how much you do it.¹

A new meta-analysis published in The Lancet Public Health analyzed data from 74 studies and more than 4.2 million adults and found that leisure-time physical activity was associated with a 24% lower risk of dementia, while physical activity at work was linked to a 20% higher risk.² Here's what the researchers found and what it means for your brain health.

How Was the Study Conducted?

Researchers at the University of Southern California led a systematic review and meta-analysis of 74 cohort and case-control studies covering 4,227,297 participants across 30 countries, followed for a median of 10 years. Participants ranged in age from 45 to 93.²

The research team looked to determine whether dementia risk differed depending on the context—or domain, as the researchers called them—in which physical activity occurred. The four domains examined were leisure-time activity (recreational exercise like walking, swimming or going to the gym), occupational activity (physical labor at work), household activity (such as cleaning or cooking) and active commuting (walking or cycling to work). Researchers tracked outcomes of all-cause dementia, Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.²

Feter N, Iso-Markku P, Markarian T, et al. Domain-specific physical activity levels and risk of dementia: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Lancet Public Health. 2026;11(9):e650-e664. doi:10.1016/S2468-2667(26)00142-8

What Did the Study Find?

Overall, higher physical activity was associated with a 20% lower risk of all-cause dementia, a 21% lower risk of Alzheimer's disease and a 29% lower risk of vascular dementia.

But when results were broken down by domain, they found

the following differences among domains:²

- Leisure-time physical activity: 24% lower dementia risk
- Household physical activity: 15% lower risk—though this came from only one study
- Active commuting: 10% higher risk—based on two studies
- Occupational physical activity: 20% higher risk—based on five studies

The researchers found that not all movement is equal when it comes to lowering dementia risk. They dubbed this the “physical activity paradox,” a pattern already well established in cardiovascular research, where occupational activity consistently fails to deliver the same benefits as recreational exercise and can sometimes increase risk.

As to why this would be the case, researchers hypothesize that workplace physical activity tends to be repetitive, low-autonomy and performed without adequate recovery. Additionally, workers in physically demanding jobs may also be more likely to face lower socioeconomic status, workplace hazards, chronic stress and limited health care access, all of which can increase dementia risk.

Limitations

All of the included studies were observational, so these findings reflect associations rather than proof of causation. The occupational activity finding is challenging to separate from the socioeconomic factors that cluster around demanding physical work. The household and commuting findings were also founded on very few studies. Reverse causation is another concern, where people in the early, preclinical stages of dementia may naturally reduce activity before diagnosis, which could potentially distort the observed associations.²

How Does This Apply to Real Life?

Regularly engaging in recreational physical activity that you choose to do and enjoy doing is the best type of exercise for your brain health. Examples of this include walks after dinner, gym classes, swimming, dancing or gardening for pleasure.

“When it comes to protecting the brain, the context of physical activity may matter just as much as movement itself,” lead study author David Raichlen, Ph.D., said in a statement. “Improving access to safe parks, walking trails and recreational facilities, ensuring people have adequate leisure time for exercise, and reducing harmful workplace exposures may ultimately prove as important as promoting physical activity itself.”

Here are some other research-backed ways to improve your brain health and lower dementia risk with recreational physical activity:

A 20- to 30-minute brisk walk after work or dinner, as brisk walking is linked to lower dementia risk.

Activities that combine movement with social connection, such as group fitness, recreational sports or hiking with friends, may provide additional brain-health benefits.

Household activities done for enjoyment, like gardening or active home projects, may offer some brain-health benefits.

Our Expert Take

A new meta-analysis of 74 studies including more than 4.2 million adults found that not all physical activity protects the brain equally. Leisure-time exercise was linked to a 24% lower dementia risk, while occupational activity was linked to a 20% higher risk. For better brain health, the type of physical activity you choose for yourself appears to offer more cognitive benefits than workplace-related physical activity.



Trump's fortune climbs as his approval sinks and Americans pay more

Continued from front page

between the president's private financial interests and the economic pressures squeezing millions of Americans.

Forbes estimated Trump's net worth at roughly \$6.5 billion in March, built on cryptocurrency, branded products, and his Truth Social platform, and he reported generating \$2.2 billion through his business interests in 2025.

Trump has dismissed scrutiny as politically motivated, claiming his financial gains benefit the country rather than himself and that he had made "hundreds of billions of dollars" through stocks for the United States — a figure that appears to be a substantial exaggeration, referring in part to the rising value of the government's 9.9 percent stake in Intel.

For Americans facing higher electricity, grocery, and housing costs, gains in a government stock portfolio can seem remote from daily life.

The scale of Trump's own trading has drawn ethics scrutiny: his latest disclosure shows more than 1,000 equity trades in June alone, unusual for a sitting president, and a report from congressional Democrats found his oil-and-gas holdings rose nearly \$16 million as a result of the war with Iran — even as his policies directly shape those industries' fortunes.

Legislation to restrict stock trading by members of Congress has advanced, but pointedly does not cover the president or vice president.

The political contrast is stark.

An FT poll put Trump's approval at 33 percent, a new low in that survey, though 72 percent of Republicans still approve — down from 82 percent in May but evidence of a durable base.

The deeper tension is plain: rising stock valuations do not lower the cost of food, housing, or health care, and as Trump's wealth grows while his approval sinks, more Americans may ask who his presidency is actually enriching.

US faith leaders regret appearing at Hindu nationalist RSS event

Continued from front page

Muslim faith leaders in New York say they were misled into participating in events featuring the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, the patron organization of a vast network of Hindu nationalist groups.

The controversy erupted after RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat appeared at an Aug. 29 gathering at Madison Square Garden attended by thousands of people.

The Rev. Adriene Thorne, senior minister of New York's historic Riverside Church, said she had been led to believe she was participating in an interfaith event devoted to peace, human dignity and cooperation among religions.

Instead, she found herself sharing a platform with Bhagwat.

"My presence there was a mis-

take," Thorne said in a video statement posted on Instagram.

She said organizers had withheld crucial information about who was behind the event and whom it was intended to honor.

"I was never told that Mohan Bhagwat would be the central figure at the Madison Square Garden event," Thorne said. "I was never told the RSS was involved."

Thorne said she received repeated invitations over six weeks from a group calling itself the World Council of Religious Leaders. The organizers described a gathering bringing together nearly 200 representatives of different religious traditions.

But, according to Thorne, the program provided to participants left the name of the "guest of honor" blank. She later discovered that the space had been reserved for Bhagwat.

"Had I known the event centered on the leader of the RSS, I would never have participated," she said.

Thorne said her appearance created the false impression that she or Riverside Church endorsed Bhagwat, the RSS or the Hindu nationalist ideology associated with the organization.

For Riverside Church, the controversy is particularly sensitive. The Manhattan church has a long history of involvement in civil rights, anti-war campaigns and social justice movements.

Thorne said its values were fundamentally at odds with religious supremacy.

"I reject Hindu supremacy just as I reject Christian supremacy, Muslim supremacy, Jewish supremacy, racism, and every ideology that elevates one community over another," she said.

She also expressed solidarity with Indians who have faced discrimination because of religion, caste or identity.

"I stand with all those in India who have experienced violence or discrimination because of their religion, caste or identity," she said.

Muslim imam says he felt 'betrayed'

Thorne was not the only American religious leader who said organizers had failed to disclose the nature of the gathering.

Imam Shamsi Ali, director of the Jamaica Muslim Center in Queens and a prominent Muslim interfaith leader, attended a related breakfast at The Pierre hotel in Manhattan.

He later described his participation as a "serious error in judgment."

"I feel kind of betrayed," Ali told The New York Times.

Significantly, the newspaper independently examined communications between organizers and the religious leaders.

The Times reported that it reviewed a dozen emails sent to faith leaders during July and August and found that the organizers made no mention of either the RSS or Bhagwat.

Ali said he had understood that he was being invited to an interfaith gathering built around the theme "One World, One Humanity."

He said he would have declined immediately had he known the gathering was intended to honor the RSS chief.

After attending the breakfast and learning more about the event, Ali did not participate in the Madison Square Garden program.

The controversy has therefore raised a larger question: whether respected American Christian, Muslim and other religious leaders were brought into the events without adequate disclosure, and whether their presence could subsequently be portrayed as interfaith acceptance of the RSS.

Thorne said she confronted Bawa Jain, the interfaith organizer who had repeatedly invited her, after discovering who Bhagwat was and why the gathering had been organized.

According to Thorne, Jain told her Bhagwat's identity could not be disclosed beforehand because of security concerns.

She rejected that explanation.

"That's not a reason to hoodwink people," Thorne told The New York Times.

Jain, secretary general of the World Council of Religious Leaders, told the newspaper that he regretted that the faith leaders felt misled.

But he did not apologize for honoring Bhagwat.

Jain said Hindu organizations had approached him the previous year about the RSS centenary and Bhagwat's planned visit.

What is RSS?

For many Americans, the three letters RSS carry little meaning. In India, however, the organization has exercised enormous political and social influence for decades.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, whose name is commonly translated as National Volunteer Organization, was established in 1925.

It describes itself as a cultural and volunteer movement dedicated to organizing Hindu society and promoting discipline, social service and Indian national unity.

But the RSS is also the principal ideological and organizational force behind the Sangh Parivar, meaning the "family" of Hindu nationalist organizations.

In that sense, the RSS functions as the patron and ideological parent of a wide range of Hindu nationalist groups active in Indian politics, religion, education, labor, student organizing and social movements.

These include organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or World Hindu Council, the Bajrang Dal youth organization and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad student movement.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, or BJP, which governs India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has deep historical and organizational links with the RSS. Modi himself spent years as a full-time RSS organizer before moving into electoral politics.

At the heart of the movement is an ideology known as Hindutva, literally meaning "Hinduness."

For an American audience, an important distinction is necessary.

Hindutva is a political nationalist ideology. It seeks to define Indian national identity primarily through Hindu civilization and culture and relegates Muslims, Christians and other religious minorities to a subordinate position.

The RSS disputes descriptions of itself as supremacist. Bhagwat has repeatedly emphasized social harmony and has publicly spoken of respecting religious diversity.

But observers say such language contrasts with the record of the wider Hindu nationalist movement in India.

The RSS and its affiliated organizations have repeatedly targeted and fanned hostility against Muslims and Christians.

Human Rights Watch has documented violence against Christians involving organizations within the Sangh Parivar and has described the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal as closely connected components of the Hindu nationalist movement.

The broader movement has also been scrutinized over episodes of Hindu-Muslim communal violence.

One of the most consequential was the campaign to build a Hindu temple at the site of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya.

Hindu nationalist activists demolished the 16th-century mosque in December 1992, triggering communal violence across India. The political campaign surrounding the site helped transform the BJP from a relatively marginal party into a major national political force.

A decade later, Gujarat witnessed another devastating outbreak of communal violence in 2002, which killed more than 2,000 Muslims.

Modi was chief minister of Gujarat at the time. Human rights organizations and scholars have continued to document the role of Hindu nationalist activists in attacks against Muslims during the violence under his supervision.

Gandhi assassination and the RSS ban

India's freedom icon Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was assassinated in January 1948 by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist who had been associated with the RSS. The Indian government then temporarily banned the organization.

The New York Times, in its report on the New York controversy, described the RSS as one of the world's largest far-right organizations and noted its history of seeking to reshape India into a Hindu-first nation.

Historians have accused Hindu nationalist governments and institutions of promoting a Hindu-centered account of India's past while diminishing the contributions of Muslims and other communities.

Oxford University Press academic research describes how Hindu nationalist interpretations have moved through RSS-linked schools and institutions and subsequently entered official curricula and textbooks.

The debate intensified after the BJP returned to national power under Modi in 2014.

India's National Council of Educational Research and Training, or NCERT, has removed or reduced material dealing with Mughal rulers, the 2002 Gujarat riots and Gandhi's opposition to Hindu majoritarianism.

These changes fit a longer effort by Hindu nationalist organizations to reinterpret India as fundamentally a Hindu civilization rather than the product of centuries of interaction among Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and other traditions.

Academic research has traced the development of this Hindu-centered interpretation through RSS educational networks and into official textbooks.

An Indian Express investigation also documented the removal of sub-

stantial textbook material dealing with the Gujarat riots and other politically sensitive episodes.

Protesters outside Madison Square

The event had generated opposition even before Thorne and Ali publicly expressed regret.

About 100 demonstrators from different religious and ethnic backgrounds gathered outside Madison Square Garden, according to The New York Times.

Hindu, Muslim and Sikh protesters carried signs opposing Hindutva and accusing the RSS of promoting fascism. Some demonstrators chanted "RSS out of NYC."

The Indian American Muslim Council and allied organizations had held a news conference before Bhagwat's appearance to oppose the gathering.

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani also publicly criticized the event.

The Rev. Winnie Varghese, dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Manhattan, attended the breakfast gathering.

But after leaving the hotel, she went to Madison Square Garden not to join Bhagwat's event, but to protest outside it.

Varghese told The New York Times that interfaith spaces can be difficult to navigate because religious leaders may not always know who is behind an invitation.

"It's very, very hard to vet these things, period," she said.

The episode therefore poses questions that go beyond Indian politics.

American churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and interfaith organizations routinely participate in events intended to encourage dialogue across religious and political divides.

Such engagement depends heavily on trust.

Religious leaders need to know who is organizing an event, who will share the platform with them and how their presence, statements and photographs may subsequently be used.

When those details are withheld, an invitation presented as interfaith dialogue can become political endorsement by association.

Thorne said she is particularly troubled that photographs of her appearance may continue circulating long after her explanation.

She stressed that Riverside Church's history is rooted in pluralism, racial justice, peace and solidarity with marginalized communities.

She also directed her message beyond New York to communities in India that have experienced discrimination.

"I stand with all those in India who have experienced violence or discrimination because of their religion, caste or identity," she said.

And she said the lesson from the episode was clear.

"My presence should not have happened. I was misled," Thorne said.

"I will not allow my ministry or the name of Riverside Church to be used to legitimize any ideology that violates our deepest values."

For Thorne and Ali, what had been presented as a gathering celebrating "One World, One Humanity" has instead become a warning to American interfaith leaders about the politics that can lie behind invitations framed in the language of religious unity.

Texas aims to crack down on alleged birth tourism, as Trump's executive order hits legal barrier

Continued from front page

Donald Trump to do the same nationwide. A federal judge temporarily blocked Trump's August executive order banning the practice last week.

