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40 Years of Hope and Healing: Karwan-e-Hayat Takes Its Mental Health Mission to Houston



HOUSTON, TEXAS: Karwan-e-Hayat, Pakistan's Institute for Mental Health Care, hosted a special event in Houston on September 25, 2026, highlighting its 40-year journey in psychiatric treatment, rehabilitation and mental

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Pakistan Eyes New Investment as Minister Unveils Gwadar Refinery Talks in Houston



HOUSTON, TEXAS: Pakistan's Federal Minister for the Board of Investment, Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh, has said that Pakistan's international standing has improved significantly in recent years, while foreign direct investment has also recorded an increase as the government continues efforts to attract overseas investment and strengthen economic ties.

Speaking to local media

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FORT BEND COUNTY JUDGE DANIEL WONG
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Houston 'not taking any action' on $150 million DOJ grant application tied to 'immigration law enforcement'

After repeated delays, Houston Mayor John

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PM Shehbaz urges shift from economic stabilisation to growth, job creation and export promotion

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister

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Migrant children face deportation court without lawyers

HARLINGEN, Texas — Migrant children are appearing before U.S. immigration judges without

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ICE's digital dragnet expands to 183,000 under electronic watch

NEW YORK — ICE's electronic monitoring program has expanded sharply, placing an

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One Roof, Many Worlds

The Voice of Peace Inside the Hall, a World of Power Outside — and a Changing Global Order



By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

Who knows how many lines have been drawn across the map of the world. Some were drawn by rivers, some by mountains, some by history, and many by human beings themselves, out of fear, interest, war, and the hunger for power. Yet walk into the United Nations building in New York and, for a few moments, it seems as though all those lines have folded into a single roof. Under one roof stand the countries that are friends, the countries that consider one another rivals, and the countries between whom the guns on the border have never fallen silent. Every nation has its own flag, every delegation its own position, every head of state or government his own story, his own griefs, his own interests and priorities — and yet almost every speech contains one word in common. That word is peace.

Throughout the sessions and meetings of the 81st General Assembly of the United Nations, I listened to speaker after speaker. Sometimes I studied the hall, sometimes I tried to read the faces of the delegations from different countries, and sometimes I asked myself: if nearly everyone sitting inside this building wants peace, why is there so much war in the world outside it? If everyone claims to respect international law, why does the law so often appear helpless before power? And if the United Nations is truly humanity's greatest shared political and moral forum, why are so many of the world's biggest decisions made not inside this building, but in other centers of power beyond it?

Perhaps that same question was present, in some form, in the official theme of this year's General Assembly: the restoration of trust, the management of change, and the making of a United Nations that works for everyone. But the irony was hard to miss. Inside the building, they were speaking of restoring trust; outside, the whole world was passing through a deep crisis of trust. The Middle East was burning. The human tragedy of Gaza was knocking at the conscience of the world. Tensions between Iran and America were raising questions of global security. The war in Ukraine was still there. The echoes of last year's military confrontation between Pakistan and India had not yet faded. Water in South Asia appeared to be becoming not merely a natural resource but part of the vocabulary of national security. America and China were at once rivals and, in the global economy, impossible to imagine without one another. And artificial intelligence stood before us as a new kind of power — one with no army, no border, no flag, and yet one that may, in the coming years, help decide who holds power in this world.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in his final General Assembly address, also pressed for an end to wars, for global oversight of artificial intelligence, for action on the climate crisis, and for reform of international institutions including the United Nations itself. His second and final term ends on December 31, and on January 1, 2027, the United Nations will have a new Secretary-General. During this same General Assembly coverage, I had the chance to meet Rebeca Grynspan and to take a few memorable photographs with her. A former vice president of Costa Rica and a distinguished economist, Grynspan is currently Secretary-General of UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the first woman ever to lead that institution. What made this brief meeting all the more interesting was that Grynspan is now in the race to succeed Guterres; Costa Rica has formally nominated her for the post of the next UN Secretary-General. She is also among the women candidates who, if chosen, could become the first female Secretary-General in the history of the United Nations. And so, on one side, I was listening in the hall to a Secretary-General preparing to leave this global institution after ten years; on the other, in those same corridors, I was meeting a figure who is a candidate for its next leadership. Perhaps the United Nations is much like the world itself: one era is still writing its final lines when another is quietly knocking at the door.

One of the pleasures of covering the United Nations is that one meets not only heads of state, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and diplomats — but also journalists, intellectuals, and analysts from every corner of the world, each carrying their own thinking and experience. Conversations in corridors, in the media center, over coffee, or at a friend's home sometimes raise more questions than the official speeches delivered from the General Assembly podium. On this trip, too, I met a number of journalists and intellectuals from Pakistan, but among them, my meeting with Muhammad Mehdi held special significance for me.

Together with Azeem Mian of Geo News Washington, and at the invitation of New York journalist Farrukh, I had the chance to sit with Muhammad Mehdi for a lengthy conversation. The meeting was timely, too, because on this same American tour he had spoken at Johns Hopkins University in Washington on Asia's changing security landscape. One point from that talk was especially important: that a country's national security today can no longer be measured only by its army, its cannons, its tanks and its missiles. The economy, political institutions, internal peace, cyber security, technology, the people's trust in the state, and economic ties with the rest of the world have all become part of national security. Speaking of Pakistan-China relations and CPEC, he argued that the success of major projects should be judged by outcomes such as production, trade, exports, employment, and technology transfer, while on relations with America, he spoke of the possibilities in trade, investment, technology, and diplomacy.

After speaking with him, the same question arose in my mind in a new form: what, in the twenty-first century, is the true definition of power? Is power only a missile? Is a strong economy power? Is advanced technology power? Are stable institutions power? Or is the greatest power simply this — that a state's citizens trust their own system? Perhaps national power today is the sum of all of these things, and that may be precisely why the old yardsticks of power in the world are changing so fast.

After New York, in Washington too, there was a chance for a lovely gathering with journalists. At the invitation of Khurram Shahzad, president of the Pakistani American Press Association, and Yousuf Chaudhry, its general secretary, I went to Washington, where a dinner had been arranged in honor of the journalists who had come from Pakistan to cover the UN General Assembly. There too I met many of those journalists and spoke with them on a range of subjects. It is a curious thing: when Pakistani journalists sit around a single table in a foreign land, though geography stands thousands of miles apart, Pakistan itself comes and sits down among them. Sometimes the politics of Islamabad enters the conversation, sometimes Karachi's restlessness, sometimes Lahore, sometimes Washington's priorities, and sometimes the diplomacy of New York. At the same event I also met Republican leader and well-known figure of the Pakistani community, Sajid Tarar. In gatherings like these, one realizes that inside the hall of the United Nations it is states that speak, but outside the hall it is people who speak — and that to understand the whole picture of the world, one must listen to both.

Among all the speeches during my time at the General Assembly, American President Donald Trump's address was, without doubt, one of those that drew the most attention. Listening to him, I felt again and again that he stood at the podium of the United Nations, yes, but that his political vocabulary revolved less around traditional multilateral diplomacy than around American sovereignty, national interest, and the idea of power. His tone toward Iran was extremely harsh. He sharply criticized the International Criminal Court and demanded that its members withdraw. He disagreed with global regulatory proposals on AI, and pressed for American power and freedom of action.

Listening to Trump's speech, a strange contradiction of history stood before me. After the Second World War, America was among the foremost architects of the international order then built; today, at the greatest global podium of that very order, an American president was reminding the world of the importance of national sovereignty and power. The question, for me, was not whether Trump's position was right or wrong. The larger question was this: is the world moving once again toward a place where a state's own power, rather than international law, will be decisive?

In those few days at the United Nations, another truth also kept appearing before my eyes. When the president or prime minister of a country stands at the General Assembly podium, the frame on a television screen presents a scene of great dignity: behind him, the green marble of the United Nations; before him, the emblem of the world body; and there, addressing the world, a head of state. His speech goes out live, it gets prominent play at home, newspapers make headlines of it, and selected sentences begin to circulate on social media. But sitting inside the hall, the picture looks different. Across various sessions, I noticed that during many speeches a large number of seats stood empty. Delegations came and went, busy with their own programs and meetings; and when the turn of a particular country's head or representative came, the activity of his own delegation and the relevant diplomatic circles would suddenly surge. What looks on television like an address to the entire world often appears, from inside the hall, like an address to a relatively small audience.

Watching this, a question formed in my mind: then why do the leaders of the world come here to give speeches at all? Perhaps the answer is that the podium of the United Nations is not merely a conversation with the seats in front of it. A speech here addresses, at once, the people of one's own country, the global media, friendly and rival states, and — above all — the record of history. Many of the leaders who come here perhaps know themselves that a twenty- or thirty-minute speech will not produce an immediate solution to Kashmir, Palestine, Ukraine, Iran, or any other long-standing dispute. Yet they come, because in world politics it is sometimes considered necessary, even before solving a problem, to place one's position on the global record. The next day those same words reach different parts of the world through newspapers, television, digital media, and diplomatic statements. And so the true listener of the General Assembly is perhaps not always the person sitting in the seat in front; sometimes it is a citizen watching television at home, thousands of miles away, and sometimes it is history yet to come.

I saw, too, a kind of constant commotion. In the corridors, delegations moved briskly from one place to another, journalists tried to reach some head of state or minister, security officers opened and closed passages, diplomats hurried to their bilateral meetings, and the delegations of various countries seemed busy making their national positions as prominent as they possibly could. It was there that I realized the United Nations is not only a place of negotiation — it is also a global marketplace of narratives. Every state comes here to present its position to the world. What one country calls diplomacy, another may call propaganda; what one side calls facts, the other regards as political narrative. The real test for a journalist, perhaps, lies in working out, amid this noise, what is a claim, what is a fact, and how wide the distance is between them.

The same contest between Pakistan and India was not confined to General Assembly speeches. On one occasion, at the close of a press briefing by Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, a Pakistani journalist asked him when India would stop its alleged sponsorship of terrorism in Pakistan. Rather than give a detailed reply, Jaishankar called Pakistan a "terrorist country," said that such a country was asking him this question, and then left. India consistently maintains that groups active from Pakistan have been involved in terrorism in India, while Pakistan has repeatedly accused India of sponsoring terrorism and instability on its soil. For me, the significance of this brief episode lay not only in the accusations traded between the two countries; it was also a small illustration of how quickly the language of diplomacy, inside the walls of the United Nations, turns into the language of national narrative.

And perhaps this was the very contradiction I kept seeing in those few days. The podium of the United Nations was ostensibly built to solve problems, but in practice it has also become a stage on which problems are placed on the global record, national positions are carried to the world, and a country's testimony is entered before history. The seats in the hall may be empty, but the cameras are rolling; the audience in front may be small, but millions are listening in different parts of the world. Perhaps that is why leaders still come to New York. They know that one speech will not change the world, but that sometimes it matters to put on record, before the world, what you said in the moment when history was listening.

And perhaps one answer to that very question could be seen, that same week, outside the United Nations as well. On one side, world leaders were explaining the importance of multilateral diplomacy in New York; on the other, matters of great importance among major powers were being settled directly in their capitals. Against this background, questions were raised about the United Nations' relevance — where does the practical power of this podium stand when the decisive conversations of the great powers happen outside this global body?

But perhaps this does not mean the United Nations has become unnecessary. Sitting there, I sometimes thought quite the opposite. The great powers have Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and other capitals where they can speak to one another directly — but what do the small states have? For them, this is the global podium, where at least their flag flies at the same height as the flag of a great power, and their representative stands at the same podium where the representatives of the world's great powers stand. Perhaps the greatest significance of the United Nations lies not in giving more power to the powerful, but in giving a voice to the weak.

The speech of Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif naturally held special importance for me. Listening to his address, I felt that behind him stood not only Pakistan's national flag but also many unresolved questions of nearly eight decades of South Asian history — Pakistan and India, Kashmir, terrorism, water, and the mistrust between two nuclear powers that, after any single incident, could once again push the whole region to a dangerous edge. Addressing the General Assembly on September 25, the prime minister referred to last year's Pakistan-India military escalation, invoked the role of American President Trump, raised the Kashmir issue, and took a very clear and firm position on water. He said that any attempt to divert Pakistan's share of water would be regarded by Pakistan as an "act of war."

question, perhaps, runs far deeper than that:

When law and power stand face to face, whose voice does the world finally hear?

Continued on Page 04

Pakistan's Investment Future, Turning Words into Action

'Pakistan has the resources, market, talent, and strategic position to become a major investment destination. But investment does not follow promises alone; it follows confidence, consistency, transparency, and results. The government's commitment to a more investor friendly environment is encouraging but the real challenge now is to turn those commitments into effective action, credible institutions, and a business environment where investors can invest with confidence and certainty. The real test is not what is announced, but what investors experience on the ground'.

By Syed Feroz Ahmed
Houston , Texas

I recently had the opportunity to attend an event organized by the Pakistani American Congress in Houston, Texas where I had the chance to interact with the Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Qaisar Ahmed Shaikh. In his address to the gathering, the Minister presented an encouraging picture of Pakistan's current investment environment and highlighted the opportunities available to both overseas Pakistanis and international investors. His presentation was thoughtful and informative, particularly for members of the overseas Pakistani community who remain interested in contributing to Pakistan's economic development.