The ruling last Wednesday marked the latest defeat for Trump's efforts to curtail or restrict the Citizenship Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which grants U.S. citizenship to virtually anyone born in the United States, regardless of the legal status of the parents.

Trump signed an executive order on the first day of his second term denying automatic U.S. citizenship to anyone whose parents were in the United States illegally. On June 30, the final day of its 2025-26 term, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the definition of birthright citizenship as defined in the Fourteenth Amendment, ruling 6-3 that Trump's order was unconstitutional.

Trump responded by issuing a new pair of executive orders in August. One of these ordered the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take steps to revoke the visas of any noncitizens coming to the U.S. for the purposes of giving birth and gaining U.S. citizenship for their children, as well as to permanently bar such noncitizens from entering the U.S.

"What the Supreme Court said is if you're born on U.S. soil, you're presumptively a citizen unless there's some sort of a fiction, some reason why you're not actually here," said Josh Blackman, a professor of constitutional law at South Texas College of Law Houston. "I think what Trump [was] arguing in this order is that if there's allegations of fraud, that is you didn't come here under the right circumstances, it's as if you were really never here ... I don't see that that clearly follows from the Supreme Court's opinion."

Judge Deborah Boardman of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland agreed. Boardman wrote in her decision, issued last Wednesday, that the Supreme Court's June ruling meant that Trump's August executive order "is almost certainly unconstitutional."

"The administration talked so much about birth tourism in their larger attempt to change to birthright citizenship that there are probably some voters who are thinking, 'Well, why aren't we seeing more action on this front?,'" said Julia Gelatt, associate director of the U.S. program at the Migration Policy Institute. "I think we may be seeing the administration trying to satisfy the people who they had sort of activated on the issue."

Gelatt said that the prospect of birthright citizenship being abused, particularly by private companies bringing in alleged birth tourists to make a profit, is something about which U.S. citizens have a right to be concerned. But she also said it's important not to exaggerate the extent of the problem.

"It's a pretty small phenomenon," Gelatt said. "Less than 1% of U.S. births annually can be attributed to birth tourism. There are already policies in place that lead to higher scrutiny of travelers who may be coming while pregnant."

Houston immigration attorney Gordon Quan agreed. He said that even without new action from the Trump

administration, U.S. consuls around the world already have wide latitude to prevent people from entering the U.S. for purposes of giving birth.

"It's not easy for anybody to get a visa," Quan said. "Millions of people every year are denied visas arbitrarily. The consul has total authority to give a visa or not. They don't like the clothes you're wearing. They don't like an answer you give. It's a selective process."

How Texas Republican leaders are responding

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton didn't wait for the Supreme Court to issue its ruling on Trump's original birthright citizenship order before making his first move to crack down on alleged birth tourism. In late April, during his primary runoff to capture the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate from incumbent Sen. John Cornyn, Paxton filed a lawsuit against the Houston-area De'Ai Postpartum Care Center — alleging the facility operated as a maternity hotel.

Paxton charged the center and its proprietors had violated a number of Texas laws in order to encourage Chinese nationals to come to the United States for the purposes of earning citizenship for their children. Those charges included conspiracy, unlawful concealment and harboring in violation of federal law, as well as violations of the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act.

America is for Americans, not foreigners trying to cheat the system to claim citizenship," Paxton said in a press release in April. "The Center's scheme not only facilitated an invasion of Texas, but it also involved shielding and facilitating violations of immigration law. Birthright citizenship is a scam that threatens national security, and I will do everything in my power to stop unlawful 'birth tourism' schemes like this one."

De'Ai's attorney, Eric Nichols, declined to be interviewed for this story. But according to court documents, the defendants deny all allegations in the suit.

Immigration attorney Gordon Quan said he doesn't think much of the state's case.

"There's this idea of anchor babies, the people coming in just to have a child, so the parents can get their green cards," Quan said. "Just because you have a child born in the United States doesn't mean that you're allowed to stay. That child cannot sponsor you until they're 21, and if you accrue unlawful presence, you have a 10-year bar to go back out of the country before you can come in."

Paxton is seeking an injunction to shut down the De'Ai Postpartum Care Center, which he said facilitates up to 20 births per day at locations in Houston, Sugar Land, Richmond, and Rosenberg. The next hearing in the case is scheduled to take place in Fort Bend County later this month.

The next moves came almost immediately after the Supreme Court issued its decision on birthright citizenship. State Rep. Brian Harrison, R-Midlothian, issued a call on social media for Gov. Greg Abbott to call a special session of the Texas Legislature to make birth tourism a state felony.

Abbott demurred, but a few days later, he directed the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HSSC) to open an investigation into the Mission Regional Medical Center in the Rio Grande Valley for allegedly promoting birth tourism packages aimed at Mexican nationals.

"Birth tourism is an illegal practice that exploits the extraordinary hospitality that the United States and Texas offer to millions of foreign travelers each year," Abbott said in a press release in July. "Thousands of foreign travelers come to the United States under false pretenses to give birth and secure citizenship for their children. HHSC must investigate the hospital, a facility it regulates, for any violations of state law and contractual obligations."

Paxton soon ordered his own investigation into Mission Regional Medical Center, as well as another health care provider in south Texas, Knapp Medical Center. Knapp did not respond to a request for comment, but Mission Regional did.

"We recognize that a very limited marketing campaign may have caused unintended misunderstanding and was immediately discontinued," a spokesperson for Mission Regional said in a statement. "The very limited campaign consisted of only two billboards located near the hospital and a website that generated very little patient volume, produced no financial benefit to the hospital, and was only intended as a service for the community, which is one of the most medically underserved regions of Texas, where approximately 30% of residents are uninsured and access to maternity care continues to decline."

Three weeks after the Supreme Court's decision, Abbott issued his own executive order.

"What I decided to do was to make sure that any agency in the state of Texas involved in whatsoever in providing licensing to any healthcare provider, they must be investigated to determine whether or not they are involved in in birth tourism, and if so take action against them, including what I call the death penalty for a business and that is to pull their license so they would not be able to operate," Abbott told Fox News.

Abbott said Texas would be working hand-in-hand with the Trump administration to crack down on the practice of birth tourism, reporting all the findings of its investigations to the U.S. Department of Justice.

The laws on the books

Lying about one's reason for coming to the U.S. to obtain a visa is already a federal offense. If a noncitizen is found to have come to the U.S. specifically to give birth and concealed that fact during her visa application process, that alone would be grounds for deportation and a ten-year ban on returning to the U.S.

The primary concern of both Texas and the federal government, according to former U.S. Border Patrol agent Ammon Blair, is not individual visa applicants but rather activity by transnational networks involved in human smuggling operations. Blair, who now works as a senior fellow at the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, said the most significant such networks are the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Mexican cartels. He said such operations are extremely lucrative.

"For Chinese nationals we would see sometimes anywhere from \$60,000 to \$80,000 per person, and for those that are in the Western Hemisphere, maybe \$8,000 to \$10,000 per person," Blair said. "And so, if you were able to bust an entire network, you're talking hundreds of thousands of dollars ... [even] millions, depending on how many people you bring into the United States."

Blair pointed to a range of existing federal statutes that could be used to prosecute such transnational operations,

including making false statements on a visa application, wire fraud, health care fraud, money laundering and identity theft. But he said such networks are typically well organized and skilled at covering their tracks.

"Do the guys in the ground ... have the ability to actually conduct the investigations to go forward with this and create a case and show an established network to bring forth tourism into the United States, specifically for the idea of getting citizenship?" Blair said. "It's going to take [not only] the Department of State, DHS, but all those that are actually local law enforcement — county sheriffs, your state law enforcement ... Texas DPS with their division of CID [Criminal Investigations Division] ... or the Texas Rangers."

Even then, Blair said, such networks frequently advertise their services using encrypted apps that are hard to identify and harder to crack. That means making charges stick often requires a lucky break for investigators.

"This is going to be very difficult unless we have those within this chain come forward," Blair said, "and either they are informants, or they come forward through human intelligence and communications, or say that the process went haywire and they felt like they were being trafficked."

Houston Community Mourns the Loss of Akbarali Muhammad Hussain Narsi

Continued from front page

His death has left a deep void in the hearts of his family, relatives and countless friends who shared his life and cherished his presence.

Akbarali Narsi was the beloved father of prominent Houston businessmen Ameen Narsi and Ahmed Narsi, and the beloved uncle of Siraj Narsi, President of the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston (PAGH). He is survived by his wife, two sons and four daughters, along with other grieving family members.

The Namaz-e-Janaza was held at Masjid Sabireen in Houston, where a large number of people from the Houston and Sugar Land communities gathered to offer funeral prayers and express their condolences to the bereaved family.

The gathering reflected the deep respect and affection held for the Narsi family. Among those attending were prominent business and community figures, including renowned Houston businessman Ali Sheikhan of Sheikhan Group of Companies, Shakeel Khan, owner of Maxx Builders, and Siraj Narsi, President of PAGH, along with numerous businessmen, community leaders, friends and well-wishers.

Following the funeral prayers, the deceased was laid to rest at Wood Forest Cemetery in Westheimer, Houston.

As news of his passing spread, family members, friends and community leaders expressed profound sorrow and offered their heartfelt condolences to the Narsi family during this difficult time. His passing marks a painful loss for a family deeply connected to the Houston Pakistani-American community.

The bereaved family has humbly requested everyone to remember

Marhoom Akbarali Muhammad Hussain Narsi in their prayers.

May Allah SWT forgive his shortcomings, grant him complete maghfirah, fill his grave with Noor, grant him peace and mercy, and bless him with the highest place in Jannatul-Firdous.

May Allah SWT grant his wife, children, grandchildren, relatives and the entire Narsi family Sabr-e-Jameel and the strength to bear this profound and irreparable loss.

Ameen.

CONDOLENCES FROM AMERICAN CHRONICLE

Jamil Siddiqui and the entire American Chronicle team extend their deepest condolences to the Narsi family on the sad passing of Akbarali Muhammad Hussain Narsi.

We share in the family's grief and pray that Allah SWT grants the departed soul complete maghfirah, fills his grave with Noor, and blesses him with the highest place in Jannatul-Firdous.

May Allah SWT grant his wife, children, grandchildren, relatives and the entire Narsi family Sabr-e-Jameel, strength and comfort during this time of profound sorrow. Our heartfelt prayers and deepest sympathies are with the Narsi family.

Jamil Siddiqui

American Chronicle & Team

25 years after 9/11, Islamophobia endures as a lasting legacy

Continued from front page

In May found more than 40 percent of US adults believe Muslims are less patriotic than other Americans or have a negative impact on the country — evidence, advocates say, of how terrorism stereotypes still shape perceptions.

The hostility has had concrete consequences across the years, from the murder of Sikh man Balbir Singh Sodhi days after the attacks — killed by an assailant who mistook his turban for a marker of Islam — to Trump-era travel restrictions, to the recent designation of CAIR as a terrorist group by Texas and Florida officials, one struck down by a federal judge.

Muslim women have sued after their hijabs were forcibly removed in custody; Salam Jabaieh, arrested at a Palestinian advocacy campus protest in Arizona, said she spent 26 hours in jail without the covering she had worn since high school. "I felt stripped... scared... humiliated," she said. "Being Muslim doesn't make me less American."

Yet the era also produced a transformation in Muslim civic life.

By 2026, 255 Muslim officials served across 26 states, per CAIR, among them Zohran Mamdani, New York City's first Muslim mayor. Mohyuddin, who entered activism opposing an anti-Sharia bill in Tennessee, helped found a Muslim advisory council.

"What gives me hope is seeing more of the community willing to exert their rights... despite all of the attempts to silence us," she said. The attacks' legacy, for many Muslim Americans, lies in that continuing effort to ensure national tragedy is never a license for discrimination.

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.

Two Houston-area communities suspend Flock camera use over privacy concerns

The decisions by both municipalities come as Flock faces growing national scrutiny over its nationwide camera network.

Two Houston-area communities suspended their use of Flock Safety cameras this week after residents expressed worries about how the company's surveillance systems might violate privacy.

On Tuesday, the city council of Manvel, located south of Houston in Brazoria County, voted unanimously to cancel its contract with Flock Safety, a technology surveillance company. That same day, the mayor of Willis, located north of Houston in Montgomery County, announced the city was pausing its use of Flock cameras pending a city council meeting. The decisions by both municipalities come as Flock faces growing national scrutiny over its nationwide camera network.

During the Manvel City Council Meeting on Tuesday, mayor Dan Davis said the law enforcement benefit of Flock cameras cannot outweigh elected officials' responsibility to ensure residents' right to privacy.

"This is not a request to reduce our committee to public safety; it's a request to make a different policy and budget choice about this particular vendor [Flock Safety] and this specific system," Davis said. "We're seeing jurisdictions all across America do this. ... This company is



A Flock camera situated just over the Texas/Oklahoma border.

so much more than just license plate readers, and they have no place in the City of Manvel."

The Manvel City Council ultimately voted to give Flock 30 days' notice that it would be ending its contract and would immediately cover the cameras installed around the city to prevent further recording.

Davis voiced several concerns with Flock, including the company's use of collected anonymized data to further train its AI systems and the ability for other agencies to access Manvel's Flock system.

"My concern is what happens when a camera, a simple piece of

technology, becomes a part of a much larger privately operated surveillance and data network ... when they begin to profit and have financial interest in collecting, connecting, analyzing and expanding the use of that information, that's where the issue is," Davis said.

Before the Manvel City Council voted to end its contract with Flock, Manvel police Chief Keith Traylor said the cameras often provided valuable information, but acknowledged that information should not interfere with residents' right to privacy.

"When a violent crime occurs, that information can be critical, but

as technology improves, so does responsibility," Traylor said. "I also recognize that any discussion involving cameras and license plate recognition raises legitimate questions about privacy. Those concerns need to be addressed."

Traylor said his department had policies meant to address those concerns, including limiting access to the city's Flock system and prohibiting any improper use.

"Public safety and privacy do not have to be competing objectives; we can have both," he said. "Our goal is simple: give our officers the tools to identify and locate the people who commit crimes in our community while maintaining the trust and privacy of the people we serve."

Just this week, in nearby Fort Bend County, the local sheriff's office credited Flock cameras with assisting in their investigation that resulted in the arrest of three men allegedly connected to a string of robberies.

On the same day Manvel voted to end its contract, Willis Mayor William Brown announced via social media that the city's Flock camera system had "been discontinued and shut off until further notice."

"The matter will be brought

before the Willis City Council for discussion and consideration to determine how the City will move forward," Brown said on social media. "Public safety remains one of our highest priorities, but we must also make sure the tools and technology used within our city are appropriately reviewed and that the concerns of our residents are heard."

Flock did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding either city's decision, but a Flock representative was virtually present at Manvel's meeting and pushed back on several of Davis' concerns.

Trevor Chandler, the senior director of public affairs for Flock, said during the meeting that Flock does use anonymized data to improve their surveillance equipment, but that municipalities can choose which other agencies have access to the city's data and equipment.

"The only people with access to Manvel's data are those who you have agreed, who your agencies have agreed, to give access to," Trevor Chandler, the senior director of public affairs for Flock, said. "It's not a part of the nationwide network unless you opt into the nationwide sharing feature, which you [Manvel] have not."

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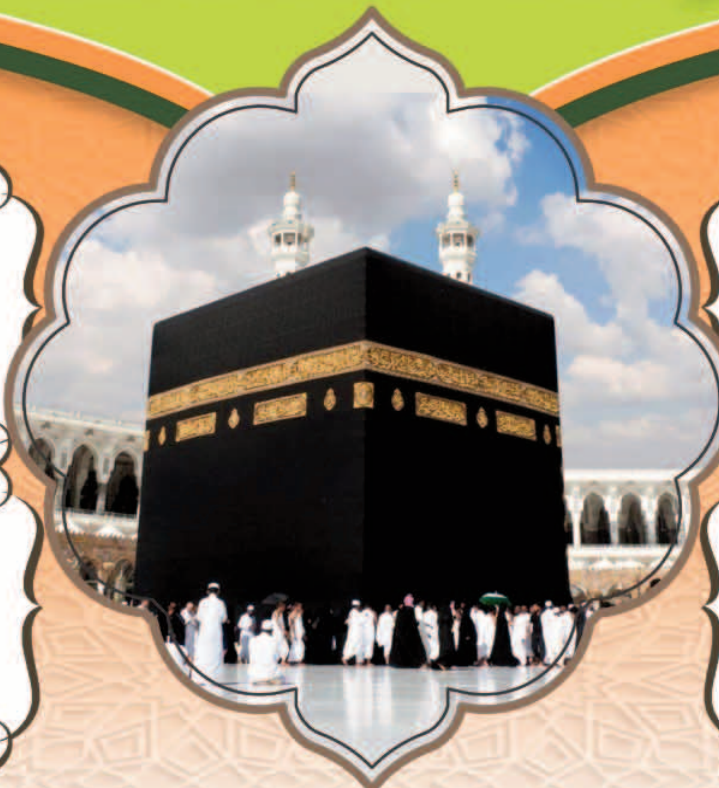
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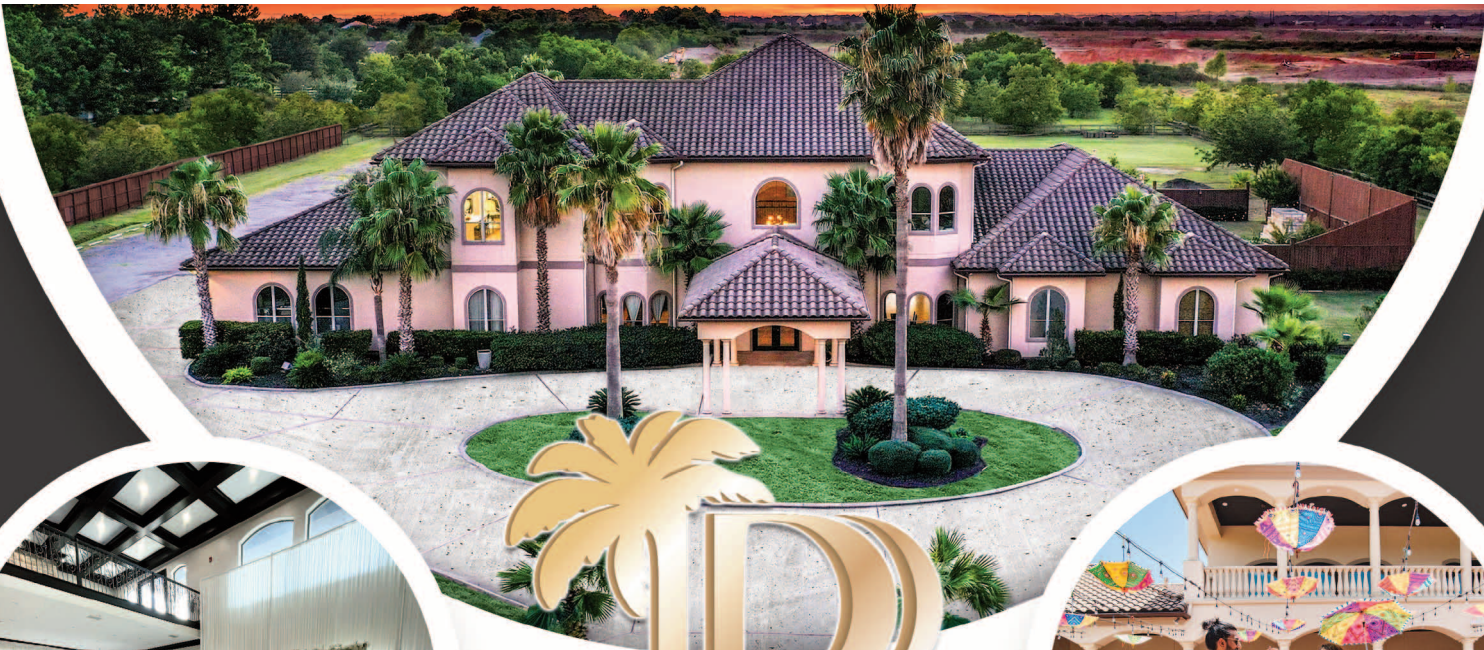
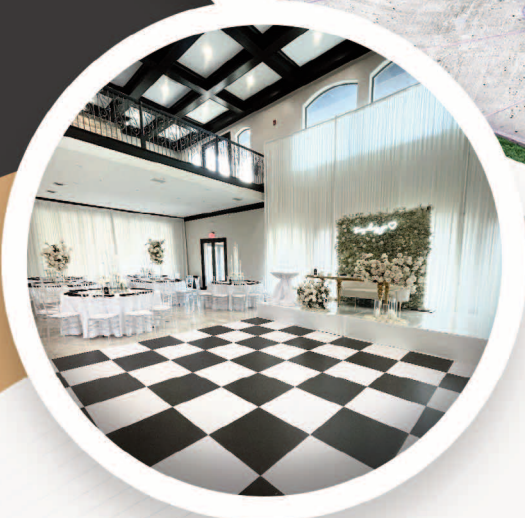
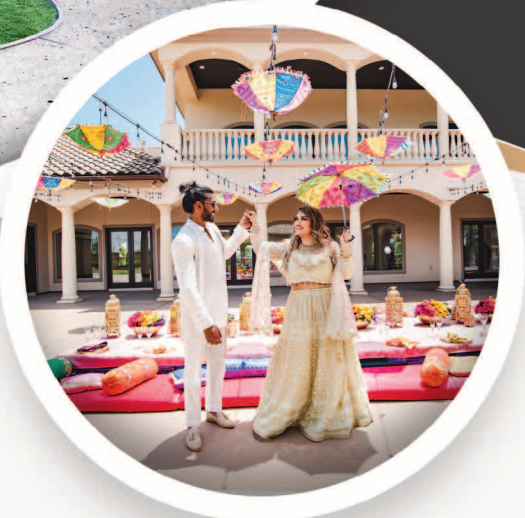
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Houston Muslim Community Hosts Grand Milad-un-Nabi Featuring World-Renowned Reciter Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali



HOUSTON, TX — The vibrant Muslim community in Houston came together for a deeply spiritual gathering recently to host a "Mehfil-e-Milad-e-Mustafa," an event dedicated to commemorating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The highlight of this blessed occasion was the presence of the internationally acclaimed Pakistani Quranic reciter, Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali, who attended as

Continued on page 28

Pak Veterans Association Houston Marks Defence Day with Families and Friends in Sugar Land

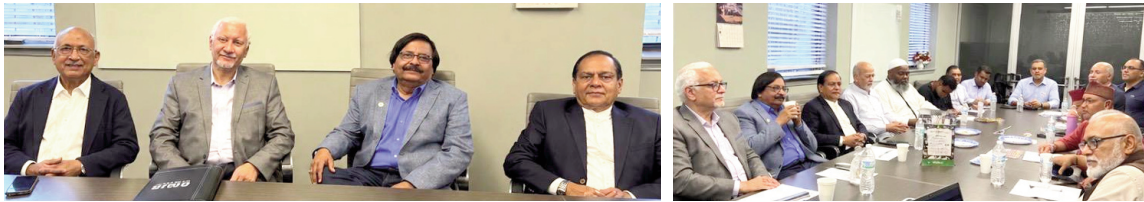
Haideri Banquet Hall Hosts Warm Defence Day Gathering Honoring Pakistan's Veterans and Spirit of Sacrifice



By Amjad Qaimkhani
 SUGAR LAND, Texas: The Pak Veterans Association Houston marked Pakistan Defence Day on September 6, 2026, with a special families and friends' get-together in Sugar Land, Texas. The gathering brought together

Continued on page 28

Civic Leaders & Houston Muslim Leadership Unite Against Islamophobia



HOUSTON — Muslim community and civic leaders from across Greater Houston gathered at the Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) Main Office for an important leadership meeting addressing growing concerns surrounding Islamophobia and its impact on the community.

The meeting brought together diverse voices from Houston's Muslim leadership to exchange perspectives, discuss recent concerns, and explore a unified and constructive response centered on stronger communication, community support, civic engagement, and collaboration.

ISGH President Emran Gazi emphasized the importance of standing together and ensuring that Houston's diverse Muslim community speaks with coordination, confidence, and a shared commitment to

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PAGH President Siraj Narsi Honored at NRP Washington Gala

Jamil Siddiqui and Team American Chronicle Congratulate Siraj Narsi on His Community Service Award



ELLICOTT CITY, Maryland: The Non-Resident Pakistanis (NRP) Washington, D.C. Chapter hosted an impressive gala on September 6, 2026, at the renowned Turf Valley

Continued on page 28

South Asian diaspora raises alarm over prolonged immigration detention

A South Asian American advocacy group is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to protect immigrants from being held for months or even years without a meaningful opportunity to seek release on bond, warning that prolonged detention can create additional hardships for members of the South Asian diaspora.

The South Asian American Justice Collaborative (SAAJCO), along with the American Immigration Lawyers Association, American Immigration Council, Asian Law Caucus, Sikh Coalition and RAICES, filed an amicus curiae brief in the Supreme Court in *Genalo v. Black*.

The case could have significant implications for immigrants who are detained during removal proceedings, including members of South Asian communities who may face lengthy separation from their families, communities and religious institutions.

Continued on page 28

PPP USA Houston Honors Sindh Minister Mir Tariq Ali Khan Talpur



HOUSTON, TEXAS: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) USA Houston Chapter hosted a prestigious luncheon in honor of Provincial Minister Mir Tariq Ali Khan Talpur during his private visit to the United States.

The gathering brought together PPP supporters, community members and party representatives, who welcomed the provincial minister and

Continued on page 28

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HOW PAKISTAN LOST ITS COTTON

The miracle seed that once transformed Pakistan's cotton fields ultimately proved unable to withstand evolving pests, climate extremes and failing institutions, resulting in the unravelling of an entire agricultural system. Based on years of fieldwork, this is the story of how South Punjab's cotton belt entered a crisis and why the poorest farmers remain trapped within it



A smallholder farmer inspecting cotton fields in Multan district in 2020: although Bt cotton seeds were initially embraced, over time, as the efficacy of the seeds declined, the crop demanded more and more pesticides to battle the evolving pest pressure | Photo courtesy the writer

Mehwish Zuberi

When you drive through South Punjab, you will notice irregular plots with diverse land uses and different crops growing on them. The yields on those crops, you will discover if so inclined, can also vary. This heterogenous landscape with many different crops reflects diverse management choices, capabilities, needs and resources. Many of these plots are managed by smallholder farmers who operate land as small as half a hectare.

On a sunny October afternoon in 2020, I walked with Nusrat*, her elderly mother and younger sister through their small plot of land where they grow cotton. She spoke about her attachment to this land. “My family has belonged to this area since the time of Hazrat Adam [Prophet Adam],” Nusrat claims, “we belong to this land.”

I certainly did not question the validity of her statement. However, maintaining a dignified life and livelihood on the land to which they are so attached increasingly came with a great deal of hardships.

After generations of patrimonial division of the land, her family barely had enough land to cultivate crops on. They lived off a rented agricultural plot of roughly four acres, where they grew cotton in the summer and wheat in winter. Cotton had become unproductive over recent years and the crops were evidently in a poor condition, with a great deal of shed leaves and unopened spotted bolls, indicating disease and damage.

With a yield of only 1.5 maund per acre (one maund is equal to 40 kilogrammes) and little hope for more, Nusrat conveyed a sense of apprehension: “When my father comes in the evening and visits the farm, he is unable to eat afterwards.”

They managed to survive by working as weed pickers, but that did not pay well. When asked why they did not grow something else, she said, “Only the poor are forced to grow cotton. Big landowners are not. They grow rice, potato and maize. They grow fodder. They have the machinery to mix residues in the land. That increases the average of the next crop.”

She was not an outlier. In many parts of South Punjab, referring to the belt of 11 districts that grows close to two-thirds of Pakistan's cotton, farmers have increasingly referred to the crop in the language of a funeral, as “vanishing” and “disappearing”. The official record agrees: the land planted with cotton in many parts of the so-called ‘cotton belt’ has shrunk steadily for over a decade.

This is the story of how that happened.

It involves hopes centred around a seed technology that delivered on its promises of yield protection for a few good years before succumbing to complex social-ecological challenges, and ultimately failing to preserve a long-standing cotton industry in the region. It is also the story of who gets to leave a failing agricultural system and who is left holding it in place.

A CROP OLDER THAN THE COUNTRY

Cotton is not new to this region. Traces of the significance of agriculture in Punjab can be found as far back as the sixth millennium BCE, when the earliest known specimens of cotton fibres were found from the Indus Valley civilisation.