The Federal Minister emphasized the government's efforts to create a more investor-friendly environment and assured the audience that investors would be facilitated through a one window operation designed to simplify procedures and reduce unnecessary delays. He also spoke about the government's efforts to regularly review and improve investment policies / regulations and welcomed investors to Pakistan with assurances regarding the protection and security of their investments. It was certainly encouraging to hear such a positive and forward looking presentation.

Pakistan has much to offer potential investors, and there is no doubt that the country possesses many of the fundamental ingredients required to become an attractive investment destination. Its large population represents a substantial consumer market, while its young workforce, natural resources, strategic geographical location, and growing technology sector offer opportunities across a wide range of industries.

However, a positive presentation and well intentioned policies are only the beginning. The real measure of an investment environment is not what is announced from a platform, but what an investor experiences when attempting to establish and operate a business. This is where the difference between potential and reality becomes important.

Pakistan has significant investment potential, but potential alone does not attract capital. Investors require confidence that the rules governing their investments will remain clear, consistent, transparent, and predictable. They need institutions that function efficiently, procedures that are straightforward, decisions that are made within reasonable timeframes, and effective mechanisms for resolving commercial and regulatory disputes.

In this context, the concept of a genuine one-window operation is particularly important. If properly implemented, it could substantially improve the investment climate by allowing investors to deal with multiple government departments through a coordinated system rather than navigating a complex and time consuming bureaucratic structure. Such a system could reduce delays, lower the cost of doing business, and provide investors with greater certainty.

The challenge, however, is that Pakistan has struggled with many of these issues for decades. Policy uncertainty, bureaucratic delays, institutional weaknesses, inconsistent implementation, lack of accountability, and governance problems have frequently affected the confidence of businesses and investors. These difficulties do not necessarily mean that investment opportunities do not exist rather, they make it harder for investors to assess risks and make long term commitments.

For an investor, certainty is often as important as opportunity. A business may be willing to accept commercial risks, but it is far more difficult to accept uncertainty created by unpredictable regulations, administrative delays, changing policies, or inconsistent treatment by institutions. When such concerns persist, investors may hesitate, postpone decisions, or direct their capital toward jurisdictions where the operating environment is more predictable.

This is why Pakistan's investment strategy must go beyond offering incentives and announcing new policies. The country needs meaningful and sustained institutional, bureaucratic, and governance reforms. Procedures must be simplified, unnecessary regulations eliminated, transparency strengthened, and accountability improved. Most importantly, policies must be implemented consistently rather than remaining confined to official announcements.

Government institutions also have a critical role to play. Investors should be able to obtain clear information, receive timely decisions, and operate under rules that apply equally to everyone. An investment environment based on transparent systems rather than personal connections would not only benefit foreign investors but would also strengthen confidence among Pakistani businesses and entrepreneurs.

At the same time, Pakistan should concentrate on sectors where it possesses genuine economic advantages. Agriculture and agro processing, information technology, renewable energy, oil & gas, minerals and mining, manufacturing, tourism, infrastructure, and logistics all offer considerable opportunities. Investment in these sectors could create employment, increase exports, improve productivity, develop local industries, and generate broader economic activity.

For overseas Pakistanis in particular, Pakistan can offer an opportunity to contribute capital, expertise, technology, and international business connections to the country's development. Many members of the diaspora have a strong emotional and economic connection with Pakistan. What they need, however, is not simply an invitation to invest but they need confidence that their investment will be treated professionally, transparently, and fairly.

The Minister's message, therefore, should be viewed as an encouraging indication of the government's stated direction. But the real test will be implementation. Investors will ultimately judge Pakistan not by speeches or policy documents alone, but by the ease with which they can establish a business, obtain approvals, operate without unnecessary interference, resolve disputes, repatriate legitimate returns, and plan for the future with reasonable certainty.

Pakistan stands at an important point in its economic journey. The country has resources, people, geography, markets, and entrepreneurial talent. What it needs is an institutional environment capable of converting these advantages into sustainable economic activity.

Investment follows confidence, and confidence cannot be created overnight. It is built gradually through consistent policies, effective institutions, transparency, accountability, the rule of law, and demonstrated respect for legitimate business interests. If Pakistan can make meaningful progress in these areas, the investment opportunities highlighted by the Minister can move beyond presentations and policy statements and become a tangible economic reality.

Pakistan's challenge in attracting international investment is less about a lack of opportunities and more about lack of predictability. From an international investor's perspective, policy uncertainty, complex regulations, high energy costs, taxation issues, foreign-exchange risks, security concerns, and weak contract enforcement reduce confidence.

Main Hurdles for Foreign Investment in Pakistan can be summarized as Political instability and uncertainty, Economic instability and high inflation, Currency depreciation and exchange rate volatility, Difficulty in repatriating profits and foreign currency, Complex taxation system, Frequent changes in government policies, Excessive bureaucracy and red tape, Weak contract enforcement, Slow judicial and dispute resolution processes, Corruption and lack of transparency, Security and law and order concerns, High energy costs and unreliable electricity supply, Weak infrastructure and logistical challenges, Inconsistent regulations and approval procedures, Weak protection of intellectual property, Land ownership and property related issues, Limited investor confidence in long term policy stability, High cost of doing business, Limited access to financing and foreign exchange, Uncertainty about long term economic reforms.

Policymakers should therefore focuson stable and consistent economic policies, simpler regulations and taxation, reliable and competitive energy, stronger investmentand contract protection, predictable foreign exchange and profit repatriation mechanisms, and faster reforms of state owned enterprises. Instead of relying mainly on short term incentives, Pakistan should build a business environment based on certainty, transparency and consistent implementation, so that international investors have confidence to commit capital for the long term.

One Roof, Many Worlds

Continued From Page 03

In that speech, the word "water" struck me as deeper, perhaps, than many of the other political words. Water is not, on its face, politics. Water is the river, the field, the farmer's crop, the hearth of a mother's home, the glass in the hand of a thirsty child. But when water becomes part of the vocabulary of national security between two nuclear powers, a journalist has to look beyond the word of the speech to the picture of the future. The coming disputes of South Asia may perhaps not be only over land and borders, but over the basic resources of life itself. On the other side, India, rejecting Pakistan's position and allegations, has continued to repeat its longstanding objections on terrorism. One hall, one podium, two neighbors, and two different national narratives. It is perhaps here that the meaning of the title of my piece, "One Roof, Many Worlds," becomes clearest.

The scope of Shehbaz Sharif's speech was not confined to India and Kashmir. The Middle East, Iran, the Gulf, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and vital global maritime routes were also part of what he addressed. He urged that the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb be kept open. This is not a matter of shipping lanes alone. The trade leaving Karachi is tied to the Gulf, Pakistan's energy needs to the Middle East, its economic future to China, and its financial and diplomatic ties to the West, including America. Perhaps that is why it has become impossible, today, for Pakistan to turn its foreign policy around a single axis.

It is not possible to complete the picture of this General Assembly without mentioning Gaza. Sitting through the different sessions, I felt again and again that Palestine is no longer merely a regional dispute, but has become a test of the global order's moral claims.

Listening to talk of Gaza and Palestine, an old scene from history returned to my mind. In 1988, when America refused to grant a visa to New York to Yasser Arafat, the most prominent voice of the Palestinian struggle and then chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the matter was not confined to a travel document; the UN General Assembly moved its session on the Palestinian question from New York to Geneva, and Arafat stood there and addressed the world. Nearly four decades later, history repeated itself in a strange way. This time, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was denied an American visa for the second year running, and instead of being present in that same New York hall, he addressed the world from Ramallah by pre-recorded video. The General Assembly did open the way for his virtual participation by a vote of 152, and a number of countries objected to the American decision, so the world was not entirely silent — but the extraordinary collective step of 1988, when the General Assembly's session itself picked itself up from New York and moved to Geneva for one Palestinian leader, was nowhere to be seen. Perhaps that difference tells the story of two eras. The question is not whether the world heard Palestine's voice; the question is how much the strength of the world's collective response to that voice has changed in four decades.

In his address, the UN Secretary-General spoke of the deaths and destruction in Gaza and appealed for an end to the fighting, for humanitarian aid to be delivered, and for the two-state solution to be saved. Israel presents its actions in the context of its own security and its war against Hamas, while Palestinians and many countries around the world have raised grave objections to civilian deaths, destruction, and the humanitarian crisis. It was here that the question arose in my mind: does even the word "peace" mean something different to every nation? For one, peace is the protection of one's border; for another, seeing one's child alive; for another, the survival of the state; and for another, freedom on one's own land. The difficulty of the United Nations, perhaps, is exactly this: it has to seat all these different definitions of peace under one roof.

Under that same roof, China's voice was also heard, but its vocabulary differed from the American tongue. China emphasized respect for the sovereignty of Gulf states and opposed American pressure and sanctions on Cuba. And so, on one side, America spoke the language of national interest, sovereignty, and its own power; on the other, China spoke the language of international law, state sovereignty, and non-interference. Yet an old contradiction of world politics remains here too: principles sound very beautiful when they are being applied to someone else; the real test of a state's principle comes when that same principle stands in the way of its own interest.

During various sessions, I would sometimes stop listening to the speaker and simply watch the hall in silence. The world sat before me. The great nuclear powers, and the small island states; the world's largest economies, and the poor countries for whom climate change is not a conference term but a question of their very existence. Some had nuclear weapons, some dollars, some oil, some technology, and some perhaps only their own voice. That same week, at the General Assembly's "Sagarmatha to the Sea" session, the severe shortage of adaptation finance for developing countries in the face of the climate crisis was also under discussion.

On paper, sovereign equality among states is a foundational concept of the United Nations, but outside its walls the world has never been equal. Some hold a Security Council veto, some possess boundless military power, some the financial might to shake the global economy, and some only the few minutes in which their representative can stand at the General Assembly podium and tell the world his story. And perhaps this is the very moment when one realizes why the United Nations, with all

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Do leaders matter?

The role individuals play in shaping history has always been a contested issue in an age-old debate.

Maleeha Lodhi

THE age-old debate over the role of individuals in history continues. Do leaders shape history or is history the product of underlying social and economic structures? Can leaders bring about change in society and determine national outcomes? Proponents of the 'great man theory' have argued that history is the biography of great leaders. This has been contested by others who insist economic and social forces are decisive and impose constraints on what individuals can do. But can individuals transcend structures in moments of crisis?

A provocative new book joins this debate. In Profits, Prophets, Coaches, and Kings: (When) do Leaders Make a Difference Jared Diamondexamines whether individual leadersalter the course of their societies. The study marks a break from the American author's earlier books which earned the Pulitzer Prize winner much fame. But his bestselling 1997 book Guns, Germs, and Steel and other works also attracted criticism for geographic determinism and playing down human agency. His latest book reverses the lens. Across politics, business and sports, it examines whether individual leaders play a decisive role in shaping the world around them, and under what conditions if they do. He considers how the interplay between an exceptional individual and historical circumstances determines success or failure.

At the book's outset, Diamond narrates the incident of March 1930 when Adolf Hitler's car was hit by a huge trailer truck in which he survived. Three years later, Hitler became chancellor of Germany and unleashed the Holocaust and World War II, in which millions of people were killed. He asks whether these horrific events would have happened if Hitler had died in the car crash. Some will argue things would have turned out differently. Others would point to the humiliation inflicted on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles, by the hyperinflation it suffered and the fact that anti-semitism was deeply embedded in the country well before Hitler's rise. That makes it hard to decide whether Hitler made a difference. This, Diamond says, exemplifies the question of whether leaders determine outcomes, for better or for worse.

He mentions three competing schools of thought in this debate. One sees exceptional and heroic leaders determining history. The opposite view is that leaders are constrained by circumstances and have little influence on events. An in-between view holds that individual leaders sometimes do and sometimes don't make a difference. His book takes a middle ground in this debate. For the author, the key question is under what conditions can leaders make a difference.

In his discussion of leaders' impact on history, Diamond sets what he calls the Hamlet test. This refers to whether any contemporary person had comparable qualities to achieve a similar outcome as the individual being assessed. In Shakespeare's case, his unique talent meant no other Elizabethan could have written Hamlet if Shakespeare hadn't done so. He cites the example of independent Botswana's first president as a political figure who passes the Hamlet test. Seretse Khama's policies made his country well-governed and not consumed by civil wars or diamond revenues being wasted on ostentatious projects. Although he leveraged Botswana's inherent advantages and his position as a tribal leader, his contributions to his country would not have happened under another founding president. No other figure had comparable skills. He was an effective leader at a particular place and time, and therefore made a difference.

Leaders however gifted, Diamond says, can be effective only in certain circumstances. For example, Genghis Khan, who established the largest land empire in history, had exceptional qualities but was lucky enough to be born "at the start of the wettest decade in the last 2,000 years on the steppes of Central Asia". In other words, a military and administrative genius was helped crucially by climatic factors which had favourable economic, social and demographic consequences. Therefore, much turns on enabling conditions.