The cotton industry is also well-established in the region. Cotton was promoted in Punjab during British colonial rule through the establishment of an Agriculture College in Lyallpur (today's Faisalabad) in 1902. By 1914, American commercial



A cotton boll destroyed by the pink bollworm in Multan district: in 2022, the pink bollworm returned as a major threat, with parts of Multan flagged as infestation hotspots | Photo courtesy the writer

varieties of cotton were introduced, due to their higher yields and better lint quality, changing the cotton landscape in perpetuity.

The cultivation of cotton spread rapidly during the 19th and 20th century as the canal system was established, with the area under cotton acreage increasing since the creation of Pakistan in the mid-20th century.

Agricultural production in South Punjab is subject to great ecological challenges. Summers are scorching, rain is scarce and falls mostly in the monsoon months, and agriculture survives on irrigation. Roughly 35 million people live in South Punjab, three-quarters of them in the countryside, most tied in some way to the land. Cotton is the great summer cash crop, planted after the winter wheat comes off the fields. However, this conventional cropping pattern is changing.

Since the turn of the millennium, cotton farmers had been battling numerous pests. Bollworms such as American bollworm, pink bollworm and spotted bollworm had been destroying yields. Pesticides, which had expanded since the 1980s, were proving to be ineffective against pests that would not go away. Then, in the early 2000s, a new and promising seed technology appeared.

THE (UNOFFICIAL) UPTAKE OF BT COTTON SEEDS

“Bt cotton” seeds were engineered to produce the toxin *Bacillus thuringiensis* that naturally kills bollworm pests. These seeds had been commercialised by Monsanto in 1995 (Monsanto was acquired by Bayer in 2018). The seed technology spread quickly around the cotton-growing world and, in several countries, including China, India and Argentina, it spread ‘illegally’ before it spread legally. Pakistan was no exception, but its version of the story was slightly different.

In India and Argentina, the big transnational seed corporations were central players. In Pakistan, they were formally absent. Instead, the technology arrived through private companies and breeders. A member at a cotton research institute in South Punjab described the first generation of Bt cotton, known as Bollgard I, as having been “stolen” and arriving in the country “illegally”. Whether it was in fact illegal is contested: from Monsanto's point of view, no agreement was ever signed, while Pakistan's own regulators judged varieties approved or unapproved under their own rules.

The earliest approval from the state came in 2010. However, local seed companies in Pakistan were reportedly experimenting with exotic Bt seed as early as 1997. By 2003, there had been field trials and unapproved varieties were leaked to farmers through informal channels. Private breeders and companies crossed Bollgard I — the first generation of Bt cotton technology — with local varieties and sold the results without state approval.

One of the pioneers was the company Neelum Seeds, which produced a variety called Neelum (Bt)121. A farmer in Multan

80%

OF PAKISTAN'S COTTON
LAND IS ESTIMATED TO
HAVE BEEN COVERED
BY UNAPPROVED
BT COTTON SEED
VARIETIES BY 2009

district recounted, “For several years, Neelum 121 did business. There was no attack of spotted or American bollworm. As soon as the worms would lay eggs and the eggs would hatch and the hatchlings search for food, they would die immediately upon touching the [cotton] leaves. This gave a lot of relief to farmers.”

Farmers embraced Bt cotton seeds as these promised bigger harvests, because fewer bolls would be lost to pests. The promise did not come only from seeds salesmen. Even state officials, farmers said, urged them on. “They said that if you currently have 25 maund, Bt will give you 50 maund [per acre],” one smallholder in Lodhran recalled.

BT COTTON BOOM

For a while, it worked. Farmers who planted the new seed remembered being delighted.

One in Khanewal district recalled early yields of 50 maund an acre. Several interviewed farmers recalled similar figures in those first years. Additionally, and just as strikingly, they recalled using far less pesticides.

“A single application of pesticides would suffice,” one farmer in Multan district remembered. Another cotton farmer recounted, “We used to use pyrethroids to control these bollworms earlier but once Bt arrived we stopped using this.” Pyrethroids are highly potent insecticides that not only eradicate pests but also farmer-friendly insects that support the immunity of plants.

Word spread and the seed market boomed. By one estimate, unapproved Bt varieties covered 60 percent of Pakistan's cotton land in 2007 and 80 percent by 2009. One breeder boasted that a single one of his unapproved varieties covered nearly a fifth of Punjab's cotton area in 2012. He described his popularity during the peak years, from 2010 to 2014, in these words: “I had to switch off my phone during the seed season.”

Underneath the boom lay a deep faith, older than Bt technology itself, in the power of a good seed. It can be traced back to the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, when new wheat and rice varieties had produced astonishing harvests and taught a generation of farmers to look towards good seeds for salvation.

“When the Mexican strain of wheat arrived, people travelled long distances to buy it,” an elderly farmer in Khanewal said as he remembered the high yields resulting from these exotic seeds.

That same faith would later keep farmers loyal to Bt cotton long after it stopped repaying them, convinced that their problem was not the technology itself but a lack of access to good quality seed.

A CRISIS EMERGES

The turn came around 2014 and 2015. The seed dealer who had switched off his phone in the boom years described the moment it began to unravel: heavy, unseasonal rain in 2015 that he blamed on climate change; the provincial cotton average sliding from 23 maund an acre to 14; and, in the same year, the return of the pink bollworm.

Farmers again had to turn towards pesticides. Bollgard I, the first generation of Bt seed technology, had lost its resistance

Continued on Page 20

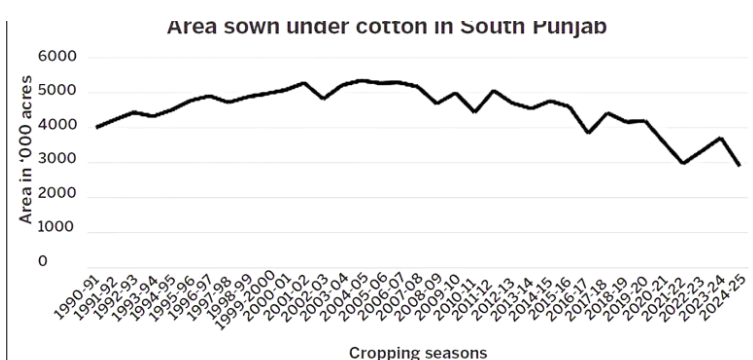
HOW PAKISTAN LOST ITS COTTON



Workers pick cotton in a field in Bahawalpur district: historically, cotton has been Pakistan's great summer cash crop, planted after the winter wheat comes off the fields.



A smallholder farmer saves Bt cotton seeds for reuse in 2021 in Bahawalpur district: in 2022, poor germination, more pests, untimely rain and the catastrophic national floods of that summer proved ruinous for cotton | Photo courtesy the writer



This graph, based on data sourced from the Punjab Agriculture Department's Crop Reporting Service, shows the decline over the years in the area in South Punjab where cotton is sown | Courtesy the writer

Continued From Page 19

to bollworm pests. Other sucking pests had also become a problem for farmers, particularly the whitefly.

In South Punjab, average cotton yields fell from 22 maund an acre in 2007 to just nine maund by the 2022 season. Several forces had converged to cause this descent.

For one, the weather had turned hostile. For instance, in 2020, rainfall in Punjab ran 48 percent above average and, in an arid region built for dryness, sudden downpours flattened standing crops. Rising summer heat made cotton plants shed their bolls before they opened. A brief reprieve arrived in 2021 when a dry, calm year lifted the regional average yield back to approximately 20 maund an acre.

Unfortunately, this was followed in 2022 by fresh disaster: poor germination, more pests, untimely rain and the catastrophic national floods of that summer, whose lingering moisture proved ruinous for cotton.

The smallholders hit hardest were those locked by the wheat-cotton calendar into planting according to the conventional calendar. More affluent farmers who followed alternative cropping cycles were able to plant cotton earlier, and therefore managed to have a round of picking harvests before disaster struck.

Pest pressure had also escalated. The pink bollworm returned as a major threat, with parts of Multan flagged as infestation hotspots by 2022. Moreover, the Bt gene had

never protected against other enemies, such as whitefly, thrips, mealy bug, the cotton leaf curl virus, and these pests also intensified.

Meanwhile, the pesticides meant to safeguard were failing. Some experts blamed years of spraying the same chemicals, which had bred immune pests; others pointed to cheap, poorly formulated or outright adulterated products.

"The crop was good until the second picking, when the bollworms appeared," one farmer said. "Pesticides would be too big of an expense, so I decided to cut my losses and sell the infested crop to livestock herders."

For the most part, no upgraded technology was widely available. Monsanto had released newer generations of Bt cotton — Bollgard II in 2002, Bollgard III in 2016 — but, at the time, no deal was ever struck to bring them to Pakistan's fields at scale.

At a local level, by 2022, the Centre of Excellence in Molecular Biology (CEMB) at the University of Punjab developed double and triple gene varieties of Bt cotton that claimed to offer some defence against rampant bollworm pests. However, such varieties had limited commercial release and so, for the most part, farmers continued to plant an ageing technology against evolving pests.

FARMERS LEFT TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES

Meanwhile, as yields were in decline, costs were increasing. The seed itself had been the smaller

problem. The Bt seed cost around 70 percent more than the conventional seed when it arrived, but many farmers simply saved and replanted their own. However, battling the pest complex grew expensive.

Over time, as the efficacy of Bt cotton seeds declined, the crop demanded more and more pesticides to battle the evolving pest pressure. Previously, one farmer said, he treated his field once a month — now, "every six to seven days, you have to repeat the application." The only pesticides that still worked were the pricey imports, which are predominantly beyond the reach of most farmers.

Behind the decline of cotton was a perceived broader abandonment.

"There is no one standing behind cotton," a member of the cotton research institute remarked, indicating that cotton lacked political backing. Farmers and experts alike described a state that had backed away, leaving cotton growers to face the crisis alone. A senior agriculture department official made no apology for it: "Market forces are working in favour of the farmer. We are not a communist country. We are a free economy."

Meanwhile, other crops have been advancing in the region. Sugarcane's acreage in South Punjab jumped by 22.6 percent between the cropping seasons of 2019 and 2020. It had expanded by another 12 percent by 2021. Several people interviewed put this down to politics. Many powerful politicians, they noted, are also landowners with stakes in the sugar industry.

"Most people in the government have vested interests in the sugar industry," one non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker said bluntly.

Resourceful farmers found another exit. Maize, especially hybrid varieties, which can be grown twice a year, sell readily and come from reliable seed. Maize acreage in Pakistan rose 16.6 percent in a single season between

2020 and 2021. But switching crops takes capital, machinery, know-how and labour — and the smallholders had none to spare.

By 2022, some farmers could not even sell what they grew, as the region's cotton-processing factories began shutting their doors.

STUCK WITH COTTON

For the poorest cotton farmers, change was hard. Many bought their inputs on credit from local dealers who doubled as their cotton buyers, repaying the debt in produce, a cycle that kept them permanently short.

Where a big farmer can store harvest and wait for prices to rise, a smallholder generally has to sell cheap the moment the crop comes in, just to service last season's loan and buy next season's inputs.

The alternative crops also clashed with the wheat calendar that most smallholders depended on to eat. And cotton offered one last thing the poor could not easily replace: its stalks are a primary cooking fuel for them.

So many stayed, propping up a system that was breaking them. One smallholder summed up the arithmetic of defeat: "We will leave the one acre after getting the crop. We cannot afford it. It is better to do chopa [weeding] and work in someone else's fields and fill our bellies."

IS TECHNOLOGY THE ANSWER?

Presently, cotton fields in some parts of South Punjab can be seen covered in plants that are heavy with cotton bolls. Many of these are triple-gene varieties, bred to be immune to glyphosate, a potent weed killer. Such varieties of cotton also claim to provide protection against the threat of bollworms. CEMB has introduced several such cotton varieties and so have some private companies, such as the Evyol Group and the Suncrop Group.

Whether these varieties benefit farmers hinges on the support of ecological factors. A farmer reported that the reason why the triple-gene plants are unable to grow in height is due to mounting environ-

mental stress. South Punjab has been experiencing an intensification of extreme weather events. When temperature rises suddenly, the cotton plant experiences the stress of fruiting at the expense of plant growth.

The plant does not have enough energy to focus on fruiting and height at the same time. Then there is the issue of plant wilting and sudden plant death due to high temperature. Seed varieties bred for protection against pest complexes are crumbling in the face of climatic stress and environmental change.

The inherent inadaptability of technological solutions to rapidly changing conditions casts doubts on how appropriate such approaches are.

Seed technologies are designed to be short-term solutions, which need upgrades at best and transitions to entirely new technologies at worst. The expectation and assumption that emerging technologies will provide solutions to agricultural problems risks creating a deficit of accountability, allowing the state and industry to defer responsibility for developing and implementing pro-poor solutions. Farmers and farming stakeholders are expected to navigate the rapidly changing agrarian landscape by themselves. Over time, farmers are habituated to the increasing resource demands of these high-tech solutions and are faced with the choice to either fulfil these or exit the system.

Despite this, farmers continue to gravitate towards technological solutions because, in the absence of alternative options, new seed varieties offer some respite, however limited it may be. It is the only choice available to them, besides leaving agriculture for good.

Name changed to protect privacy

This account is drawn from 11 months of field research in South Punjab between 2019-2022 and in 2026, including 148 interviews with cotton farmers and with officials, scientists, seed and pesticide dealers, and NGO workers across the districts of Multan, Bahawalpur, Muzafargarh, Lodhran and Khanewal. Farmers' words are quoted as they were recorded; most interviews were conducted in Urdu, with a local field assistant and, where needed, a Seraiki interpreter.

The writer is a geographer and researcher. She holds a PhD from Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany. She currently serves as one of the principal investigators of SMALLPAK, a research project based in Germany, focusing on local innovations pertaining to agro-forestry and integrated livestock-crop production, as well as ways to scale them for resilient and equitable farming systems.

The era of new alliances

The SCO offers a glimpse of an emerging international system that Washington is helping shape but may no longer lead



“Attacks on alliances, hostility toward multilateral institutions, unpredictable tariffs and the transactional treatment of even close partners have made the US look increasingly unreliable. Countries that once depended on Washington are therefore looking for other relationships and institution

Ashok Swain

By HAMMAD SARFRAZ |

The most revealing development at this year's Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit was not another declaration about the need for a multipolar world, it was Tayyip Erdogan's suggestion that Turkey could seek full membership of an organisation whose two dominant powers are China and Russia. Turkey remains a member of Nato and Erdogan was careful to say that closer ties with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) would not mean abandoning the West. But that is precisely what makes his statement so significant. A Nato member no longer sees participation in an institution led by Beijing and Moscow as something that requires an either-or choice.