Diamond draws up a list of 22 modern leaders — familiar names — and asserts that historical figures may be forces for either good or bad. Some leaders led their countries to independence and left lasting legacies. Others established dictatorships and systems that did not outlive them. Some leaders had enough power to execute their policies and make an impact. Being at the right place and at the right time, their context aided them to make a difference.

One conclusion he draws is that those who made a difference rarely left office voluntarily — the two notable exceptions being Nelson Mandela and Lee Kuan Yew. He regards education as an important variable in a leader's effectiveness. He cites the cases of Lee Kuan Yew and South Africa's president Thabo Mbeki, trained in economics, whose countries' economies grew spectacularly under their leadership. His account of leaders who contributed positively — and negatively — to national economic growth is particularly insightful.

In discussing business leaders, Diamond notes that many famous names notably Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg are credited with changing the world. But were they uniquely qualified to accomplish what they did? He concludes that none of them pass the Hamlet test. They are important and successful risk-takers in modern business but they were all replaceable. If Bezos hadn't built an online 'everything store', someone else would have, as its time had come thanks to the explosion of the internet. These business leaders made a difference but not the kind that shapes a society's trajectory.

Diamond concludes that context, timing and a leader's abilities determine impactful leadership. Some situations offer an opportunity for leaders to make impactful decisions while other situations severely constrain a leader. "A leader's lowest potential for impact is under circumstances making it improbable that a single person could have changed the outcome," he writes.

There is much in the book to criticise. In places, Diamond's what-if counterfactuals confuse rather than clarify. His "natural experiment" methodology of comparing similar societies or business firms facing similar crises but led by different individuals, in order to isolate the leader's impact, also raises questions. History rarely provides comparable cases. Although he acknowledges the importance of charisma, he says too little about the distinctive qualities that leaders need to be effective. Still, it is an engaging book that makes an important contribution to a debate that will undoubtedly continue for years to come.

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

Expanding surveillance

PUNJAB'S decision to extend its digital surveillance network should be appreciated. However, the question is what the government does with the vast amount of data it is collecting. The expansion to 98 tehsils will take the network well beyond its existing urban footprint. The present network uses systems such as automatic vehicle registration-plate recognition, facial recognition, video analytics and crime-pattern analysis. The potential benefits are considerable. Properly integrated surveillance can improve police response, help identify suspects and stolen vehicles, provide digital evidence, map crime patterns and allow scarce policing resources to be deployed effectively. It can also improve traffic management and response to women's safety and crime reporting. But cameras alone do not make cities safer.

The government appears to be expanding the hardware much faster than it is developing the institutional capacity to turn data into intelligence. This is where the project needs greater attention. Punjab is generating an enormous stream of potentially valuable data from cameras, emergency calls, traffic systems, police records and other digital platforms. However, there is little public evidence that this information is being systematically combined and analysed to understand the causes, patterns and geography of crime. The reported 70pc reduction in serious crime is encouraging, but such claims need independent verification. A fall in reported incidents in areas covered by cameras is not, by itself, proof that surveillance caused the decline. The larger opportunity lies in using the network as a public safety intelligence system rather than treating it primarily as a surveillance project. Data should be integrated with police investigation, prosecution and court outcomes. This could help explain why cases fail, where investigations break down and which policing interventions work. There is another requirement: safeguards. As surveillance expands into union councils and public spaces, rules governing access, retention, sharing and use of personal data become essential. Facial recognition and other AI tools should not become a licence for indiscriminate monitoring. Access to sensitive data must be logged and audited, with penalties for misuse. The technology can improve policing, but only if the authorities develop the analytical capacity, accountability and institutional discipline needed to extract its full value.

Rehman Patel Hosts High-Energy Meet-and-Greet for Dr. Salman Lalani's Re-Election Campaign

Rehman Patel hosted a well-attended meet-and-greet at his residence for State Rep. Dr. Salman Lalani, bringing voters and supporters together for dinner, community conversation and campaign outreach. Attendees expressed enthusiasm for block walks, campaign literature distribution, yard signs and grassroots word-of-mouth efforts in support of Dr. Lalani's re-election campaign.

























Judge Daniel Wong Connects with Stafford Congregation at ISGH Center



STAFFORD, TX — Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong visited the Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) center, Masjid As Sabireen in Stafford, addressing the congregation on unity, shared heritage, and local economic growth. Wong connected with attendees by highlighting Fort Bend's rich diversity, noting that residents are bound by a common thread of hard work and the shared immigrant journey of coming to America to build a better future.

Shifting to his vision for county leadership, Wong outlined a pro-growth agenda focused on expanding high-paying jobs, upgrading vital infrastructure including roads and flood mitigation, and delivering dedicated support to local small businesses.

Following his address, Judge Wong held a productive meeting with ISGH executive leaders. The discussion focused on deepening collaboration between county administration and faith communities, addressing neighborhood public safety, and ensuring local transportation and drainage projects keep pace with rapid community growth. ISGH leadership welcomed Judge Wong's hands-on outreach, while he reaffirmed his commitment to maintaining an accessible, transparent county government that serves all working families across Fort Bend.

Karwan-e-Hayat Hosts Houston Event to Highlight 40 Years of Mental Health Care

Karwan-e-Hayat marked its four decades of psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation with a special event in Houston, bringing together community leaders, medical professionals and supporters to highlight its mental health initiatives, healthcare services and opportunities for international collaboration.



Houston Pakistani Diaspora Joins Shehzad Roy and Tabish Hashmi to Transform Pakistan's Public Schools

At the Zindagi Trust 2026 Annual Gala in Houston, founder Shehzad Roy and comedian Tabish Hashmi united civic leaders to champion systemic public school reforms and empower Pakistan's youth.















THE HIGH COST OF BALOCHISTAN'S SOLAR TRANSITION

By MOHAMMAD ZAFAR BALOCH |

The trouble began when the electricity supply to agricultural tube wells in Manjhoshori, Naseerabad, was changed from three-phase to two-phase.

For Mohammad Anwar Manjhoo, a local farmer, the timing could not have been worse.

His Rabi crops, including wheat, corn and pulses, were approaching maturity. His tube well, run on subsidised electricity, was the source of irrigation for his fields. Then, suddenly, the power supply was disrupted, and so was, consequently, the water supply to the crops.

"Just when the crops were approaching maturity, we ran out of water," Manjhoo said.

Come harvest time and the effect could be seen, even quantified. A 16-acre block that normally produced between 600 and 700 maunds of wheat yielded around 500 maunds after the water shortage, he said. Between 250 and 300 acres of his land was affected.

"This became the story of almost every household," said Manjhoo.

The interruption came as Balochistan was undertaking a major change in the way its farmers power agricultural tube wells. The government had decided to move thousands of subsidised agricultural connections from the electricity grid to solar power to solve a problem that had been building for years. Agricultural tube wells had depended heavily on subsidised electricity. The subsidy was expensive for the government, while the Quetta Electric Supply Company (Qesco) faced mounting financial pressure and farmers complained that the electricity they were supposed to receive was often unavailable or insufficient.

Solarisation offered the government a different arrangement. Instead of continuing to pay a recurring electricity subsidy, it would provide financial support for solar systems, disconnect the agricultural tube wells from the grid and shift farmers to solar-powered irrigation.

A gradual transition to solar

The Balochistan solarisation programme was launched with a promise of completion within three months, with uninterrupted water supply for farmers. The Rs 55 billion project included shifting around 28,000 agricultural tube wells from grid electricity to solar, with the federal government contributing 70 percent of the funding and the remaining 30 percent covered by the Balochistan government. However, implementation was slow and unwieldy.

For Manjhoo, however, the transition was measured in immediate terms. With his crop still standing in the field, the power was interrupted.

Farmers and their representatives say the problem was the sequence in which the transition took place. Khalid Hussain Bathh, chairman of Kissan Ittehad Pakistan, said farmers in Naseerabad were promised compensation for solarisation but faced electricity cuts before receiving the money. "Before payments were made, electricity connections were cut, and the supply was shifted from three-phase to two-phase," Bathh said.

The result was that tube wells remained shut and crops suffered from the shortage of irrigation water.

"Crops were destroyed due to the unavailability of irrigation water," he said, adding that farmers had sown crops on the assurance of the provincial irrigation minister but that their seeds went to waste because of the water shortage. Kissan Ittehad took note that farmers were suffering financial losses after electricity connections were disconnected while solarisation funds had not yet been released.

Qesco claims compensation preceded disconnections, but official federal briefings from March 2025 confirm thousands of premature disconnections while energy departments were still negotiating payments in May. Its records show that compensation was paid in phases, followed by disconnection of the corresponding agricultural connections.

If the payments and disconnections happened in the sequence described by Qesco, the problem was one of implementation and timing of individual cases. If farmers' accounts are correct, some were left without adequate irrigation while waiting for the promised transition.

Why the government wanted the change

The old system that subsidised power for agricultural irrigation had its own problems. According to energy economist and policy expert Zubair Khan of the Indus Consortium, the agricultural tube well subsidy dates back to July 2001. It was introduced because farmers in Balochistan depended heavily on groundwater for irrigation, particularly in areas with limited canal irrigation.

The arrangement gave farmers access to subsidised electricity, but the subsidy was ultimately paying for the energy used to pump groundwater. Under the 2015 arrangement, a tube-well owner paid Rs10,000 a month while the government subsidised the remaining electricity bill up to a ceiling of Rs75,000. The federal government contributed 40 percent and Balochistan 60 percent. The arrangement was based on a specified motor size and an assumption of eight hours of electricity supply a day.

Farmers increasingly complained that they were not receiving those eight hours. By 2023-24, some farmers were reporting that they received only around three hours of electricity a day.That left the government paying a large subsidy while farmers still struggled to irrigate their land.

Khan also pointed to another problem. Because the benefit was tied to subsidised tube-well electricity rather than directly targeted according to need, larger farmers or those with greater groundwater dependence could receive a larger public benefit. The state was subsidising the cost of pumping water. Solarisation changes that arrangement. The government makes a substantial investment at the beginning, and the farmer takes over the cost of operating the system. That makes sense for the government; as for the farmers, it gives them something they had not reliably received from the grid: control over when they irrigate.

The question is who can afford to get there.

The farmer's share

While the government capped its contribution at Rs2 million per connection, real conversion costs ran significantly higher. Tariq Bangulzai, who farms 50 acres in Mastung, spent over Rs4 million to install his system which uses between 112 and 115 panels of 615 watts each.

With no dedicated bank financing available, growers were forced to sell livestock or rely on private high-interest loans to cover the shortfall, turning an energy relief programme into an immediate financial burden.

Mohammad Munawwar, an eight- to nine-acre apple grower from Khanozai, faced a similar problem. His solar system, including the panels, wiring, frame and other equipment, cost approximately Rs2.45 million.

The examples show why the solarisation programme cannot be judged only by how much money the government saves on electricity subsidies. For the government, the change converts a recurring expense into a capital investment. But for the farmer, it could mean taking on a large financial obligation immediately.

Zubair Khan argues that farmers who cannot meet the capital cost need affordable financing mechanisms, including concessional agricultural loans, long-term instalments, partial grants for smaller farmers and, where appropriate, cooperative or shared solar systems linked to efficient irrigation.

There is also a question about who is eligible in the first place. The programme is designed around registered subsidised agricultural tube-well consumers. Farmers who never had such a connection, including some who depend on diesel, do not automatically enter the same compensation arrangement. The transition therefore does not affect every farmer in the same way.

What solar gets right

While some farmers suffered during the transition, others are pleased with what happened after the solar system was installed. Munawwar says his orchard has not suffered from the change and that his main benefit is no longer having to depend on Qesco for irrigation power.

"I am very happy after shifting to solar," he said. "At least now I do not have to protest against Qesco over electricity supply."

This is a gripe that consumers in Pakistan have long held against the grid. For many, including the farmers in Balochistan, solar power is not just access to clean and cheap energy. It is also reliable daytime power, and in that sense an end to dependence on an expensive and unreliable grid. The problem is whether the state can move farmers from one irrigation system to another without leaving them exposed during the transition, without assuming that every farmer can finance the same capital cost and without ignoring what greater pumping capacity means for groundwater.

The experience of Naseerabad shows the first problem. Other parts of Balochistan point towards the third.

A falling water table

The falling groundwater is not primarily a Naseerabad issue. The province's most serious groundwater concerns are found in areas where agriculture depends heavily on aquifers, including parts of Pishin, Quetta, Mastung and Killa Abdullah.

In Dasht Kumbela, Bangulzai operates nine tube wells. Before solarisation, he said, the feeder serving his village supplied around 400 agricultural tube wells. There was not enough electricity for all of them to operate at the same time. Some farmers received electricity one day and others the next.

Solar changed that. It gave farmers greater pumping capacity during daylight hours. Bangulzai believes the change has added pressure to groundwater.

After heavy rains last year, he said, groundwater in his area was around 900 feet deep. During the following seven months, he estimated that 70 to 80 tube wells went dry as farmers drilled deeper.

He said drilling now costs around Rs4,500 per foot as farmers go deeper. His concern extends beyond agriculture. He fears continued depletion could eventually threaten drinking water in his area.

His account does not prove that solarisation caused those wells to dry. Groundwater depletion in Mastung predates the solar programme and has several causes. But the economic mechanism, however, is simple to follow: When electricity is scarce or expensive, pumping is constrained. When solar makes daytime pumping cheaper and more readily available, that constraint weakens.

Dr Najeeb Ullah, a lecturer in the Department of Geology at the University of Balochistan, describes groundwater depletion as one of northern Balochistan's most serious environmental threats. His research indicates that groundwater levels in parts of the Pishin Basin are declining by around two to five metres annually. Kuchlak and Quetta subbasins have also experienced excessive extraction accompanied by significant land subsidence.

He estimates that the Quetta Valley is subsiding at around 16 centimetres a year. "Solarisation is a factor, but it becomes dangerous when groundwater extraction remains unchecked," he said. That is where the policy question moves beyond solar. A tube well does not care whether its pump is powered by electricity, diesel or sunlight. The question is how much water it is allowed to extract.

The missing regulation

Irrigation Secretary Sohail-ur-Rehman Baloch says there is currently no province-wide statutory limit on the number of hours a solar agricultural tube well can operate, and no uniform volumetric extraction limit for every solar tube well.

He says any restrictions should take account of crop requirements, aquifer safe yield, groundwater availability, pump capacity and local groundwater stress.

That approach makes more sense for Balochistan than a single province-wide quota on extraction, if only because the groundwater conditions of Naseerabad are not the same as those of Pishin, Quetta or Mastung.

The province already has a groundwater-management framework and a system for monitoring groundwater resources. But monitoring a falling water table is different from controlling the pumping that is causing it.

The 2025 Agricultural Solarisation and Electricity Theft Prevention Act regulates the solarisation process, including the use of government-supported solar facilities and restrictions on unauthorised reconnection to the grid. It does not establish a province-wide limit on pumping hours or a uniform groundwater extraction quota.

Solarisation is, therefore, changing the energy economics of irrigation faster than the province has established a comprehensive system for managing the water being pumped.

Governments elsewhere have encountered the same problem. India's experience with solar irrigation has increasingly focused on creating incentives for farmers to use less electricity and water rather than simply making pumping cheaper. In Gujarat, for example, grid-connected solar pumps have been linked to arrangements under which farmers can sell surplus electricity. National programmes have also incorporated groundwater-stress considerations and promoted efficient irrigation.

The policy lesson is useful for Balochistan. The answer is not to restrict solar because the need for cheap and clean energy transition is an immediate universal need, more so in Pakistan where energy poverty is widespread.

For experts the answer lies in regulating what happens after the solar panels are installed. That could mean monitoring groundwater levels, registering abstraction points, measuring water use, encouraging efficient irrigation and imposing restrictions in aquifers where extraction exceeds safe yield.

Sohail-ur-Rehman Baloch says High-Efficiency Irrigation Systems have been proposed as part of the response, but they are not currently a statutory requirement for every solarised tube well.

The Balochistan Water Policy 2024 also envisages further institutional and legal reforms.

The issue, then, is not whether solar power should be used for irrigation. It is whether the government will build the water rules around the new energy system.

Back to the field

In Naseerabad, Manjhoo's tube well now operates on solar power, and the immediate crisis of transition has passed. "Grid electricity was often unavailable or switched off by the authorities," he said. "From that perspective, solarisation has been very good for farmers."

The state had legitimate reason to end an expensive, failing electricity subsidy, just as farmers had reason to demand reliable power. Solar delivers that power while easing financial strain on Qesco. But an energy transition cannot come at the expense of basic agricultural survival. Crops need water when they need water; solar systems must be operational before grid connections are cut.

Moving forward, the success of Balochistan's solarisation plan will not be measured by installed panels or removed subsidies. It will depend on whether the state can provide accessible financing for smallholders and enforce groundwater rules to keep cheap energy from draining depleted aquifers.

For the government, the calculation was about offloading an expensive electricity subsidy. For farmers, it has always been about water.

One Roof, Many Worlds

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its weaknesses, failures, and contradictions, is still necessary.

Returning from New York, what stayed with me more than the words of the speeches were the images: the flags of the world fluttering outside the United Nations, the security barriers, the journalists' cameras, the delegations passing swiftly by, the empty seats of the hall, the applause, the commotion in the corridors, the brief meeting with Rebeca Grynspan, the conversation with Muhammad Mehdi, the sitting with Azeem Mian and Farrukh, the dinner in Washington hosted by Khurram Shahzad and the Pakistani American Press Association in honor of Pakistani journalists, meetings with the journalists from Pakistan, the conversation with Sajid Tarar, Trump's tone, Shehbaz Sharif's speech, the questions of water and Kashmir between Pakistan and India, Gaza and Palestine, Iran, China and America, and then that great hall where the entire world stands up in turn to tell its own story.

When I place all these images side by side, I feel that the world today perhaps does not lack speeches; what it lacks is the will to close the distance between speech and action, a distance that is only growing wider. Whether it is the children of Gaza or the people of Kashmir, the fear of war in the skies over Iran or the battlefields of Ukraine, water between Pakistan and India or technology and trade between America and China — for every dispute the vocabulary of the United Nations contains words: peace, negotiation, sovereignty, justice, human rights, and international law. The question is not whether we still have the words; the question is whether behind those words there remains enough moral and political force to restrain power.

Perhaps that is why, this time, the United Nations building seemed to me both a symbol of the world's power and a mirror of its helplessness. But it is a mirror that cannot be solved by smashing it, for then where would the world see itself? Born from the rubble of the Second World War, this institution was founded on the promise that coming generations would be spared the devastation of war. Eight decades later, war still exists, power often appears greater than law, one nation's hero can be another nation's enemy, and the definition of justice itself changes the moment a border is crossed. Still, every year, the world returns to this same building, stands at this same podium, and speaks to one another.

Perhaps because human beings have not yet found a better global way to keep talking to one another despite their disagreements.

And as I left that hall, this was what I was thinking: the real question before the United Nations is no longer whether the world hears its voice. The real

The roof of the United Nations is still one, beneath it the world still gathers, the word peace can still be heard in almost every speech — yet the worlds that live beneath that single roof remain, still, different from one another.

Migrant children face deportation court without lawyers

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lawyers as funding disruptions and the expiry of a major legal-services contract leave thousands without representation in removal proceedings.

The consequences were visible in Harlingen, where 13-year-old Angel, a Honduran boy, appeared without an attorney. Asked whether anything prevented his return, he said his mother and nearly all his family were in the United States; the judge nonetheless found he did not qualify for asylum and ordered his removal.

Angel was one of 25 minors in the courtroom, some as young as three; all 15 unrepresented children asked said it was their first time in immigration court, and none sought to leave voluntarily.

Immigration proceedings are civil, so the government need not provide counsel to those who cannot afford it.

The gap widened after the administration let a federal contract worth about $200 million a year, held by the Acacia Center for Justice, expire in July; the center says it had helped more than 20,000 unaccompanied children with legal orientation and referrals, and national reporting put the number who lost protections higher still.

One El Paso provider closed and laid off most of its staff. Advocates told CNN that hearings once spread over months now occur within days or weeks.

Americans for Immigrant Justice says nine in 10 children without attorneys are ordered deported, against far better odds for the represented — figures drawn from its own casework.

Federal officials point to a new award of up to $20 million to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, running through Dec. 31, as evidence that counsel remains a priority, and the immigration-court agency disputes that children's cases are being improperly fast-tracked, saying scheduling prevents stalling.

But court declarations describe continuing gaps — at the Harlingen hearing, a USCRI attorney appeared by video in a supporting role for several children but did not speak.

The central question, advocates say, is whether children who have endured separation, abuse or displacement can meaningfully defend their rights before decisions are made about whether they can stay with their families.

Pakistan Eyes New Investment as Minister Unveils Gwadar Refinery Talks in Houston

Continued from front page

in Houston, Sheikh said Field Marshal Asim Munir's role on the diplomatic front has received significant recognition abroad. He also disclosed that discussions are underway with Saudi Arabia regarding the proposed establishment of an oil refinery in Gwadar.

The minister made the remarks during a dinner hosted in his honor by the Pakistani American Congress in Houston. The event brought together prominent Pakistani-American community leaders, business personalities, entrepreneurs, professionals and representatives of various organizations.

During the ceremony, Sheikh was presented with certificates of recognition on behalf of U.S. Congressman Al Green and Texas State Representative Dr. Suleman Lalani, acknowledging his engagement in Pakistan's investment and economic development initiatives.

Addressing the gathering, Pakistan Consul General Aftab Chaudhry emphasized the importance of continued engagement between Pakistan and its diaspora in the United States. He highlighted the potential for increased investment, trade and economic cooperation and the important role of Pakistani Americans in strengthening relations between the two countries.

Pakistani American Congress President Dr. Ashraf Abbasi, who hosted the event, highlighted issues faced by Pakistani Americans in their dealings with Pakistan and expressed concern that successive governments had not given adequate attention to addressing those concerns. He called for greater engagement and practical measures to facilitate overseas Pakistanis.

The gathering was also addressed by Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) President Emran Gazi, Houston-Karachi Sister City Association President Saeed Sheikh, prominent businessman Iqbal Sheikh and Dr. Mazhar Chaudhary.

Gazi described Pakistan as a "big brother" to Bangladesh and said relations between the two countries had witnessed significant progress in recent years.

Speakers and participants discussed Pakistan-U.S. relations, investment opportunities in Pakistan, trade and economic cooperation, as well as ways to facilitate greater participation by Pakistani-American entrepreneurs in Pakistan's economic development.

Particular attention was given to improving facilities and support mechanisms for overseas Pakistanis, expanding commercial links and encouraging Pakistani-American investors to explore opportunities in Pakistan.

The dinner provided an opportunity for community and business leaders to directly engage with the federal minister on Pakistan's investment climate and economic priorities. Participants also stressed the importance of continued dialogue between Pakistani officials and the Pakistani-American community in Houston.

The event concluded with an emphasis on strengthening economic and commercial cooperation, encouraging investment and maintaining strong people-to-people and institutional ties between Pakistan and the United States.

Houston 'not taking any action' on $150 million DOJ grant application tied to 'immigration law enforcement'

Continued from front page

Whitmire's administration is "not taking any action ... at this time" on an application for $150 million from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), according to a spokesperson for the mayor's office.

The administration's plan to apply for the DOJ's Model Cities Initiative (MCI) program drew criticism from some members of the public in recent weeks. They were concerned about grant guidelines calling for cities to "ensure that their initiatives align" with a number of priorities, including "immigration law enforcement operations."

Ten people signed up to speak to the city council about the MCI application during a public comment session on Tuesday evening, including Jennefer Canales-Peláez, senior policy attorney and strategist with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

"While I can agree that bringing housing and funding to the city of Houston is important, it should not be done while sacrificing our most vulnerable community members," Canales-Peláez said.

President Donald Trump unveiled the MCI program in June under the banner "Make America Safe Again." He said it was intended to "slash violent crime in major metropolitan areas all across our country."

The application was slated for consideration by the city council in September, but was delayed twice as city officials sought clarification from the DOJ on the guidelines.

The Mayor's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security previously stated the city's proposed program would "strengthen enforcement and crime suppression, modernize public safety technology and intelligence, protect victims, improve street-level stabilization and public order, reduce recidivism, address youth violence, and strengthen frontline readiness.

Last month, Whitmire downplayed the impact of the grant guidelines on city policy. He said the city's analysis found the grant wouldn't require action beyond what Houston police officers already do — contacting federal immigration authorities when they encounter people with immigration warrants.

Whitmire's office did not say why they're not currently taking action on the grant application.

40 Years of Hope and Healing: Karwan-e-Hayat Takes Its Mental Health Mission to Houston

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healthcare services. The gathering brought together community leaders, medical professionals and supporters to discuss the importance of accessible mental healthcare and opportunities for collaboration.

The evening began with a welcome reception at 7 p.m., followed by Maghrib prayers and a recitation of the Holy Quran. The formal program opened with the national anthems of Pakistan and the United States, reflecting the event's connection between the Pakistani and American communities.

Karwan-e-Hayat Board Chair Mohammad Salim and Chief Executive Officer Rahal Saeed delivered introductory remarks, outlining the organization's four decades of work in psychiatric treatment, rehabilitation and community outreach. They also highlighted the institute's healthcare services and its continued efforts to expand mental health awareness and access to treatment.

Video presentations showcased Karwan-e-Hayat's treatment facilities, healthcare programs and impact on patients, providing attendees with an overview of the organization's work and its contribution to mental healthcare in Pakistan.

The chief guest and distinguished guests of honor delivered keynote addresses, emphasizing the importance of mental health awareness, accessible psychiatric services and continued support for institutions providing specialized mental healthcare.

An interactive question-and-answer session provided attendees with an opportunity to discuss mental health initiatives, the challenges facing psychiatric healthcare and potential avenues for cooperation.