That would have been difficult to imagine when the post-Cold War order was at its peak. Washington's alliances were not simply military arrangements, they helped shape the balance of power and the way countries dealt with one another. They could disagree with the US, trade with its competitors and pursue their own interests, but the basic understanding remained that the principal architecture of global security, finance and diplomacy would be shaped in Washington and its allied capitals across the West. That assumption has started to fade, not because countries have suddenly decided to join a bloc created by China, but because fewer of them see any reason to organise their foreign policies around a single centre of power that is the US.

Ashok Swain, professor of Peace and Conflict at Uppsala University, views Trump's "America First" policies as accelerating this shift. He argues that attacks on alliances, hostility toward multilateral institutions, unpredictable tariffs and the transactional treatment of even close partners have made the US look increasingly unreliable. Countries that once depended on Washington, he said, are therefore looking for other relationships and institutions.

Russia benefits from the divisions within Europe and Nato, while China, he argues, stands to gain even more by presenting itself as a stable economic and diplomatic partner as the US relinquishes influence. "Trump may believe he is making America stronger," Swain said, "but he is accelerating the decline of US global leadership and making the emergence of a China-led order easier."

The SCO summit in Bishkek offered a snapshot of what is emerging. The organisation now brings together China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics, as well as Belarus, and its wider network includes countries that have very different relationships with Washington. It is not a military alliance and its members have serious disputes with one another. India and China remain at odds, India and Pakistan have a perennially antagonistic relationship, and Russia and China are partners without being formal allies. But all of them have found value in belonging to the same institution without having to resolve those differences or adopt the same relationship with the West.

At the summit in Kyrgyzstan's capital, President Xi Jinping carefully calibrated his speech to preserve that flexibility, describing the SCO's experience as one based on non-alignment, non-confrontation and a refusal to target any third party, even as he argued that the organisation should play a more active role in shaping international affairs. He called multipolarity an irreversible trend and urged greater representation for the Global South, a more democratic international system and a stronger role for the United Nations. The language, by the Chinese leader's standards, was familiar. The substance, however, is becoming increasingly practical. Beijing wants the countries gathered around the SCO to have more trade, investment, transport, energy, technology and financial links with one another, creating a strong network of relationships that does not depend on any one Western institution or country.

Swain argues that the SCO has considerable potential precisely because it brings together China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Belarus and the Central Asian states. "It provides a platform for security cooperation, trade, energy, connectivity and resistance to Western political pressure." In that sense, he sees the organisation as developing a parallel system of cooperation, although not yet an alternative global order. "The SCO is not a military alliance," he explained, and its members have "serious internal contradictions", from the rivalry between India

and Pakistan to India's distrust of China and the differing interests and ambitions of its members. Those contradictions could make enlargement both a source of strength and a constraint, making the organisation more representative while making consensus harder.

But Swain believes the balance of power within the SCO will matter increasingly. Over time, he argues, it is likely to become more China-centric because Beijing has the greatest economic and political weight. Russia will remain important, but its position could gradually come to resemble that of Europe in the former US-led order, an influential but unequal partner operating under the shadow of the dominant power.

For its part, it appears, Beijing is already putting resources behind its wider ambitions. President Xi announced plans for an international AI application cooperation centre for SCO members, a China-SCO port economic cooperation centre in Tianjin and 100 technological cooperation projects over the next three years. He presented the organisation as a priority platform for high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and called for deeper collaboration in the digital economy, green industries, energy and resources. These initiatives may sound bureaucratic compared with declarations about a new world order, but institutions, experts argue, are built through precisely such arrangements.

Putin's parallel proposal

In Bishkek, Vladimir Putin took the financial argument further, describing the SCO as an independent and influential centre of the emerging multipolar world. Russia's trade with SCO members, he said, had exceeded \$400 billion in the previous year, while national currencies accounted for more than 98% of Russia's transactions with them. He also backed the creation of an SCO development bank, arguing that it should be independent of financial systems belonging to states that use economic instruments as political weapons.

For Russia, given its financial troubles, the push makes sense. Western sanctions have made access to the dollar-based financial system a challenge, and Moscow has spent years looking for ways to bypass it. But the same parallel financial arrangements, experts believe, can serve many countries that have no intention of confronting the West or the US. China, according to them, appears to be in a far stronger position than Russia to provide that financial system. Moscow has energy, military presence, natural resources and diplomatic reach, but its economic base is weak. China, on the other hand, has manufacturing capacity, capital, technology, a huge domestic market and an extensive network of commercial relationships across Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe. It produces much of the world's solar equipment, dominates important parts of the EV and battery supply chains and has spent years financing projects and industrial zones through the Belt and Road Initiative.

The SCO therefore gives Beijing something more useful than an anti-American alliance would, it provides a political space in which countries can increase cooperation without signing up to a common ideological programme or accepting China's leadership as a condition of participation. On the other hand, the SCO cannot simply translate its impressive population and economic statistics into collective power. The body may be growing, but growth cannot be confused with long-term cohesion. That said, cohesion is not necessarily what Beijing needs at this point. The SCO operates according to a different logic and offers a structure of cooperation among countries that do not share the same interests on every issue, allowing them to build ties in particular areas without resolving their larger disagreements. That model, experts argue, fits the foreign policy of many middle powers better than the old demand to choose sides. And Turkey is perhaps the clearest example. Erdogan's government wants to retain Nato membership and its relationship with Europe and the United States, while maintaining close economic and energy ties with Russia and expanding its connections across Central Asia and with China. Ankara, according to experts, has no obvious interest in exchanging one dependency for another, its ambition is to make sure that it has enough relationships to avoid being dependent on any single power.

Writing off Washington

Washington's own policies have contributed to a shift that is lead-

ing nations, if not to abandon its orbit, then to move further away from it. In that environment, the SCO offers an increasingly useful option. The Trump administration's 2026 National Defense Strategy places the defence of the US homeland first, calls for stronger deterrence of China in the Indo-Pacific and asks allies to assume greater responsibility for their own security. For Europe, a staunch US ally, the document shows a very scaled back US involvement in keeping the continent safe. The problem is that allies do not respond only to what Washington intends, they also respond to what they believe Washington might do next. And under Trump, at least for now, no one really knows what is coming next. If American commitments appear more conditional or transactional, governments have a reason to look for alternatives before they need them. That does not necessarily mean buying fewer American weapons or completely ending decades of security cooperation with the US. It can mean joining another organisation, signing another trade agreement, developing another payment system, cultivating another source of investment or building another diplomatic relationship and, in short, making the US-led architecture less of a necessity in the broader scheme.

Experts argue that American power has benefited for decades from a network effect. The more countries that used US-led institutions, the more valuable and influential those institutions became. China is trying to build a similar web of relationships, but it does not need to create a Chinese version of every American institution. Instead, it can link the organisations and arrangements that are already taking shape around it. The SCO provides a platform for that political and security cooperation, the Belt and Road Initiative connects infrastructure and trade, BRICS offers a forum for economic coordination, bilateral currency arrangements can facilitate payments outside the dollar, and Chinese technology and industrial capacity can support alternative supply chains. None of these mechanisms, experts argue, need to replace the Western system on their own to weaken its dominance. Together, however, they give governments around the world more ways to operate outside the traditional Western system. Bishkek showed how those alternatives can extend beyond economics, creating space for political alignment as well. Iran, a US adversary, for example, had a seat at the table, and SCO members voiced concerns over the actions against it, including India, which had previously been more restrained in its response.

That political alignment was also evident in how the leaders spoke about the international system itself. President Xi focused on global governance, the Global South and the need for a more representative international system. Uzbekistan's President, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, went further, arguing that the wider SCO could contribute to a new global governance architecture while retaining the United Nations as the central coordinating institution. The rhetoric, experts argue, is meant to appeal to countries that have long complained that institutions created after the Second World War no longer reflect the distribution of economic and political power.

All that said, none of this means that the US is about to disappear from the centre of global affairs. Washington can still, if not shape the future of global alliances, at least influence what they look like in the near term. It may be weaker and somewhat isolated, but it still has an extensive alliance network, considerable influence over the global financial system and other advantages that its main rival cannot easily replicate.

According to experts, a less predictable American commitment encourages hedging, which creates demand for alternative institutions. China, unlike any other potential rival, has the economic potential to help build them. The contest ahead, experts argue, may therefore be less about which country convinces the world to join its camp than about which country becomes indispensable to the choices other countries make. China has spent years preparing for that competition, often through projects that appeared commercial rather than strategic at the time. The result is a growing web of ports, railways, factories, energy links, digital infrastructure, financial arrangements and diplomatic forums in which Beijing is already present.

The SCO, Swain argues, is an important part of that effort. Its members, he explained, are not forming a Nato-style alliance but building flexible networks in which countries can cooperate on some issues while disagreeing on others. "Russia is using these relationships to escape Western isolation, China to expand its influence, while countries such as India and Turkey use them to hedge between competing centres of power," the Sweden-based academic added.

"The world is no longer organized around one unquestioned center of power," Swain noted. The US-led order, he said, is weakening while new and often flexible partnerships are emerging across Asia and the Global South. The SCO's Bishkek summit, Swain said, showed both the importance and the limitations of that shift. Multipolarity is emerging, but Swain sees it as "a transitional stage toward a more China-centered order" — a shift he believes is being accelerated by Trump's erosion of American credibility and influence.

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World-Renowned Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali Graces Houston Milad-un-Nabi Event

The Houston Muslim community gathered for a grand Mehfil-e-Milad-e-Mustafa, hosted by local leaders Mr. Nadeem Malik, Mr. Tahir Bhatti, and Dr. Asaf Qadeer, featuring soul-stirring recitations by the internationally acclaimed Pakistani Quranic reciter, Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali.



4 Surprising Factors That Could Be Aging You Faster

Not spending much time with your friends? That could affect your health.

Many of us have watches that track our steps, rings that give us “sleep scores” and even unassuming wristbands that can show us our heart rates. Wearable technology and health optimization have become increasingly popular in the United States, particularly as we try to “optimize” our every move and search for small lifestyle changes that might help us live longer.

But as popular as these gadgets are, they’re probably not the best way to support your overall health as you age. In fact, in the U.S. News & World Report’s second annual healthy aging survey, 63 health professionals—including longevity experts, registered dietitians, doctors, scientists, fitness experts and pharmacists—agreed that when it comes to aging well, the basics often beat the “biohacks.”

Instead of focusing on optimizing our heart rates or daily step counts to help prevent disease, experts say it’s much simpler than that. They point to the less glamorous lifestyle habits we’ve heard time and time again, including regular physical activity, a balanced diet and restorative sleep. And while those tips may sound like old news, the survey also revealed some surprising areas that you may be overlooking when it comes to healthy aging. Let’s break down the four they focused on.

Social

Isolation

Experts included in the survey overwhelmingly agreed that social isolation—or a lack of consistent, meaningful community or social engagement—was the most underrated potential accelerator of biological aging.

“Social isolation erodes a sense of purpose and fulfillment, disturbs mental health, compounds stress, sabotages sleep and so on. All of the domains of lifestyle affect each other,” says David Katz, M.D., M.P.H., a participant in the survey. “The cumulate effect is often subtle and insidious, while potentially quite toxic.”

And research supports this connection. Socially and intellectually stimulating activities have been linked to improved cognitive function in older adults.² Social isolation and loneliness have also each been associated with a lower likelihood of healthy aging, which highlights the importance of maintaining meaningful social connections as we get older.³

Circadian Disruption

Circadian disruption refers to disruptions in the body’s natural sleep-wake cycle. While quality sleep has become a major focus of the longevity conversation, circadian disruption itself is less often talked about.

As we age, the body’s production of melatonin can change, which may make it more difficult to maintain consistent sleep patterns. Research suggests that circadian disruption may be a hallmark of aging, and addressing disruptions to our sleep-wake cycle may support healthier aging.⁴

Strategies like exercising regularly, avoiding meals too close to bedtime and taking medication when recommended by a health care provider may help support a healthy circadian rhythm.

Chronic Stress

It’s almost impossible to completely avoid stress, and the small stresses of everyday life that seem minor on their own can build up over time, which contributes to low-grade, unmanaged psychological stress. Research suggests that chronic stress over time may contribute to biological aging, as prolonged stress can damage cells and contribute to chronic inflammation in the body.

Identifying small, recurring stressors throughout your day and looking for small ways to reduce them may help reduce micro-stressors over time.

Environmental Toxins

You’ve probably heard about microplastics and endocrine-disrupting chemicals, but these everyday environmental exposures may be another overlooked factor when it comes to healthy aging. These exposures can be difficult to avoid completely, but there are some ways to reduce your exposure, like avoiding heating food in plastic containers when possible, choosing glass or stainless steel containers for food storage and limiting the use of products with known endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

Research suggests that some environmental chemicals may interact with biological pathways involved in aging, including oxidative stress, mitochondrial dysfunction and chronic inflammation. And because exposure can occur over many years, understanding how cumulative environmental exposure may affect health as we age remains an important area of research.⁶

Other Factors That Influence Aging

While the four healthy aging “blind spots” were a primary focus of the survey, experts also weighed in on a few other interesting considerations. For example, dietary supplements didn’t make the experts’ top three habits for healthy aging—those were physical activity, diet and sleep—but 35% of experts did suggest a multivitamin, while 22% recommended vitamin D. We recommend talking with a health care provider before adding a supplement to your routine.

When asked about the most overlooked factors specifically affecting women’s healthy aging, experts pointed to loss of bone density and skeletal muscle during perimenopause and menopause, delayed recognition and treatment of heart disease and suboptimal management of menopausal hormone therapy.

Because these concerns can have significant implications for health as women age, experts recommend having proactive conversations with a healthcare professional during midlife. These conversations can help women stay on top of factors such as bone density, muscle strength, blood pressure and menopause symptoms, rather than waiting until a problem arises.

How to Support Healthy Aging

Ultimately, experts agreed that the basics often beat the biohacks when it comes to healthy aging. Here are some longevity-supportive strategies they recommend:

Engage in different types of physical activity. Exercise is important, and experts recommend engaging in both cardiovascular activity as well as strength training every week.⁷

Build a balanced diet. Experts agreed that an anti-inflammatory diet packed with important nutrients, such as the Mediterranean diet, may help support healthy aging.