Board Vice-Chair Yacoob Suttar delivered the vote of thanks, acknowledging the guests, organizers and supporters for their participation and contributions to the event.

The program concluded with a dinner reception, where attendees had an opportunity to exchange views and discuss potential future collaborations.

With a 40-year history of psychiatric treatment and rehabilitation, Karwan-e-Hayat continues to provide mental healthcare services in Pakistan. The organization is Shariah-compliant, ISO 9001:2015 certified and registered with the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy (PCP). It also holds the Sindh Healthcare Commission's regular license, making it the only mental health facility in Sindh with this licensing status, according to the organization.

PM Shehbaz urges shift from economic stabilisation to growth, job creation and export promotion

Continued from front page

Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday stressed the need to focus on sustainable economic growth, job creation and export promotion, saying the country had successfully restored macroeconomic stability through a collaborative effort.

Addressing the gong ceremony in Karachi virtually to celebrate the listing of the Naya Nazimabad Apartment REIT scheme, the prime minister lauded the joint efforts of the federal and provincial governments and financial institutions in steering the economy out of severe challenges.

Recalling his recent interactions with international bankers and financial leaders in New York and London, including executives from Citibank, JPMorgan and Barclays and the managing director of the IMF, the prime minister said global financial institutions had commended Pakistan's implementation of long-overdue structural reforms, which had created an attractive ecosystem for investment.

He particularly thanked the finance minister, cabinet members, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and federal secretaries for establishing a replicable model of teamwork that had helped achieve macroeconomic stability and put Pakistan back on the path to sustainable development.

He said the successful implementation of reforms and restoration of macroeconomic stability were the result of a cohesive partnership between the political hierarchy and military leadership working in harmony.

Highlighting key economic indicators, he said Pakistan had successfully issued a $3 billion Eurobond against offers worth $6bn, while State Bank foreign exchange reserves had risen to around $21.4bn, alongside commercial bank reserves of $5.5bn.

The prime minister also said foreign remittances and IT exports were on an upward trajectory, while the Roshan Digital Account was also performing robustly.

However, stressing the need to shift from stabilisation to growth, he called for efforts to achieve economic expansion driven by technology, job creation, increased production and exports.

The prime minister recalled that the federal budget for 2026-27 offered hundreds of billions of rupees in tax breaks and incentives for exporters, manufacturers and industries, including the construction sector.

The premier further said that the incentives introduced by the government for the construction sector were now bearing fruit.

He particularly commended real estate and industrial initiatives spearheaded by business leaders such as Arif Habib in Lahore and Karachi under the REIT structure, and called for further modernisation and improvement of the stock exchange and capital markets by studying other markets in the region.

The prime minister expressed concern over the poor performance of certain industries that had received substantial subsidies and benefited from tariff protection, despite repeated commitments to import substitution and improved competitiveness.

He called for an honest approach that prioritised the national interest over personal gains, stressing that progress depended on modernised machinery, higher productivity and hard work.

Prime Minister Shehbaz particularly appreciated Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for his steadfast support and commitment to national security and economic progress, describing him as a great partner throughout the journey.

He also lauded the chairman of the National Accountability Bureau for recovering public land worth billions of rupees and for the plan to establish a land bank.

He reiterated his resolve that through such dedicated efforts and commitment, Pakistan would emerge as a powerful economy and earn a prominent place in the comity of nations.

Addressing the ceremony, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb highlighted the growing momentum of private-sector participation, saying Rs60bn had been disbursed in housing loans.

Reflecting on the country's economic turnaround, the finance minister said the economy had contracted three years ago, but sentiment had since sharply reversed, with foreign firms, particularly those from the United States, looking to enter the Pakistani market.

He said the government would continue to provide the requisite ecosystem for the private sector.

Outlining key achievements, he said tax targets had been surpassed and the number of tax filers had crossed 5.7 million, up from 3.9m last year.

Prominent business leader Arif Habib, speaking at the ceremony, highlighted Pakistan's successful return to international capital markets after four and a half years, saying the strong response to the Eurobond showed that global investors were closely tracking the country and had expressed confidence in its economy.

He said sovereign ratings had steadily improved from CCC+ to B over the past two years, while the local currency had remained stable for three consecutive years. State Bank foreign exchange reserves had reached a record high of around $22bn, with total liquid reserves touching $27bn, he added.

Habib said the current account deficit remained well managed and worker remittances continued to reach new highs, while inflows through the Roshan Digital Account had increased by 58 per cent.

The prime minister was accompanied by federal ministers Attaullah Tarar, Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Dr Musadik Malik, among others, while Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, State Bank governor, prominent business leader Arif Habib and leading corporate figures also attended the event.

ICE's digital dragnet expands to 183,000 under electronic watch

Continued from front page

estimated 183,000 immigrants under digital supervision through ankle monitors, smartphone apps and biometric technology, according to reported agency data.

The number of GPS ankle monitors has tripled since the start of the current administration, reaching about 54,000 by August 2026, following a June 2025 directive telling officers to use GPS monitoring wherever possible.

ICE's Alternatives to Detention program lets immigrants stay out of physical custody while requiring monitoring and regular check-ins — a system rights advocates say increasingly functions as detention by other means, reaching into homes and workplaces.

It includes SmartLINK, a facial-recognition and GPS check-in app run by BI Incorporated, a subsidiary of GEO Group, alongside tools that extract data from phones and run facial and fingerprint searches against government databases.

Court filings and advocacy reporting have documented cases in which check-in procedures were followed by arrests — people detained at scheduled appointments, or located at home through their monitoring data.

The growth comes as ICE arrests hit 50,925 in August 2026, a third consecutive monthly record, even as researchers find a large share of recent enforcement has involved people with no criminal convictions or charges.

The program is concentrated in major immigrant communities: ICE's San Francisco field office has more than 20,000 people enrolled, with Los Angeles, Miami and Chicago each above 18,000 and New York around 10,700.

Advocates caution against removing or tampering with devices and urge people to consult an immigration attorney before ICE appointments, noting that an administrative ICE warrant — unlike a judicial warrant signed by a federal judge — does not by itself authorize agents to enter a home.

The expansion, they argue, has become a civil-liberties issue as much as an enforcement tool, raising the question of whether release from detention has simply become another, quieter form of confinement.

Trump claims 'annihilation of Iran' possible, will create 'peace'

US President Donald Trump claimed on Thursday that the "annihilation of Iran" was possible, in response to a question about his earlier claims that the US would destroy the country.

"Yeah, I would do that. It's possible," Trump told Time magazine in an interview, while calling himself the "president of peace" in response to another question.

Asked during the interview how such a threat could fit with his description of himself as a "president of peace", Trump replied: "Because by annihilating Iran, we've created peace in the world. With Iran, I don't think you could ever have peace."

He also stated that bombing Iran was "possible" after the midterms, without providing specific details.

"I can't tell you that because look, you know, you're asking, where are you going to bomb?" Trump added.

Rubio ordered Iranian delegation to leave US after talks stalled

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio ordered Iran's delegation to the UN General Assembly, including Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, to leave the country after diplomatic negotiations stalled, a US official confirmed to Anadolu on Wednesday.

The US mission to the UN informed Iran's UN mission Monday evening on Rubio's orders that Araghchi's delegation had to leave New York "immediately," according to the Axios news site, which first reported the story.

It reported, citing a US official, that the delegation "had overstayed their welcome," adding: "The UN General Assembly was over, so it was time for them to go."

The delegation boarded a flight from New York to Doha at 1.20 am local time on Tuesday, the US official said, according to Axios.

A second source was quoted as saying that Araghchi had already been scheduled to travel back to Tehran on Monday night.

According to the report, the White House had expected possible progress in talks with Iran on Monday morning, but by late afternoon, it became clear the negotiations had reached a stalemate.

Qatari mediators are continuing talks with both sides on a compromise proposal, the report cited regional sources as saying.

Iran, Russia hold talks on information security cooperation

A new round of consultations on the implementation of the bilateral agreement on international information security between Iran and Russia was held in Moscow, IRNA reported.

The delegations were led by the Director General for International Peace and Security at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Information Security Department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the meeting, representatives of the relevant agencies of both countries reviewed the current status of cooperation on the implementation of the agreement's provisions and the established action plan.

Key areas of focus during this round of consultations included identifying and implementing cybersecurity projects; enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure and communication networks in both countries against attacks; combating cybercrime; training and upskilling personnel to handle cyber incidents; and fostering cooperation in the field of artificial intelligence infrastructure.

Iran claims capture of another US submarine drone in Strait of Hormuz

Iran said its forces had captured another "advanced smart" unmanned submarine belonging to the US Army in the Strait of Hormuz, TRT reported.

In a statement carried by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) official news outlet, Sepah News, the navy said the autonomous underwater vehicle (AUV), which it said was carrying out "espionage" activities in the Strait of Hormuz, was captured in a "coordinated and complex operation with intelligence dominance and electronic warfare".

The IRGC identified the AUV as a "REMUS 600", adding that it had been handed over to specialists for data recovery.

Iran says it receives US response to latest proposal as Washington pulls out of Iraq

Iran said on Wednesday it had received a US response to its latest proposal to resurrect the collapsed ceasefire in the Gulf, days after President Donald Trump said he had rejected it.

Iran's allies were celebrating on Wednesday after Washington withdrew the last of its forces from neighbouring Iraq, where 4,500 US troops died in the biggest US war of the century. More than 200,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in chaos unleashed after US forces toppled dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Tehran views the pullout as a victory for its "axis of resistance" of allied armed groups, and a step towards its aim of driving US forces out of the region.

With the US-Israeli war against Iran now entering its eighth month, Iran put forward a proposal last week under which the United States would lift its blockade of Iranian ports, and Iran would reopen the disrupted Strait of Hormuz within seven days.

Trump said on Sunday he had rejected the proposal, although Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Tehran had not received a formal rejection. In a post on X on Wednesday, an Iranian government spokesperson said Araqchi had conveyed a US response to the Iranian government.

Iran says its plan aims to restore an interim agreement which collapsed weeks after it was signed by Trump and Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian in June.

Last week, Qatari mediators shuttled between US and Iranian envoys in New York on the sidelines of a meeting of the United Nations, the first proximity talks between the warring sides since the ceasefire unravelled.

An official briefed on the talks, who is not Iranian and spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity, said the Qataris had briefed Araqchi on the US response on Tuesday when Araqchi stopped off in Doha on his way home from New York. According to the official, the sides largely agree about the steps that are needed but still disagree about the order in which to take them.

Iran wants an eventual deal to grant it control over the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important oil shipping route, which runs past its coast.

Shipping through the strait has increased in recent weeks, with shippers charging high fees to brave the risk of attacks. But flows of crude oil, refined products and natural gas remain substantially disrupted. In the latest incidents, Britain's UKMTO maritime security body reported on Wednesday that two ships had been hit by projectiles the previous day.

PPP Houston Celebrates Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Birthday with Enthusiasm

Houston, Texas — The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Houston celebrated the birthday of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari with enthusiasm, bringing party members, supporters and community representatives together to mark the occasion.The celebration reflected the participants' affection for Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and their continued association with the Pakistan Peoples Party. Party members shared birthday wishes, expressed their appreciation for the PPP chairman and highlighted the party's longstanding political legacy.The event also provided an opportunity for PPP Houston members and supporters to strengthen their connections and reaffirm their association with the party. Participants extended their heartfelt wishes to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, praying for his good health, success and a bright future.
















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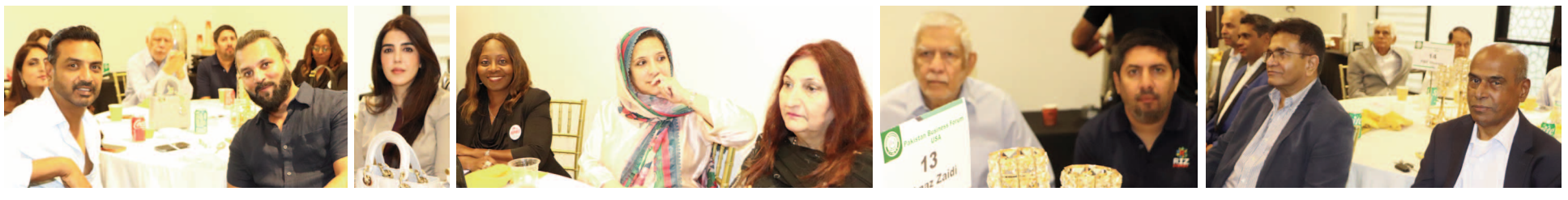
Pakistan Business Forum USA Hosts High-Level South Asia Dialogue with Stimson Center Director

Houston business leaders engage Elizabeth Threlkeld, Director of the South Asia Center at the Stimson Center in Washington, D.C., in a wide-ranging discussion on Pakistan, regional developments, U.S.-South Asia relations and emerging opportunities for stronger economic and professional engagement.