Protect sleep. Restorative, high-quality sleep is an important consideration for healthy aging. Aim to get seven to nine hours each night.⁸

Prioritize relationships and social engagement. Maintaining meaningful social connections as we get older can help slow biological aging and preserve cognitive function.

Keep up with preventive care. Work with your health care provider to manage health markers relevant to aging.

Our Expert Take

When it comes to healthy aging, experts agree that the basics often beat the biohacks.

And if you’re looking to support your longevity beyond regular physical activity, a balanced diet and high-quality sleep, don’t overlook the less obvious factors that can influence how you age, including social isolation, circadian disruption, chronic micro-stress and everyday environmental exposures.



Watermelon vs. Cantaloupe: Which Fruit Is Better for Your Blood Sugar?

Think you need to skip sweet fruit for better blood sugar? Think again!

Watermelon and cantaloupe are two popular summer fruits. Both are naturally sweet, contain carbohydrates and provide important nutrients that are beneficial for metabolic and overall health. But when it comes to managing blood sugar, does one melon have an advantage over the other?

“Both watermelon and cantaloupe contain naturally occurring carbohydrates that can raise blood sugar, but they also have a high water content, vitamins, antioxidants and relatively low glycemic loads when eaten in typical serving sizes,” explains Brittany Poulson, M.D.A., RDN, CD, CDCES. Below, dietitians break down whether watermelon or cantaloupe is the better choice for blood sugar, plus how they can both fit into a blood sugar-friendly eating pattern.

How Watermelon Affects Blood Sugar

It’s a Carbohydrate

“Watermelon can raise blood sugar because it contains natural sugars, and its carbohydrates are digested fairly quickly,” explains Poulson. However, 1 cup of diced watermelon is about 91% water and contains just about 11 grams of carbohydrates, which helps explain why watermelon has a higher glycemic index but a relatively low glycemic load.

The glycemic index measures how quickly a carbohydrate-containing food raises blood sugar, while glycemic load takes both the food’s glycemic index and the amount of carbohydrates in a typical serving into account.³ Because watermelon is mostly water and provides a relatively small amount of carbohydrates per serving, its overall impact on blood sugar is considered low when enjoyed in a typical portion.

It Contains Lycopene

One cup of diced watermelon contains 6,890 micrograms of lycopene, an antioxidant that gives the fruit its vibrant red color.¹ Lycopene has been studied for its potential role in supporting overall health, including metabolic health and blood sugar regulation.

Some research suggests that higher lycopene intake may be associated with healthier fasting blood sugar levels and hemoglobin A1c in individuals with diabetes.⁴ However, more research is needed to understand exactly how lycopene may influence blood sugar. Early research suggests it may work through several pathways, including supporting insulin sensitivity and helping reduce inflammation.⁵

How Cantaloupe Affects Blood Sugar

It’s a Carbohydrate

Like watermelon, cantaloupe contains carbohydrates that are broken down into glucose and can raise blood sugar levels when digested. However, 1 cup of diced cantaloupe is about 93% water and provides 12 grams of carbohydrates, along with about 1.5 grams of fiber.

Because cantaloupe is high in water and provides fiber, it may help slow digestion and support a more gradual rise in blood sugar. Because it contains a relatively modest amount of carbohydrates per serving, cantaloupe has a low glycemic load, even though its glycemic index falls in the medium range.

It Contains Vitamin C

One cup of diced cantaloupe provides 57 milligrams of vitamin C, or 76% of the recommended daily intake for females and 63% of the recommended daily intake for males.^{6,8} Vitamin C is an important antioxidant, and research suggests that higher dietary intake is associated with healthier hemoglobin A1c levels and improved glucose metabolism.

While vitamin C alone isn’t a tool for managing

aging blood sugar, cantaloupe can contribute to an overall nutrient-rich eating pattern that supports metabolic health.

Watermelon vs. Cantaloupe: Which Is Better for Blood Sugar?

Cantaloupe may have a slight edge for blood sugar because it contains nearly twice as much fiber as watermelon, notes Sheri Gaw, RDN, CDCES. However, neither fruit is necessarily “better,” says Poulson. “While watermelon tends to have a slightly higher glycemic index (GI) than cantaloupe, the difference is unlikely to be meaningful for most people because serving size and what you eat with the fruit have a much greater impact on blood sugar than small differences in GI alone,” adds Poulson.

The bigger concern may be that people are avoiding fruit altogether because they fear its natural sugar content, shares Poulson. “Recent meta-analyses suggest that eating whole fruit can support overall glycemic control and is associated with a lower risk of type 2 diabetes when part of an overall healthy dietary pattern,” says Poulson.

Gaw adds that both watermelon and cantaloupe can easily fit into a blood sugar-conscious eating pattern. “Since 1 cup of watermelon or cantaloupe has less than 15 grams of carbohydrates, eating 1 cup or less generally should not cause a blood sugar spike for someone who does not have diabetes.”

That said, everyone responds differently to carbohydrates. “What spikes one person may not spike another, so pay attention to how your body responds and adjust from there,” says Val Warner, M.S., RD, CSSD, CPT.

How to Include Both in a Blood Sugar-Friendly Eating Pattern

“Combining watermelon or cantaloupe with protein, healthy fats or extra fiber helps slow digestion and often results in a steadier blood sugar response,” shares Poulson. Portion size also matters—sticking to the recommended 1-cup serving can help keep the overall carbohydrate load in check.

Rather than avoiding watermelon or cantaloupe, focus on incorporating them into balanced meals and snacks that include a mix of nutrients. The dietitians share these recommendations for including both melons in a blood sugar-friendly eating pattern:

Pair them with protein. Enjoy watermelon or cantaloupe alongside foods like Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, eggs or nuts to create a more balanced snack or meal.

Add healthy fats. Enjoying either fruit with a handful of pistachios, almonds or walnuts can help slow digestion and make the dish more satisfying.

Use them as sweet sides. Both melons pair well with protein-rich foods like eggs, sandwiches or salads for a refreshing addition to a meal.

Add it to breakfast bowls. Top plain Greek yogurt or oatmeal with fresh melon for a naturally sweet boost of flavor and nutrients.



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Modesty is not woman's burden alone

Deaths of two young girls in Pakistan raise harder question for Muslim societies: whether men are being taught, with equal seriousness, to lower their gaze, control their desires, and respect dignity of women and children

By Shabana Ayaz

Every year, conversations about the hijab return to Muslim communities around the world. World Hijab Day, founded by Bangladeshi-American activist Nazma Khan in 2013, is observed globally on Feb. 1, while in Pakistan the religious political party Jamaat-e-Islami and some other religious and civil-society groups have traditionally organized hijab-awareness activities around Sept. 4.

Whatever the date, these observances generally focus on the significance of the hijab — the headscarf many Muslim women wear — the right of women

to practice their faith, and the values of modesty and dignified dress.

But two horrific cases involving little girls in Pakistan force us to ask whether our conversation about modesty has become far too one-sided.

In Karachi's Qayyumabad area, a toddler named Aizal was allegedly taken from her home by a relative

on the pretext of buying her something. According to police, she was returned in critical condition and rushed to hospital, where she died; doctors reported signs consistent with sexual assault, and a teenage relative was taken into custody.

Then came the case of five-year-old Ayat Noor in Haripur, who went missing after leaving her home. Her body was recovered from a well more than two weeks later, and police said she had been sexually assaulted and killed; several suspects were detained, and one reportedly confessed before a court.

Significantly, the Quran does not begin its instruction on modesty by telling only women what to wear.

In Surah An-Nur, verse 30, it first commands believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity; the following verse gives parallel instructions to believing women.

That sequence deserves greater attention, because Islam does not place the entire burden of sexual morality on women. Men are accountable for their eyes and their desires — and, above all, for their conduct.

For generations, we have trained daughters to protect themselves from the world, while doing far less to teach sons that they must never become the people from whom daughters need protection. That educational gap can have devastating consequences.

What Türkiye made me notice

Living in Türkiye made me think more deeply about this question.

On the metros of Istanbul and Ankara, women dress in many different ways. Some wear full hijab or cover their hair with a simple scarf; others wear ordinary Western clothing, or considerably more revealing dress. I remember standing on a train opposite a woman whose arms, neck, and much of her midriff were visible. My own eyes briefly went toward her — but then I looked at the men around me, and noticed something that stayed with me.

Nobody appeared to be staring at her or examining her body. Nobody seemed to be using the crowded carriage as

an excuse to move closer or to touch her.

After that, I began to observe this more consciously, and the contrast with my memories of bus journeys in Karachi was uncomfortable. I remembered hands slipping around the sides of seats, men deliberately pressing against women, and opportunistic groping in crowded buses — where even women in full burqa were not necessarily spared.

That contrast led me back to the same question raised so painfully by the cases of Aizal and Ayat Noor. If clothing is the problem, why are fully covered women also harassed? And if the absence of a hijab is supposed to provoke men, how can that argument possibly explain the sexual abuse of children? The responsibility lies not with the victim's clothing, but with the person who chooses to violate another human being.

The other hijab

To insist on the hijab of a man's gaze does not diminish the importance of a woman's hijab.

For a Muslim woman, the hijab may be an expression of faith, modesty, dignity, and religious identity. If she chooses to wear it in obedience to her understanding of Islam, her decision deserves respect, and she must be protected against discrimination because of her religious dress. But a woman who does not wear the hijab possesses exactly the same right to dignity and physical safety. Her clothing is not a license for harassment, just as attractive or revealing clothing does not authorize a lustful stare, unwanted touching, or assault.

Being outside after dark does not amount to consent. And when the victim is a child, any discussion of her clothing should never even enter the conversation.

This is why the cases of Aizal and Ayat Noor should disturb us at a level deeper than the horror of the individual crimes. They challenge a convenient social narrative that places disproportionate responsibility on women while avoiding harder questions about male behavior. A society genuinely committed to haya — the Islamic principle of modesty and moral decency — must address both sides of that moral responsibility. It should teach women the modesty their faith asks of them, while teaching men, with equal seriousness, that Islam begins their moral responsibility with their own eyes, desires, and conduct.

Sermons alone will not protect children

There is another uncomfortable truth: sexual crimes will not disappear through religious instruction and sermons alone.

The abuse of children requires us to move from moral exhortation to effective accountability. Pakistan needs robust laws, professional policing and investigation, modern forensic systems, reliable child-protection mechanisms, and courts capable of delivering justice without endless delay. Most important, perpetrators must know they are likely to be caught and held accountable.

A severe punishment written into law means little if offenders believe investigations will collapse, evidence will disappear, or cases will drag on for years. The real deterrent lies not merely in the severity of a sentence, but in the certainty and fairness of its enforcement.

Law and moral education must therefore reinforce each other, and families, schools, mosques, and religious scholars all have a role to play. When we teach a daughter about the hijab, we should also teach her brother about lowering his gaze.

When we teach girls about haya and personal safety, we should teach boys about boundaries, consent, and responsibility. And when a woman is harassed or assaulted, our first question should concern the conduct of the perpetrator, not the clothing of the victim.

So whenever we observe a day dedicated to the hijab — whether on Feb. 1 internationally or through the Sept. 4 observances held by some groups in Pakistan — we should continue to defend women's right to practice their faith and observe modesty without ridicule or discrimination.

But let us speak just as loudly to men, reminding them that modesty also requires them to guard their gaze, control their desires, and keep their intentions and conduct within moral boundaries.

They must be taught to respect a woman's dignity, and to understand that another person's body is inviolable — regardless of what she wears, where she goes, or how she chooses to live.

If we genuinely desire a modest society, we must speak about our sons' gaze and conduct with the same seriousness we devote to our daughters' covering.

Aizal was only a toddler; Ayat Noor was just five years old. Neither had any choice of dress that could explain what happened to her, and neither should ever have needed protection from the predatory behavior of an adult.

Their tragedies leave us with a question that goes beyond debating women's clothing and respecting a woman's choice to wear the hijab: we also need to spend enough time teaching our sons how to control themselves and behave.



South Asian diaspora raises alarm over prolonged immigration detention

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At issue is whether the government can continue holding immigrants under mandatory detention laws for extended periods without providing a bond hearing to determine whether continued detention is necessary.

SAAJCO said mandatory detention can sweep up people who may pose little or no danger or flight risk. For South Asian immigrants, the organization said, prolonged detention can also create challenges involving religious practices, dietary requirements and access to meaningful language assistance.

“A government should not be able to deprive people of their liberty for months or years without having to justify that detention. For South Asian communities, prolonged detention can bring additional harms, including barriers to religious practice, religious dietary requirements, and meaningful language access. Meaningful judicial review is a basic safeguard against unchecked government power and essential to our democracy,” said Kalpana V. Peddibhotla, Executive Director of the South Asian American Justice Collaborative (SAAJCO).

The organization is particularly highlighting the impact detention can have on immigrant families and communities as the Supreme Court prepares to examine the limits of mandatory immigration detention.

For many South Asian immigrants, prolonged detention can mean being separated from spouses, children, parents and other relatives while their immigration cases move through the courts. The coalition also argues that extended confinement can make it harder for detainees to find attorneys and meaningfully participate in their cases.

SAAJCO’s brief is supported by several immigration and civil rights organizations, which argue that lengthy detention without judicial review raises fundamental due process concerns.

“Indefinite or prolonged confinement without meaningful judicial review, especially for purely civil immigration violations, directly conflicts with America’s commitment to equal justice before the law.

When the government seeks to hold human beings for an extended period, fundamental fairness requires an opportunity to challenge that detention before a neutral decision-maker. The Court should reaffirm that liberty does not depend on immigration status and that due process remains a core American value,” said Jeff Joseph, president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA).

The Asian Law Caucus also pointed to the impact of detention on families, jobs, health and community ties, describing cases involving immigrants who spent months or years in detention before ultimately prevailing in their immigration cases.

“Behind the legal arguments in our amicus brief are real people losing months and years of their lives in

detention. They are parents separated from their children, family members missing the funerals of loved ones, community members ripped from their jobs and neighborhoods. They are people whose health rapidly deteriorates while waiting for care and release, like Rodrigo, who was left to cover an open wound – with shrink wrap saved from his dinner. Others endured years of needless detention only to ultimately win their cases and return home. These stories show the profound human cost of a system that forces people to remain locked and away while they fight for the right to remain with their families,” said Evelyn Wiese, Asian Law Caucus Immigrant Justice Program Director.

The Sikh Coalition said members of immigrant communities can face compounded hardship when they remain separated from their families and communities for prolonged periods.