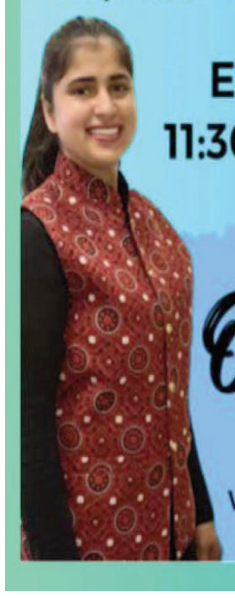
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Tabish Hashmi and Shehzad Roy Win Hearts at Zindagi Trust Fundraiser



HOUSTON — Members of Houston's Pakistani-American community came together in a major showing of philanthropic support at the Zindagi Trust Annual Fundraising Dinner 2026, unifying civic leaders, philanthropists, and social figures behind a shared goal to transform public education in Pakistan.

The evening highlighted the vital and growing role overseas Pakistanis play in driving social and educational progress back home. Attendees gathered to learn about Zindagi Trust's ongoing initiatives and pledge critical resources toward modernizing Pakistan's public school infrastructure and advocating for systemic policy changes within the government school system.

During the program, Zindagi Trust founder and advocate Shehzad Roy delivered a keynote briefing

Continued on page 28

Pakistan Business Forum USA Hosts Elizabeth Threlkeld for Houston Dialogue



HOUSTON, TEXAS: The Pakistan Business Forum USA, Houston, organized an engaging talk with Elizabeth Threlkeld, Director of the South Asia Center at the Stimson Center in Washington, D.C., providing members of the Pakistani American business and professional community an opportunity to discuss developments and emerging issues affecting South Asia.

The discussion focused on the evolving political, economic and strategic landscape of South Asia, with particular attention to regional developments, U.S.-South Asia relations and issues of importance to Pakistan and the Pakistani American community.

Threlkeld shared her perspective on regional affairs and discussed the changing dynamics shaping relations among countries in South Asia. Participants also exchanged views on Pakistan's role in the region, opportunities for greater engagement with the United States and the importance of strengthening economic and professional connections.

The program, organized by the Pakistan Business Forum USA in Houston, reflected the organization's efforts to provide a platform for informed dialogue on international affairs and issues that have implications for Pakistan, the United States and the broader South Asian region.

Members of the business community and other participants welcomed the opportunity to hear directly from a Washington-based South Asia expert and to engage in an open discussion on regional and international developments.

EMGAGE USA Highlights Muslim Political Engagement at Houston Candidate Forum



Houston Activists, Community Leaders Gather to Discuss Human Rights, Advocacy and Political Participation

Houston hosted a series of civic engagement initiatives bringing together human rights activists, community leaders and advocates to discuss pressing issues, strengthen

Continued on page 28

Annual Gyarhveen Shareef Held at Masjid Ghous-e-Azam in Houston



HOUSTON, Texas — The annual Gyarhveen Shareef was held on September 25, 2026, at Masjid Ghous-e-Azam in Houston, drawing members of the Pakistani-American and Muslim community for an evening of religious devotion, prayers and remembrance.

The gathering featured recitation of the Holy Quran, Naat, Durood-o-Salam and special prayers, with attendees participating in the religious program and seeking blessings and spiritual guidance.

The annual observance is held in remembrance of Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (RA), widely revered by Muslims around the world for his teachings on faith, spirituality, charity and service to humanity.

Community members attended the program with their families and joined in collective prayers for peace, unity and the well-being of Muslims and humanity. The gathering also provided an opportunity for members

Continued on page 28

Strong Support for Dr. Salman Lalani at Rehman Patel's Houston Meet-and-Greet



HOUSTON, TEXAS: Mr. and Mrs. A. Rehan Patel hosted a re-election campaign meet-and-greet for Texas State Representative Dr. Salman Lalani at their residence, where supporters and voters gathered for dinner and an evening of conversation about the upcoming campaign.

The gathering drew a strong turnout of Dr. Lalani's supporters, who expressed enthusiasm for participating in campaign activities, including block walks, distribution of campaign literature and yard signs, and grassroots

Continued on page 28

THE AGA'S PHENOMENON: HOUSTON'S SOUTH ASIAN FOOD POWERHOUSE MAKES GLOBAL SPLASH

HOUSTON, TEXAS — A Houston restaurant built around the flavors of Pakistan and India has achieved a remarkable distinction: Aga's Restaurant is now the busiest single-location restaurant on Uber Eats anywhere in the world, according to the delivery platform and reports by The New York Times, Business Insider and the Houston Chronicle.

Located in a Houston strip mall, the family-owned restaurant has

Continued on page 28






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Kashmir unresolved

SEVEN years after India revoked occupied Kashmir's limited autonomy, disquiet continues in the disputed region over the prevailing state of affairs. Even loyalist parties in India's good books are not happy.

This was reflected in a resolution passed by the held region's assembly on Monday, which called for a restoration of statehood that was scrapped when the Indian constitution's Article 370 was abrogated in 2019. The occupied area's chief minister, Omar Abdullah, claimed that statehood was "our right". BJP lawmakers termed the resolution "anti-national". Two similar resolutions have been passed over the years by the IHK legislature.

The problem goes far deeper than the restoration of the status quo ante that existed before August 2019. The core issue is the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, which India has been blocking since the division of the subcontinent. Unless this core issue is addressed with justice, the problem will linger as Kashmiris in the occupied territory are denied their fundamental rights. While speaking at the UN General Assembly, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also highlighted the Kashmir issue, saying that Kashmiris had been waiting "for eight decades" for the UN to fulfil its commitments. He also pointed out the human rights violations that India has carried out against the Kashmiri population. Turkiye's President Recep Erdogan, while speaking at the UNGA, similarly called for a resolution of the Kashmir question as per the "relevant resolutions".

The human rights situation in the disputed region is very grim. A UN report from November 2025 has condemned the arbitrary arrests, suspicious deaths in custody, torture and "discriminatory treatment of Kashmiri and Muslim communities". Held Kashmir's wounds cannot be left to fester. The people of Kashmir, including even those politicians who were or are close to New Delhi, are chafing under the post-Article 370 regime in the held region. Along with rights abuses, there is also alarm over the demographic changes in IHK, as the Kashmiris are being turned into a minority in their own land. The just solution lies in India addressing the issue through a trilateral dialogue involving the legitimate representatives of the Kashmiri people and Pakistan. India's rulers can continue to believe the fiction that occupied Kashmir is an 'integral' part of their country. But that does nothing to address the dissatisfaction that both the common Kashmiri and the political elite of the region feel towards Indian rule. The dispute has poisoned all chances of normalisation in South Asia. Instead of arrogantly dismissing talk of freedom, India's rulers need to listen to voices from IHK, and together with Pakistan, work towards a just solution to this dispute.

Makkah moment

The strategic opportunity comes with caveats.

Fahd Humayun

THERE is no disputing that the coming together of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye comes at a critical juncture for West Asia, even if several aspects around the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement's precise operationalisation remain unclear.

There are good reasons for Islamabad to view this as a significant strategic opportunity. The arrangement, forged in the shadow of the US and Israeli war on Iran, responds to a growing imperative for regional stakeholders to exercise greater control in stabilising a region fractured by conflict.

It also builds on long-standing relationships between three important middle powers whose security is bound up in regional outcomes. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have decades of military and diplomatic cooperation behind them. Turkiye has important extensive defence ties with both. With US retrenchment from the region increasingly appearing inevitable, institutionalising these relationships offers some much-needed strategic coherence to a region beset by complex challenges.

But for Pakistan to make the most of this moment — and for it to translate the compact into lasting strategic advantage — several caveats deserve consideration.

First, for this 'non-directional' arrangement to truly be regionally tenable, it must avoid becoming a source of further division in the Middle East. For Pakistan, the present crisis involving Ansarullah (the Houthis) in the Red Sea offers an early test of whether the alliance can resist being drawn into the region's existing rivalries. There is no disputing the fact that the stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia matters enormously to Pakistan: it is an important source of energy and financial support, and home to a large Pakistani diaspora whose remittances contribute significantly to foreign exchange earnings.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has also dramatically increased Pakistan's dependency on the flow of oil through the Red Sea. But direct military involvement against the Houthis does risk drawing the alliance deeper into existing regional rivalries, risking Islamabad's position with Tehran, and testing Pakistan's stated policy commitment to avoiding camp politics. Ultimately, Pakistan's usefulness to the alliance might lie in its ability to exploit the diplomatic space it retains with both Tehran and Riyadh, using those channels to encourage dialogue and de-escalation.

Second, in terms of objectives, military coordination, defence-industrial cooperation and, ultimately, collective defence are not incompatible with one another. But it is that final commitment, however, that will require the most careful thinking about where Pakistan's obligations to the other two countries begin and end. A decade ago, in 2015, Pakistan's parliament played an important role in the decision not to commit Pakistani troops to the Saudi-led war in Yemen. While the intervening decade has arguably seen an erosion of Pakistan's democratic institutions, the country's leaders must still remember that major commitments abroad still require political dialogue and consensus at home, not least given the country's demographic diversity and the ability of external security choices to reverberate internally.

Finally, and relatedly, those shaping Pakistan's strategic direction would be wise to recognise that Pakistan's expanding strategic horizons cannot be divorced from the pressures it confronts at home and that while there is no arguing that regional influence can be an asset, it is important to build the domestic capacity to sustain. At present, Pakistan confronts a serious trifecta of terrorism, political instability and persistent economic fragility. This year has been among Pakistan's deadliest for terrorism in recent memory. Fraught governance challenges in KP and Balochistan add to that insecurity. For a country already contending with multiple sources of instability at home, expanding commitments abroad without thought to improved governance and/or a corresponding domestic reset at home risks weakening the very foundations on which any newfound regional influence must ultimately rest.

None of these caveats detracts from the rare opportunity Makkah presents. In the shadow of looming threats from India and Afghanistan, and general instability unleashed by America's war in Iran, the arrangement offers Pakistan the chance to do several things: to extract strategic currency from its military capacity, to expand defence-industrial cooperation with important partners, and to eventually be a consequential voice in shaping whatever security architecture emerges from the ashes of the US war against Iran. But these things also require more than aspiration. For Islamabad, that means navigating existing regional fault lines and developing a better political compact at home.

The writer is assistant professor of political science, Tufts University.

Trump-Xi summit

There is much that China and the US appear not to have discussed.

Mahir Ali

ONE of the few revelations that emerged from last week's Sino-US summit in Washington is that President Xi Jinping is "an expert on stone, aside from many other things, and he loves good granite". At least that was the host's verdict after the esteemed guest was obliged to examine the new White House helipad and the Marine One copter in which Donald Trump flits about. Xi's reflections on the ordeal are unlikely ever to be revealed but, whether or not he's actually a fan of granite, we do know that he's an expert at being stony-faced — a feat that his American host, among many others, is incapable of emulating.

More seriously, though, it's somewhat gratifying to see the top honchos of the world's biggest military and economic powers playing footsie with one another. Trump's first presidential campaign a decade ago was grounded in relentless hostility to China, and he has blamed the 2020 election outcome partly on Beijing's interference — which is as absurd as his adversaries crediting Russia with the 2016 result. Noticeably, that plaint wasn't revisited last week.

There was no joint statement at the end of what both sides officially declared to be a huge success. But whereas the mainstream Western liberal media has generally been unduly sceptical about specific achievements, Chinese state media has been celebrating the win-win accomplishments in platitudinous terms, such as "working in the same direction" and "respect, fairness and reciprocity". That is vaguely reassuring, even though nothing is guaranteed. AI wasn't ignored, but the scope for future discussions remains uncertain.

A decade ago, in one of his last documentaries, The Coming War on China, John Pilger laid out the prospects of an operation in the making since the 1950s. He focused in part on Bikini Atoll in the colonised Marshall Islands as a site where hydrogen bombs were regularly tested, with little concern for the inhabitants, in the quest for Asia-Pacific domination. Many decades later, the "pivot to Asia" was essentially part of the same pattern.

'Who lost China?' was a key factor in the purge of State Department officials who correctly predicted the Maoist takeover in 1949, which led to the Formosa 'crisis' that remains unresolved. Trump does not appear to be too concerned about what becomes of Taiwan and has thus far held back on supplying new arms to the island. Any future war over Taiwan would be both stupid and globally disastrous. But can it be avoided? That's a question for an indeterminate future. Pakistan, like several other nations, has relied on both China and the US for decades. This is likely to continue. The perception of Beijing as an all-seasons saviour flows into a different challenge. What comes next might come as a surprise.

The difference between the US and China is that the former is floundering, while the latter, for all its flaws and tribulations, retains its edge. There is no guarantee that the US and China will remain on close terms for the remainder of the year, never mind the forthcoming APEC and G20 gatherings. Whatever Xi's Washington ordeal might have accomplished, the US and China remain at loggerheads in various respects, and the possibility of a war cannot entirely be discounted. The consequences of such an eventuality are too horrible to imagine. Xi's reception in the US has been seen as an unusual accomplishment. What does not necessarily follow is superpower bonhomie, despite the likelihood of two more Xi-Trump encounters before the year is out.

Whether the envisaged progress can be taken at face value is an open question. Leaving AI aside, there is much else that China and the US appear not to have discussed. The pronouncements from Beijing have broadly been more positive than the American pronouncements. Neither side, though, has offered clarity about what lies ahead. Neither technology nor Taiwan may be enough to persuade Trump to challenge China, but the post-Trump scenario remains hazy.