“Too many individuals across our country are suffering in long-term detention after being targeted by an overly aggressive immigration enforcement regime. When these individuals are kept from their families, their livelihoods, and their communities for long stretches of time, the suffering is compounded. We must move towards an immigration system that holds justice in a higher esteem than cruelty,” said Munmeeth Soni, Legal Director, Sikh Coalition.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear *Genalo v. Black* on Oct. 13.

The justices will consider whether detention under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c) can become unreasonably prolonged, triggering a constitutional requirement for a bond hearing. The court will also consider whether the government must establish by clear and convincing evidence that continued detention is justified.

For South Asian immigrant communities, the ruling could determine how long people can remain in immigration detention without an opportunity for a judge to assess whether they should continue to be held.

PAGH President Siraj Narsi Honored at NRP Washington Gala

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Resort in Ellicott City, Maryland, celebrating the 250th anniversary of American Independence and Pakistan Defence Day.

The prestigious gathering brought together county and state elected officials, prominent corporate and non-profit leaders, community representatives and members of the Pakistani-American community for an evening of patriotism, friendship and community service.

A major highlight of the gala was the recognition of Siraj Narsi, President of Pakistan American Greater Houston (PAGH), with the NRP Community Service Award for his outstanding contributions and dedicated service to the community.

Narsi, a prominent Houston entrepreneur and community leader, was honored for his longstanding commitment to strengthening the Pakistani-American community and promoting positive engagement between Pakistani-Americans and the wider American society. His recognition at

the national-level gathering highlighted the impact of his community leadership beyond the Houston area.

The gala opened with a screening of a beautiful Pakistani fusion rendition of the U.S. National Anthem, created by Siraj Narsi as a special tribute from the Pakistani-American community. The presentation was followed by a moving rendition of Pakistan’s National Anthem, setting a deeply patriotic tone for the evening.

The NRP Washington, D.C. Chapter also presented Community Service Awards to other distinguished community leaders, including prominent Houston community leader Mr. Nasruddin Rupani.

The evening served as a celebration of the strong contributions of Pakistani-Americans to the United States while honoring the spirit of Pakistan Defence Day and the enduring bonds between the two communities.

For Siraj Narsi and PAGH, the recognition marked another significant acknowledgment of their continued efforts to serve, connect and strengthen the Pakistani-American community.

Congratulations to Siraj Narsi

Jamil Siddiqui and the entire team at American Chronicle extend their heartfelt congratulations to Siraj Narsi, President of Pakistan American Greater Houston (PAGH), on receiving the prestigious NRP Community Service Award.

This well-deserved recognition honors his outstanding leadership, dedicated community service and continued efforts to strengthen the Pakistani-American community.

Congratulations, Siraj Narsi, on this proud and well-deserved achievement!

Jamil Siddiqui & Team
American Chronicle

Pak Veterans Association Houston Marks Defence Day with Families and Friends in Sugar Land

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Pakistani military veterans, their families, community leaders and distinguished guests for an evening of friendship, community connection and socializing. The event also provided an opportunity for veterans and their families to reconnect and commemorate the sacrifices associated with Pakistan Defence Day.

A number of Houston-based veterans attended the gathering with their families, including Maj. Tariq Azhar, Col. Saleem Zaidi, Capt. M. Usman, Maj. Aqeel Virk, Maj. Inayat Aziz, Col. Aaqeb, Col. Arif Butt, Maj. Bader Tanvir, Col. Ayaz Malik, Maj. Khurram Jaswal, Lt. Col. Zia Kizilbash, Brig. Masroor, Col. Rizwan Qurieshi, Maj. Aamar Sheikh, Capt. (PN) Rizwan Farrukh, Cdr. Arshad, Maj. Khurram Sufi, Cdr. Farhan Wali and Maj. Kamal Javed.

The event was also attended by several distinguished guests, including Mohammad Aftab Choudhry, Consul General of Pakistan in Houston; Capt. Tariq Mehmood, visiting from Dallas, Texas; Aamir Zaidi, General Secretary of the Pakistan Association of Greater Houston

(PAGH); Zeeshan Mirza, CEO of AUTV; Jameel Siddiqui, CEO of American Chronicle and Saleem Syed and Zara Syed.

The evening featured informal interaction, fellowship and dinner, creating a warm family atmosphere among members of the Pakistani-American community.

The gathering highlighted the continued bonds of friendship and camaraderie among Pakistani veterans living in the Houston area, while bringing together community members to observe Defence Day and remember the spirit of service and sacrifice associated with the occasion.

Pakistan Defence Day is observed annually on September 6 to commemorate the country’s defence during the 1965 war and to honor the armed forces and those who made sacrifices in the service of Pakistan.

Civic Leaders & Houston Muslim Leadership Unite Against Islamophobia

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peace, dignity, and mutual respect.

Former ISGH President M. J. Khan also delivered detailed remarks, sharing his perspective and guidance on the ongoing situation and emphasizing the importance of coordinated and responsible community leadership.

The gathering reflected a shared commitment to confronting Islamophobia through dialogue, unity, civic participation, and stronger partnerships across Greater Houston.

The message from Houston’s Muslim leadership was clear: unity must be followed by action. Community organizations, civic leaders, faith partners, and residents are called upon to stand together against hatred and discrimination, strengthen communication, support those affected by Islamophobia, and work collectively to ensure that every community is treated with dignity and respect.

Together, we can turn concern into action, dialogue into partnership, and unity into lasting positive change for Greater Houston.

Houston Muslim Community Hosts Grand Milad-un-Nabi Featuring World-Renowned Reciter Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali

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the Chief Guest.

Organized and hosted by prominent local community figures Mr. Nadeem Malik, Mr. Tahir Bhatti, and Dr. Asaf Qadeer, the event drew a large and diverse crowd from across Texas. Attendees gathered to partake in the religious observance, share in community fellowship, and listen to inspiring speeches and recitations honoring the life and teachings of the Prophet.

Qari Syed Sadaqat Ali, renowned worldwide for his exceptionally beautiful voice and unparalleled mastery of traditional Quranic recitation, cap-

tivated the audience. His stirring recitations and soulful renditions brought a profound sense of peace, unity, and spiritual reflection to the venue. For many in the Pakistani diaspora, hearing the familiar and beloved voice of Qari Sadaqat Ali in Texas was a deeply moving and nostalgic experience.

The gathering served not only as a religious commemoration but also as a vital touchstone for cultural preservation and community building. Events like these provide the Houston diaspora an opportunity to pass down spiritual traditions to the younger generation while celebrating their heritage.

Organizers and attendees alike lauded the Mehfil-e-Milad-e-Mustafa as a resounding success, noting that the spiritual resonance of Qari Sadaqat Ali’s performance left a lasting impact on all who were fortunate enough to attend.

PPP USA Houston Honors Sindh Minister Mir Tariq Ali Khan Talpur

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highlighted the party’s leadership under Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and President Asif Ali Zardari.

Participants expressed their appreciation for the leadership of the PPP leadership and reaffirmed their support for the Sindh Assembly resolution. The gathering also paid tribute to the martyrs of the Pakistan Armed Forces, honoring their sacrifices and services rendered for the country.

The luncheon provided an opportunity for PPP members and supporters in Houston to exchange views, strengthen community ties and reaffirm their commitment to the party’s principles and democratic values.

Harris County commissioners will consider a 7.6% property tax increase. What to know

Harris County is proposing a nearly 8% property tax hike next year — the highest proposed tax increase in two decades. It’s the fifth consecutive year that county spending has outpaced revenue.

While some Democratic commissioners have placed blame on federal funding cuts worsening the county’s financial state, lone Republican commissioner, Tom Ramsey, called on the court Thursday to find cost saving measures before considering a proposed \$3.1 billion budget next week.

The county is facing a budget deficit of about \$180 million. In an effort to bridge that funding gap, the county has sold underutilized properties and proposed various fee increases like making it more expensive for landlords to file eviction claims against tenants in Harris County.

Harris County commissioners will consider the county’s proposed \$3.1 billion budget on Tuesday, Sept. 8. Commissioners plan to set a tax rate during a meeting on Sept. 17 before the county’s 2027 fiscal year starts on Oct. 1.

THE WATER BENEATH IS RUNNING OUT

Water crises due to falling water table in the Mazdoor Abad area of KP turns daily life into a daily struggle



By Abdur Razzaq |

Haidar Ali, 35, a resident of Mazdoor Abad locality in Takht Bhai tehsil of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, some 15 kilometres north of Mardan city, starts his day by searching for water for drinking and household use.

He and other locals collect water with great difficulty for their daily needs. A water tanker supplied them water on alternate days, giving one barrel per house which hardly met their requirements. If Ali and his family needed more water, he had to bring it by rickshaw at Rs 400 to 500 per trip.

This area is located beneath the mountains where the UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Takht Bhai Buddhist Monastery, is situated. According to local residents, the groundwater level has been declining here every year, for more than a decade.

Water has already depleted in Cheena Korona and Shaheen Town of the locality and the same problem is now emerging in other neighbourhoods as well.

Pointing to some already locked houses in Cheena Korona and Shaheen Town, Ali said that due to water scarcity, a number of families had migrated from the area to other villages of Takht Bhai tehsil. Likewise, he and his two brothers were also planning to sell their houses and move to an area with a higher groundwater table, as life where they were presently living had become difficult with the passage of time because of the water situation.

More than a decade ago, the groundwater table was about 65 feet below the surface, but it has now dropped to around 350 feet, says local political figure Hussain Yousafzai, adding that in past, people used water obtained through wells, and later they depended on tube wells established by the public health department.

In the current worst situation a local philanthropist had donated a tractor and a water tanker to the community. "Most residents of the locality are poor, and keep water drums, and buckets outside their homes," he explains. "The water tanker goes door to door and supplies water to each household."

To a query, he said that out of four water supply schemes, only two were functional and hardly met the needs of a few households located at lower altitude.

Since the houses situated at a higher elevation are not able to

obtain water from these schemes, the local community depended on water tankers for their water supply.

"Some people store rainwater for washing clothes and other daily household needs," he added.

Mazdoor Abad, a settlement in the Takht Bhai tehsil of Mardan district with a population of more than 20,000, is not the only locality facing water scarcity.

An electrical resistivity survey conducted by the Public Health Engineering Department, Mardan, at different points in Mazdoor Abad, to assess groundwater potential, reveals the static water level at Point-1 to be approximately 40 feet below the ground surface, with a proposed drilling depth of around 200 feet. The estimated discharge was 3,000 gallons per hour (GPH).

At Point-2, the static water level was estimated at around 20 feet, with a proposed drilling depth of approximately 200 feet and an estimated discharge of 3,000 GPH.

However, the survey concluded that neither site was feasible for tubewell construction because bedrock was encountered at a shallow depth.

Regarding the survey conducted in the area, Mohsin Iqbal, SDO, Public Health Engineering Department, told The Express Tribune that low yield tubewells serving two to three houses could be successful, where a limited quantity of water would be used. But a tubewell for the entire community in Mazdoor Abad would not be successful.

"The water supplied to the area through pipelines came from nearby villages, where the water table is relatively high and the discharge capacity is around 5,000 to 6,000 gallons per hour (GPH)," he said. "Due to changes in precipitation patterns and the amount of rainfall, the water table varies at different times. He added that the department does not have specific data on it as the groundwater table has not been measured at different time intervals.

Iqbal explained that the department did not have any tubewells in the locality. However, due to rapid population growth and the adverse impacts of climate change, the water table has declined over time.

"Now the department has shifted its focus from tubewells to surface water," he added, talking about a mega water supply scheme that has been approved for Mazdoor Abad. "We are working on its design and preparing a proposal under which surface water from the Jalala river will be pumped to a treatment plant. The treated water will be supplied to the locality. This is a shift towards surface water. Similar strategies have already been successfully implemented in Batkhela, Kohat and Karak districts of KP."

Other parts of Mardan district are also grappling with water shortages, while the declining groundwater table is becoming a concern in Peshawar and several southern and other districts of KP as well.

Documents submitted by the Ministry of Water Resources to the Senate in 2021 revealed that groundwater levels were depleting rapidly in 28 districts of KP. In five districts, the water shortage was particularly alarming, with groundwater levels falling by between 25 and 74 feet over the previous decade.

According to the Ministry's written reply, Khyber district was the worst affected, where the groundwater level had fallen by 74 feet, followed by Haripur with a decline of 62 feet. Mohmand ranked third, with 57 feet drop, while Bajaur ranked fourth. Kurram

was fifth, where the groundwater level had dropped by 26 feet.

The water scarcity issue is not only confined to several districts of KP, but the situation is becoming worse across the country.

According to a report by the Asian Development Bank, Asian Water Development Outlook 2025, Pakistan remains a severely water-stressed country and facing rising pressure on its water resources due to rapid population growth, climate change and poor water management.

The report says per capita water availability has declined from 3,500 cubic metres in 1972 to just 1,100 cubic metres in 2020, far below the minimum safe threshold of 1,700 cubic metres.

It also states that more than 80 percent of the country's population lacks access to safely managed drinking water, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

According to the annual 2023-24 report of Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), groundwater levels in Balochistan have been depleting at alarming rates, with declines of up to five meters annually in some regions of the province.

Media reports suggested that the Punjab province groundwater table is declining at rate of 0.5 to 1.0 meters annually. The depletion is associated with the unchecked installation of tube wells which were 4500 in 1960 and in 2024 reached 1.5 million.

Talking to The Express Tribune, Islamabad based water and climate change expert, Shahid Iqbal said that four divisions of KP including Mardan, Peshawar, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan were facing more water scarcity.

He added that some parts of Mardan city were experiencing water shortages, and some nearby areas were suffering from water-logging as well.

"In Mardan and Peshawar divisions, rapid population growth, increased extraction of underground freshwater has led to amplified water consumption, while the expansion of concrete infrastructure has reduced groundwater recharge during rainfall, causing the water table to gradually decline," explains Iqbal. "In the southern region, Bannu, Karak, and Dera Ismail Khan, the situation is even worse due to the adverse impacts of climate change. It is alarming that despite the Kabul River flowing through the Peshawar and Mardan divisions, these areas are still facing water scarcity."

Highlighting how in the past, rainfall occurred at regular intervals, allowing groundwater to recharge over time, Iqbal said, "However, climate change has transformed both the pattern and intensity of precipitation. As a result, groundwater is no longer being recharged as effectively as it was more than a decade ago. This is one of the main reasons our region is grappling with water scarcity."

Iqbal explained that the quantity of rainfall that used to occur in 10 days now often falls in a single day with higher intensity, causing urban flooding instead of recharging the groundwater table. "In such a situation, how can rainwater be properly absorbed into the ground, especially when most of the land is covered with concrete buildings and only limited areas are available for water harvesting?"

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Pakistan Air Force in the crucible of 1965

Remembering the September sacrifice

By Izmi Herlani |

There are moments in a nation's history when dates cease to be dates and become moments reliving a turning point in the fate of the country. September 6, 1965 was one such moment for Pakistan. Guns roared along the frontier. Armoured columns moved toward Lahore. Across the country, uncertainty turned into fear as the reality of war sank in. Pakistan stood before a formidable challenge and the battlefield was no longer confined to the ground. Above it all stretched the sky and into that sky rose the Shaheens of Pakistan Air Force.

When Indian forces attempted to cross the international border on September 6, 1965, Pakistan Air Force did not have the luxury of numbers. Its resources were limited, its aircraft finite and its pilots painfully aware that every sortie could be their last. But there are things no inventory can measure: training, discipline, leadership, courage and the unyielding will to fight for one's country. For the Men in Blues, the cockpit was not merely a place from which to fly, it was where duty became destiny. The call came—and they answered.

F-86 Sabres thundered from their dispersals. B-57 bombers disappeared into the darkness. Air-defence units watched the skies with relentless vigilance. Fighter pilots climbed toward an enemy that possessed numerical strength, knowing that somewhere beneath them were cities, soldiers, families and millions of civilians depending upon their ability to hold the line. The battle for Pakistan's skies had begun. The aerial war of 1965 was fought at terrifying speed and merciless altitude. Aircraft met over the plains of Punjab. Guns flashed, missiles and cannon fire tore through the air, pilots manoeuvred within seconds of life and death knowing that one mistake could mean a fiery descent from the sky. There was no time for hesitation, only instinct.

Among the men who entered that inferno was Squadron Leader Sarfaraz Ahmed Rafiqui Shaheed—a name that would become synonymous with sacrifice. On September 6, Rafiqui led his formation against the heavily defended Halwara airfield. Enemy fighters rose to meet them and the sky erupted into a furious contest of skill and nerve.

Then disaster struck.

Rafiqui's guns jammed. His aircraft could no longer deliver fire effectively. Yet he did not turn away from the battle. He remained in the combat zone, continuing to engage the enemy and drawing attention away from his fellow pilots. He had lost the ability to fight but he had not lost the ability to lead. In those final moments, Rafiqui placed the survival of his men above his own.

He did not return. His aircraft fell beyond the border but the man inside it rose to be a legend. That is what makes Rafiqui's story so profoundly moving. He sacri-



ficed his tomorrow so that others could have theirs. That is leadership stripped of rank, ceremony and glory. That is sacrifice.

And then came another name that would echo through the skies of 1965: Air Commodore M M Alam. On September 7, flying his F-86 Sabre, Alam entered one of the most extraordinary aerial engagements of the war. In a breathtaking burst of combat skill, he was credited with shooting down five Indian aircraft in less than a minute making his combat tally of nine confirmed IAF killed and two damaged enemy aircraft. The circumstances were extraordinary but behind the feat stood something even more important: years of preparation compressed into seconds of decision. In the cockpit, there was no room for hesitation, no time to calculate odds. There was only the aircraft, the enemy and the instinct of a highly trained fighter pilot. For Pakistan, Alam's achievement became more than a remarkable combat episode. It became a symbol of what PAF represented in those challenging days; a force that refused to allow numerical superiority to become psychological defeat.

Yet the story of 1965 cannot belong only to the celebrated names. Behind every victorious pilot stood a fraternity of men whose names rarely appeared in headlines: the ground crew who worked through the night to return a damaged aircraft to service; the armourer loading weapons

while the next sortie was already being prepared; the radar operator watching the screen for an approaching formation; the controller guiding fighters toward an unseen enemy; the technician repairing engines under the relentless pressure of wartime operations; the signals operator, the meteorologist, the maintenance crew and the countless men who kept the machines—and therefore the missions—alive. They were the invisible architecture of every aerial victory. And then there were those who returned. Some landed with aircraft scarred by enemy fire. Some climbed down from their cockpits knowing that a friend who had taken off beside them would never return. Some returned to the same runway again and again, carrying the weight of those they had lost. They were the Ghazis but alongside them stood another brotherhood—the Shaheeds. The brave men who never heard the celebrations. The valiant men who never walked back into their homes. The men whose families waited at doors that would never again open to the sound of their footsteps. Their sacrifice was not simply a military statistic, it was the price paid for sovereignty.

The 1965 war demonstrated a truth that remains relevant far beyond aviation: air power is not measured merely by the number of aircraft standing on a runway. It is measured by the people who fly them, by the men who maintain them, by the commanders who make decisions when seconds matter, by the training that transforms fear into action and ultimately, by the courage to enter the sky when the safest choice would be to remain on the ground. Pakistan Air Force entered the 1965 war facing a formidable numerical challenge. Yet its air warriors refused to allow numbers to determine the outcome of their spirit. They flew, they fought, they endured. And some gave everything.

Six decades later, the sound of those Sabres and bombers may have faded from the skies, the runways have changed, the uniforms have evolved, the aircraft of that era now belong to history but the spirit of those brave men does not belong to history. It belongs to Pakistan. It lives in the name of Rafiqui, who chose his formation over his own life. It lives in the memory of M M Alam, whose extraordinary combat performance became part of the nation's military heritage. It lives in every technician who worked through the darkness, every pilot who climbed into danger and every Shaheed who never came home. Perhaps that is the most enduring legacy of September 1965: When the nation looked toward the sky, it did not see machines, it saw men who had decided that the sky would not be surrendered. They left behind something greater than victory—a legacy of courage written not in ink but in fire across the September sky. The aircraft are gone, the battles are over, the men have passed into history but the sky still remembers.

THE WATER BENEATH IS RUNNING OUT

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According to an estimate, in Peshawar's posh areas, including Hayatabad, Regi Lalma, University Town and the old walled city, the water table has been falling by three to four inches annually, which is a significant decline, he mentioned, as he recalled that in 1990, the water table in Hayatabad was about 300 feet below ground level, but it has now fallen to around 500 to 550 feet which is a huge drop in more than two three decades.

Professor Dr Muhammad Nafees, a faculty member in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Peshawar revealed that in Pakistan, almost 90 percent of water was extracted

from groundwater resources, while 10 percent came from surface water.

He added that the unchecked use of water for household and commercial purposes through a large number of water pumps and tube wells had contributed to water scarcity in the country.

"The main reason for groundwater depletion is that water is being extracted faster than it can be recharged. In the past, rainfall occurred at regular intervals and with balanced intensity, allowing groundwater to recharge naturally. However, due to climate change and the expansion of concrete infrastructure, the recharge process has been disrupted. As a result, less rainwater seeps into the ground, while most

of it flows into canals and rivers," says Professor Nafees, adding that in Pakistan, annual groundwater recharge was about 55 billion cubic metres, while annual extraction had reached 65 billion cubic metres, hence as a result, around 10 billion cubic metres more water was extracted.

He suggested that protecting water resources required creating public awareness about reducing water consumption and avoiding the wastage of this precious natural resource. "If water was used responsibly, the groundwater table could gradually recover, while rainwater harvesting at the household, village, and town levels through storage tanks, ponds, and small dams was also crucial for recharging and safeguard-

ing groundwater resources."

To reduce the hardships faced by residents of Mazdoor Abad, Haidar Ali urged the provincial government and the relevant departments to make the available tube wells functional as a short-term relief measure.

He also called on the authorities to devise a mechanism to address the issue of groundwater depletion in the locality, this way further migration from the area could be prevented.

The writer is a Peshawar-based multimedia journalist. He tweets @TheAbdurRazzaq

All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer

5 Things to Avoid After 5 P.M. If You Have High Blood Pressure

Because blood pressure management isn't just a 9-to-5 job.

Almost half of Americans have high blood pressure, also known as hypertension.¹ If you're one of them, you may already spend your days trying to eat less sodium, exercise and manage stress.

But when the clock strikes 5 p.m., those healthy habits can be easier to let slide, says Lisa Young, Ph.D., RDN. "Evenings are when we unwind," she says. "There is a psychological shift from work mode to relaxation mode, and health-conscious decisions may take a back seat."

Maybe you relax with a cocktail or snack on cheese and crackers while waiting for takeout to arrive. Or perhaps your evenings are spent catching up on your favorite TV shows. While these habits aren't necessarily harmful on their own, the timing may matter more than you think for your blood pressure, which is naturally supposed to drop in the evening, says Young.

And those aren't the only habits that may be working against you. Here are five things experts recommend steering clear of after 5 p.m. if you have high blood pressure.

1. Alcohol

For years, there was some debate on whether alcohol may support heart health. But those thought processes have changed, and recommendations have shifted. Today, the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology recognize that less alcohol is generally better for blood pressure. If cutting out alcohol completely isn't realistic, they recommend limiting intake to one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men.

While alcohol may feel relaxing in the moment, it can temporarily set off your body's fight-or-flight response, triggering a cascade of blood pressure-raising hormones. And it's not just one type of alcohol that causes these changes—beer, wine and spirits appear to have similar effects.

Research suggests the effects may begin even at relatively low levels of intake and increase from there.⁴ On the flip side, drinking less—or not drinking at all—has been associated with healthier blood pressure levels.

2. Certain Over-the-Counter Medications

A pounding headache is the last thing you need at the end of a long day. So, you reach for ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve). These medications—known as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)—can help relieve pain, but they may also raise blood pressure in some people.

That doesn't mean you have to push through discomfort. Depending on your health history and symptoms, alternatives may be available. The American Heart Association notes that taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) may be a better option for people with high blood pressure.⁶

And if sinus headaches tend to strike in the evening, keep in mind that decongestants may also raise blood pressure.⁷ If you have hypertension and frequently rely on over-the-counter medications, talk with your health care provider about options that are a better fit for you.

3. High-Sodium Takeout Meals

Did you know dinner tends to be the highest-sodium meal of the day?⁸ "It makes sense—dinner portions tend to be larger, the dishes are more complex, and it is the meal most likely to come from a restaurant or takeout," explains Young.

That doesn't mean takeout is off-limits. But if high blood pressure is a concern, preparing simple meals at home more often may help you better manage sodium intake.

Melissa Mitri, M.S., RDN, recommends keeping meals simple and building them around minimally processed whole foods flavored with herbs and spices instead of relying heavily on salt. Think fruits, vegetables, lean meats, beans and whole grains.

Dinner doesn't have to be elaborate—a sautéed chicken cutlet and microwaved frozen veggies, or a fried egg over canned black beans topped with shredded cheese, can come together faster than waiting for takeout.

4. Too Much Evening Screen Time

We've all been there: You sit down to watch your favorite TV show and one episode quickly turns into another. Before you know it, it's really late!

That's not just going to make it difficult to wake up in the morning. Too much screen time has been linked to several markers of poor heart health, including hypertension.

The reasons may be multifactorial, says Mitri.¹¹ For starters, extended periods of sitting reduce opportunities for

movement. In addition, "you may become more stressed or anxious as a result of stimulating or action-packed shows," she says.

And if late-night screen time cuts into sleep, that may affect blood pressure too. "When we sleep, our blood pressure lowers and our cardiovascular system has a chance to rest," says Abby Langer, RD. "Poor sleep also causes the release of stress hormones, which increase heart rate and blood vessel constriction, leading to elevated blood pressure."

This doesn't mean you can't unwind with a little TV before bed. Just try setting boundaries around screen time so it doesn't regularly push back your bedtime.

5. Sugary Snacks

Nearly two-thirds of Americans snack in the evening—and, for many, that snack is something sweet.

Why does that matter for blood pressure? "Consuming a lot of sugar at night from cookies or sugary drinks can raise blood sugar, which triggers the release of insulin to bring [glucose] levels back down," says Mitri. Occasional intake isn't a concern, but regularly snacking on sugary foods may contribute to less stable blood sugar and insulin patterns over time. These patterns may also indirectly affect blood pressure regulation over time.

Mitri suggests a simple swap: If you enjoy sweets, consider having them earlier in the day rather than right before bed. "Instead of cookies at night, try having one cookie earlier in the day, such as after lunch," she says.

Other Tips for Better Blood Pressure

Beyond what you do after 5 p.m., your overall daily habits also play a major role in supporting healthy blood pressure. Small consistent choices across the day can add up over time. Here are a few strategies we recommend that can also help support healthy blood pressure:

Take your workout outside. Brisk walking, cycling and jogging can all help support healthy blood pressure levels. For an added benefit, try exercising outdoors.³ "Even if you're getting up from your desk for a 15- to 20-minute midday walk in a park, being in nature can reduce stress and, in turn, help lower blood pressure," says Langer.

Increase potassium intake. "Most people fixate on cutting salt, but increasing potassium is equally powerful and often easier to stick with," says Young. "Potassium directly counteracts sodium's blood pressure-raising effects."

To get your fill, load up on potassium-rich choices like fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils and low-fat milk and yogurt.

Try the DASH diet. "Build meals around a DASH-style pattern," suggests Young. It's filled with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and low-fat dairy, yet is moderate in sodium and low in saturated fat and added sugars.³ "The beauty of eating this way is that it naturally increases potassium, magnesium and calcium while reducing sodium, so it addresses multiple pathways at once," adds Young.

Prioritize quality sleep. Research suggests that insufficient or poor-quality sleep may be associated with higher blood pressure over time, partly due to its effects on stress and cardiovascular regulation.¹⁷ Prioritizing sleep and getting the recommended seven to nine hours each night may help support blood pressure.

Manage stress levels. Chronic stress may contribute to higher blood pressure over time by affecting hormones and increasing strain on the cardiovascular system. Stress-management practices like mindfulness, deep breathing or light stretching may help support healthier blood pressure levels.

Our Expert Take

Evenings are when we tend to relax and unwind, which can make it easier for certain habits to slip in—even if you've been mindful earlier in the day. Things like higher-sodium takeout, cocktails, late-night sweet snacks, certain over-the-counter medications and extended screen time can all contribute to higher blood pressure over time. Instead, experts suggest focusing on simple, supportive habits like prioritizing quality sleep, managing stress levels, getting regular movement and opting for lower-sodium, nutrient-rich meals in the evening to support healthy blood pressure levels.



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