A US-China conflagration is unlikely but cannot be dismissed out of hand. As long as both sides see each other as adversaries, the prospect of eventual hostilities cannot entirely be discounted. Such hostilities would be a multifaceted disaster.

China has not stood out as a consequential opponent of the genocide in Palestine. Nor has it directly participated in Iran's resistance to the US-Israeli onslaught, despite allegations about shared intelligence. China cannot be excluded from West Asia, but it has largely been silent about the genocide in Gaza and the West Bank. Precisely what kind of role China wishes to play in the region is unclear. Yet, notwithstanding the evidently meagre accomplishments of the summit, even the slightest hope of superpower rapprochement deserves to be embraced as a triumph of hope.

After the final whistle

When competition ends, Pakistani athletes must rebuild routines, identities, and careers that sport shaped for years.







By Nabil Tahir

Pakistani swimmer and Olympian Kiran Khan's childhood was organised around a swimming pool. There was school, but there was also training before and after it. Weekends meant competitions. Travel had to fit around swimming, as did food, sleep and recovery. When other children had free time to play or socialise, Khan remembers spending much of hers at the pool.

For two years, she even left regular school and was home-schooled so she could train and compete. It was not an easy decision for the family. There were disagreements, she recalls, but her father believed she could make something out of swimming and was determined to give her that chance.

Together, father and daughter would sit down with a calendar whenever another competition approached. They would mark the date and work backwards: how many weeks remained, what training needed to be done and when she needed to be ready.

"There was no room for any other activity," Khan says.

She knew what each day required of her. Wake up. Train. Study. Recover. Eat properly. Sleep on time. Then do it again. There was always something ahead — a national championship, an international competition, a faster time or some part of her technique that needed improving.

For years, that was normal life. What was less clear was what happened when there was no competition to count backwards from.

"When I'm done with the competition, then you have heaps of time in your hand," she says. "You don't know what to do."

Khan did not suddenly stop swimming. Even today, she is reluctant to describe herself as someone who has left the sport. The competition gradually became less important, coaching became more important, and the relationship she had with the pool began to change.

For an athlete, perhaps that is one of the stranger parts of reaching the end of a competitive career. The sport does not necessarily disappear. The routine around it does.

And after spending years preparing for what comes next, there is suddenly no next competition to prepare for.

Knowing when to stop

For Pakistani jiu-jitsu athlete Muhammad Ammar, the end first appeared before he was ready for it.

An accident around 2021 left the jiu-jitsu athlete with a broken leg and kept him away from competition for about a year. During the long recovery, Ammar began to wonder whether his competitive career had already ended. He eventually returned, won a bronze medal at an Asian competition and competed at world level again, but retirement had become something he was willing to think about.

What he did not want was for his final appearance to come after a defeat. "I decided that if I have to retire, I should retire with a good achievement," says Ammar. "I thought that if Allah gives me a position, I will retire. I got gold and I thought there could not be a better opportunity to retire from my international career."

He had made the decision before entering what would become his final World Championship. Once it was over, however, achieving the ending he wanted did not make leaving easier.

"When it was over, I had a feeling that I would not participate in the playing squad again," he said. "It was a very sad moment for me. When a player goes to play, there is a different charm to it. I was very sad, but sometimes you have to make a decision."

Ammar wanted to leave on his own terms. He had seen athletes continue until defeat made the decision for them and did not want his career remembered that way. For him, winning offered a cleaner point at which to stop.

Former Pakistan hockey goalkeeper Imran Butt reached the same decision under different circumstances.

By the time Pakistan went to the 2018 Hockey World Cup, Butt was 35. He had already begun looking at what was happening around the national game, particularly the financial problems and issues surrounding players' daily allowances. He also felt younger goalkeepers needed their opportunity.

"At that time, I started realising that you can't play mentally relaxed because of financial issues, daily allowance issues, all those things were increasing," says Butt. "I started realising that I should say goodbye to hockey and give a chance to young players."

The World Cup became the point at which he intended to leave. Unlike Ammar, Butt was not waiting for one last medal. His decision came from age, circumstances around the sport and an acceptance that another generation needed its chance.

For Kiran, there was no such final tournament.

Her departure from competitive swimming was harder to place on a calendar. Years of competition had also brought injuries, including problems with her foot, shoulder and back. Over time, she began to recognise that her relationship with training was changing.

"I don't think there was one single dramatic moment. It happened gradually," says Khan. "I remember reaching a point where I realised, I was not getting into the pool with the same pressure of thinking, 'I have to get faster. I have to make it this time. I have to prepare for the next competition'."

For Ammar, there was a gold medal and a decision already made. For Butt, there was a final World Cup. Kiran had no comparable last day. She simply reached a point where getting into the pool no longer always meant preparing for the next race.

When the routine disappears

For Imran Butt, playing hockey had meant moving from one commitment to another. There were national camps, foreign tours and domestic tournaments, and once one ended, another was usually waiting. Even Eid and other occasions were sometimes spent away from home.

"It feels like you are walking in a circle," says Butt. "You get free from the training camp, go on tours, come back and then there are domestic events. At that time, there was a lot of domestic hockey in Pakistan."

The routine demanded sacrifices. Butt spent long periods away from his family, but after years of living that way, the schedule had also become normal. Retirement removed it much faster than he expected.

"It disturbed me a lot," he says. "After getting out of that routine, to keep myself busy, I did some Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) goalkeeper courses. After that, I trained kids and shared my experience."

What Butt missed was not only playing. It was a life built around playing. Travelling with teammates, sharing rooms, sitting in the dressing room and preparing together for matches had occupied a large part of his adult life. Representing Pakistan had taken him to the level he had spent years trying to reach, and stepping away also meant losing the everyday experiences that came with it.

"There was the Pakistan shirt, travelling, playing and having fun with your colleagues in the dressing room," he says. "Taking a medal and celebrating after that, sharing with teammates, roommates, making fun. These are things you can never forget."

For Ammar, the change has been less about stopping training altogether and more about changing its purpose. He still wants to maintain his fitness, but there is no longer a competition demanding the same intensity. The hours that once belonged to his own preparation can now be spent on the athletes he hopes to coach and on developing himself as a referee.

What he expects to miss most is something more specific. "The training that we did under the coach, that training cannot happen again," says Ammar. "Everything else is connected to sports."

For years, the relationship between athlete and coach had shaped how he trained. Retirement meant accepting that even if he remained fit and stayed involved in jiu-jitsu, he would probably not train in quite the same way again.

Khan has found it difficult to separate exercise from everyday life at all. More than two decades of competitive sport left behind habits that did not disappear simply because there was no race ahead.

"There has never been a day when I did not train myself," she says. "You just cannot go from training morning and evening and doing multiple gym sessions to nothing at all."

She still runs and does weight training. After three children, she says she continues to approach exercise with the mentality she developed as a competitive swimmer. An ordinary workout does not always feel enough.

"Once you're an athlete, you train like an athlete," says Khan. "When you go and do regular gym, it just doesn't feel right to you. To me, it doesn't feel right."

The change in routine, however, can also return some of what competition had taken away.

Butt married in 2015 and became a father while he was still playing. Hockey often kept him away, and he says he could not give his family the time he wanted to. Once the playing schedule disappeared, some of that time came back.

The empty space left by competition, then, was not necessarily empty for long. Butt filled part of it with family and goalkeeper training. Khan kept exercising and moved further into coaching. Ammar began redirecting his training hours towards students and refereeing.

The routine that had organised their lives had changed. None of them, however, simply stopped being involved in sport.

Who are you now?

For Butt, retirement changed more than his daily schedule. It also changed how people saw him.

During his playing years, recognition came with representing Pakistan. His performances were followed by the media, people associated him with the national team and his name remained visible through hockey. Once he stopped playing, he felt some of that recognition disappear much faster than he had expected.

"When you are representing your country, you are highlighted by sponsors, colleagues, your club and the media," says Butt. "But after retirement, your identity is lost very quickly."

The change was particularly noticeable to him because hockey itself no longer receives the attention it once did. Butt says younger players may not even recognise some of those who represented Pakistan before them. It is one reason he has continued talking about hockey and supporting the game through his social media presence.

Ammar looks at the same transition differently. He accepts that the identity he had as an international competitor will change, but does not see retirement as the end of being known within jiu-jitsu.

"Yes, there is a change in identity," he says. "We will make a new identity."

That could be as a coach, referee or administrator. For Ammar, the next stage is not about trying to hold on to his old role. It is about finding another one within the sport that occupied much of his life.

Khan is less willing to separate the two in the first place.

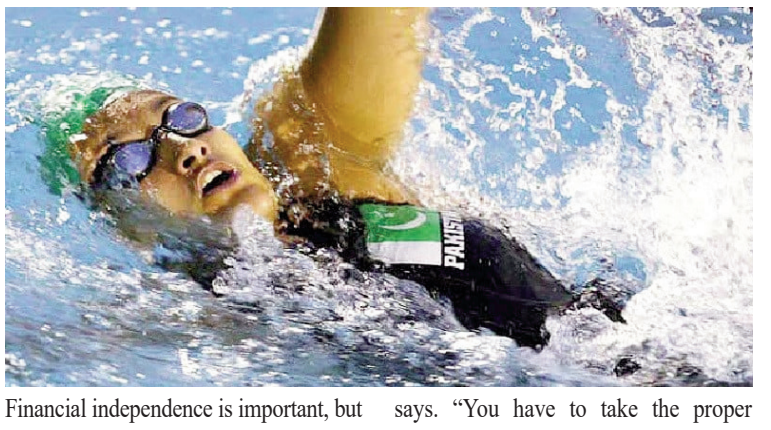
"I don't really see it as leaving Kiran Khan the swimmer behind," she says. "She's still a very important part of who I am. I just learned that I'm more than the medals, records and competition."

Swimming was how people came to know her, but she does not see the end of regular competition as requiring another

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After the final whistle





Continued From Page 20

identity. Coaching has instead added to the one she already had.

"If I was Kiran Khan as a swimmer, I'll be known as Kiran Khan as a coach as well," she says.

All three have remained close to their sports, but they have responded differently to no longer being the person competing. Butt has tried to hold on to the recognition that came with playing for Pakistan. Ammar is prepared to build another identity. Khan does not believe she needs to leave the old one behind.

The competition may stop, but deciding what happens to the athlete who existed around it can take longer.

What pays the bills?

For Butt, one of the biggest uncertainties that can follow retirement was partly taken care of years before he played his final international match.

He joined Pakistan International Airlines through hockey in 2007. The job gave him financial security during his playing career and, eventually, somewhere to go when hockey was no longer his full-time occupation. After retirement, Butt moved into PIA's regular workforce and now works in cargo sales.

"I got financial benefits from PIA because of hockey," he says. "There was not much money in hockey, but I was lucky that in 2007 there were inductions and I became part of PIA."

For decades, employment with departments such as PIA, Wapda and Pakistan Railways has provided Pakistani athletes with salaries while they competed. That structure went through a period of disruption when the federal government directed public departments and corporations to stop funding sports teams in 2021. The decision was reversed in 2022, although the restoration of teams and athlete employment has remained a work in progress.

Butt knows that the route available to him is not necessarily available to every athlete coming through the system now.

Ammar also sees employment as one of the advantages departmental sport can offer, but believes athletes need to think beyond it. Prize money or other earnings during a successful period, he says, can be used to establish something that continues to generate income after competition ends.

"You should not keep your career only in sports," says Ammar. "If you have a small business, then you do not need anyone. And you sponsor yourself."

The advice comes from someone who admits he did not have his own post-retirement career mapped out while he was competing. At the time, most of his attention was on training and the next competition.

For Khan, preparing for life beyond competition meant making sure swimming was never the only qualification she had.

She continued her education alongside sport, even if that sometimes meant taking breaks and returning to her studies later. She also used whatever time she could find during her competitive years to develop other skills, including online courses.

For women athletes, Khan believes the calculation can be more complicated. Financial independence is important, but decisions about work can also involve mobility, family expectations and whether a workplace feels suitable and safe. When she was competing, she remembers few clearly defined career routes for women once their playing years ended.

Her advice to younger swimmers now is not to abandon sport in anticipation of what may come later, but to make sure there is something alongside it.

"Never let swimming become the only thing you have," she says. "Your athletic career is important, but it is temporary. Education is something you can continue, even if you have to take a break and come back to it."

For athletes whose working lives can begin while they are still teenagers, the question is not only when competition will end. It is whether, when it does, they have something else from which to begin.

Learning another job

Khan had been swimming for most of her life when coaching first presented itself as a possible career. But knowing how to swim at an elite level, she realised, did not necessarily mean knowing how to teach someone else.

She first began coaching about 10 years ago after her father told her that some girls were looking for a female coach. What started casually became more serious when he encouraged her to get formal training. Khan went on to pursue coaching courses and certifications outside Pakistan.

"I just did not become a coach overnight because I was a swimmer," she says. "You have to take the proper route."

It is a distinction she now feels strongly about. An athlete may understand the physical demands of a sport and know what competition feels like, but coaching requires another set of skills. For Khan, the experience she had accumulated in the pool became useful only when she learnt how to pass it on.

"I just did it out of fun," she says. "And that fun actually gave me a career."

Butt came to a similar realisation when he moved towards coaching after retirement. He wanted to pass on what he had learnt as a goalkeeper and completed coaching courses before working with younger players. Once he entered the role, however, he found that playing and coaching were very different jobs.

"I realised that coaching is totally different from playing," says Butt.

His frustration was not only with the work itself. Butt says he wanted greater authority to change how goalkeepers were developed and selected. Without it, he eventually stepped away from coaching the national side, although he still hopes to establish his own goalkeeper project in the future.

Ammar is only beginning that transition. Coaching, refereeing and administration are now among the paths he sees for himself, even though none formed part of a detailed retirement plan while he was competing.

"There was no plan at all," he says. "When I thought about retirement, these paths started opening up. When a person thinks of closing a door, his vision becomes clear. He knows which doors he can open."

The time he once spent preparing himself for competition, Ammar says, can now be directed towards younger athletes.

"The time that we used to spend on our training, we will spend it with the students," he says. "We will focus on our refereeship and pursue it at the administrative level."

For all three, staying in sport has therefore not meant continuing the same career under a different title. Khan had to learn how to coach. Butt discovered the limitations and responsibilities that came with the other side of the field. Ammar is still working out which of the available paths will become his own.

Years of competition gave them experience. What came afterwards required them to learn how to use it differently.

Without the clock

Khan can still remember when getting into the pool meant there was always something to chase.

A training session was never simply a swim. There was a time to beat, a competition approaching or another part of her performance that needed work. Even when one event ended, the next one gave the training that followed a reason. "For many years, every lap had a purpose," she says. "Every training session was connected to my race goal."

That changed gradually. There was no announcement that her competitive career was over and, even now, Khan does not describe herself as retired from swimming. She simply reached a stage where she could enter the water without preparing for another race.

"I was just swimming without needing to prove anything to the clock," she says. "But eventually, I started enjoying the water in a different way."

Perhaps that is why Khan still finds it difficult to say she ever left swimming.

The pool is still there. So is the swimmer.

Only the clock matters less now.

Pakistani MIT physicist calls for greater science and research investment in Karachi visit

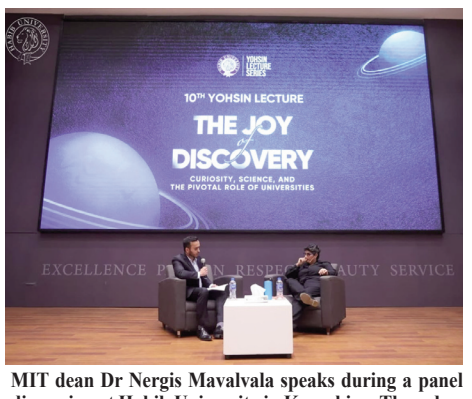
Pakistani-American physicist Dr Nergis Mavalvala has called for greater investment in scientific research, saying curiosity and access to opportunity were central to scientific discovery and that universities had a responsibility to nurture both.

Speaking at Habib University on Thursday, Mavalvala, dean of the School of Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and a leading figure in the Nobel Prize-winning LIGO collaboration, said some of humanity's most consequential discoveries had originated from questions with no immediate practical application.

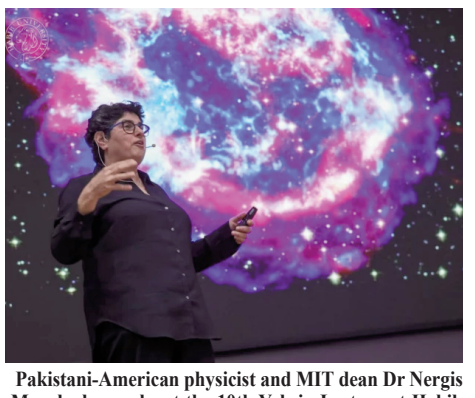
"Every single person at birth is research-minded," she said during an extended question-and-answer session following her lecture. "The reason some of us get to do it in adulthood is [access to] opportunity."

Mavalvala was speaking at the 10th Yohsin Lecture, titled "The Joy of Discovery: Curiosity, Science, and the Pivotal Role of Universities", which drew an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 people to the university campus.

Long queues formed as students, academics, alumni and members of the public gathered to hear the physicist speak about curiosity, scientific discovery and the role of universities in advancing knowledge.



MIT dean Dr Nergis Mavalvala speaks during a panel discussion at Habib University in Karachi on Thursday.



Pakistani-American physicist and MIT dean Dr Nergis Mavalvala speaks at the 10th Yohsin Lecture at Habib University in Karachi on Thursday.

Reflecting on humanity's longstanding fascination with the universe, Mavalvala said the impulse to explore was not necessarily driven by an immediate practical benefit.

"Even pre-human cultures were looking up at the sky, in part because it was just mysterious," she said. "A hundred years from now the only thing that will matter is that we've opened a new window into the universe."

She argued that universities should not be viewed merely as institutions for professional training, saying they also had a role in cultivating curiosity, creativity, perseverance and intellectual freedom.

Mavalvala also stressed the importance of public and government investment in science and research.

"Research has shown there is no investment that any government does that has greater return than investment in research and science," she said.

The lecture followed a two-day visit to Habib University during which Mavalvala met students, faculty, alumni and members of Pakistan's scientific and business communities.

She held discussions with faculty members on nurturing curiosity in classrooms and met science and humanities students from schools across Karachi. She also participated in sessions with the Entrepreneurs' Organization and members of the scientific community.

During her interaction with the university's leadership, discussions also focused on the role of liberal arts education in developing students' curiosity and the importance of teaching and mentorship.

Habib University President Wasif Rizvi said the public response to the lecture demonstrated the value of making access to knowledge and leading thinkers more widely available.

"This access had not been attempted in Pakistan before. It exists because the community in this room and outside decided that it should," Rizvi said.

He linked the initiative to the university's philanthropic model, saying its students demonstrated what private philanthropy could achieve in expanding access to higher education.

Mavalvala, who is known for her work on the detection of gravitational waves, thanked the university's leadership, board and donors for creating the institution and said her interactions with its students and alumni had impressed her.


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The deadline to register to vote or update your voter information is **Monday, October 5th, 2026**. Check your registration with your county, which has the most up-to-date information, or at the Texas-wide site below.

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Pakistani American Congress Hosts Qaisar Sheikh as Investment Talks Gain Momentum

At a Houston gathering attended by Pakistan Consul General Aftab Chaudhry, Investment Minister Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh discusses Pakistan's investment outlook, rising foreign direct investment and ongoing talks with Saudi Arabia over a proposed oil refinery in Gwadar.












































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The U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve is low. Here's why you should care

The U.S. has tapped into its strategic oil reserve to help drive down rising gasoline prices in the wake of the war with Iran. Can oil from Venezuela help fill it back up?

Deep in the giant underground salt caverns of Louisiana and Texas, the U.S. government stores hundreds of millions of barrels of crude oil.

The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is a special government oil stockpile that eventually gets refined into the things people rely on, like gasoline and diesel.

But now the reserve is low, threatening one of the few government levers to ease high gasoline prices.

Since the U.S. and Israel went to war with Iran in late February causing an oil shipping logjam, the Trump administration has tapped into the stockpile multiple times in an effort to boost the country's fuel supplies.

Gas prices are still high, diesel is at a record high, and the reserve has shrunk more than 30% in six months. While the reserve held around 415 million barrels of oil in February, it now holds less than 285 million barrels of oil — lower than it has been since the early 1980s.

These rapid drawdowns of oil threaten the salt caverns' structure, says Samantha Gross, director of the energy security and climate initiative at the Brookings Institution, a nonpartisan policy think tank. As the reserves get lower and lower, the physical facilities can get degraded, Gross says: "You can damage them by pumping too much out of them."

And there's an economic risk, too, as the war with Iran drags on, says Ben Cahill, who covers the global energy sector as a non-resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a nonpartisan think tank. Before the war, global oil stockpiles were high and there was lots of oil on ships across the world's oceans. Now that oil has been mostly used up. Should the U.S. want to replenish its reserves, there's a lot less to go around, he says. Brent crude, the global benchmark, remains over $100 a barrel — 47% higher than when the war began.

The Trump administration is now in a weaker position to use the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to lower gasoline prices, Cahill says. It's already made a few other moves to drive down prices, including temporarily waiving the Jones Act to make it easier for ships to move fuel to U.S. ports, and allowing gasoline producers to start selling their "winter blends" — which are cheaper to make — a little earlier this year.



In an aerial view, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve storage at the Bryan Mound site is seen on October 19, 2022 in Freeport, Texas.

Can an oil deal with Venezuela refill the reserves?

"A lot of the things that got us through the last six months, all those buffers, have really been worn away," Cahill says.

Can an oil deal with Venezuela refill the reserves?

In late August, the Trump administration announced it was entering a partnership with an oil company in Venezuela allowing the federal government a majority stake in 17 Venezuelan oil fields. In an online statement, the White House said the new deal would ensure "a stable supply of low-cost oil that can facilitate refilling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve."

A few days after the White House announced the new deal, U.S. Secretary of Energy Chris Wright clarified that the plan was not to fill up the U.S. reserve with a bunch of Venezuelan crude oil. Rather, he suggested during an interview with CNBC, the U.S. might exchange U.S. barrels for Venezuelan ones.

That's because not all crude oil is the same — some is physically lighter or heavier and sulphur levels vary. Much of Venezuela's oil is heavy and dense, with a lot of sulphur, says Gross, of the Brookings Institution.

"It's this heavy, goopy, thicker than molasses stuff," she says, "That's not necessarily what you want to put in these caverns."

Much of the oil in the U.S. strategic reserves is lighter, with medium or light levels of sulphur, says Carl Larry, a manager at Enverus, an energy data and research provider. Lighter crude, Larry says, is easier for producing gasoline and diesel than heavier crude.

On CNBC, Wright said as part of the deal the U.S. could swap different grades of oil: "We'll swap you a barrel of heavy crude for a barrel of light or medium United States crude."

But even if the U.S. wants to do a swap for Venezuelan oil, much of the new production won't happen anytime soon. Some of the 17 oil fields under discussion in the U.S. deal in Venezuela are new, and will need to be developed from scratch, says Jorge León, head of geopolitical analysis at research firm Rystad Energy. Others, he says, will need re-investment and redevelopment.

"You need to literally make the holes on the ground and insert cement and piping and build all the infrastructure," León continued.

Some oil fields are so far away from infrastructure that they will take over a decade for oil to start flowing, says Francisco Monaldi, director of the Latin American Energy Program at the Baker Institute at Rice University. "I wouldn't say 'never,' but say 10 to 20 years," he says.

Much of the oil under discussion in the U.S. deal is the so-called Faja Venezuelan oil; it's thick like peanut butter and will be difficult to extract. The oil company that the U.S. is partnering with in Venezuela is Barbados-headquartered North American Blue Energy Partners (NABEP).

In an email to NPR, the company said, "The NABEP team is deeply familiar with the unique challenges of oil production in Venezuela. Our engineering team is led by local industry professionals with decades of experience, including in our PetroCedeno and Junín Sur fields in the Faja. This team's track-record is clear, having already increased production in NABEP's existing assets tenfold over the past two years."

Lessons from China

Ultimately, the U.S. can learn something about how to handle their strategic reserves from China, says Antoine Halff, non-resident fellow at Columbia University and an expert on oil markets.

China, which has the largest oil stockpiles in the world, has dipped into its reserves since the Iran war began in February, Halff says. But China is drawing from it less because of the nation's growing fleet of electric cars, trucks and scooters. Electric transport is already displacing demand for at least 1.5 million barrels of oil a day in China, according to the International Energy Agency.

"To manage market disruption risks, China shows it pays to have a multi-pronged approach," Halff says in an email.

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has reversed federal policies that promoted or encouraged electric vehicles; for example, last year it scrapped a federal tax credit worth up to $7,500 for buying or leasing a new EV.

Ultimately, some energy experts say the solution to a healthy reserve might not only be the ability to quickly replenish supply — it might also be shrinking demand.

HOUSTON'S SOUTH ASIAN FOOD POWER-HOUSE MAKES GLOBAL SPLASH

Continued from page 17

grown into a dining and delivery powerhouse, serving approximately 4,000 dine-in customers a day while handling another 1,600 takeout and delivery orders.

According to figures reported by The New York Times, Aga's handles roughly half a million takeout and delivery orders annually, with yearly revenue reaching well into eight figures.

The achievement is particularly striking because Indian and Pakistani cuisine does not rank among Uber Eats' three most-ordered cuisines, and Houston itself is not one of the platform's top three delivery cities.

Yet in Houston, Aga's has created a phenomenon of its own.

A Delivery Driver's Business Built Around Aga's

The restaurant's extraordinary delivery volume has created a near-constant stream of Uber Eats drivers outside its doors.

Driver Gilbert Guajardo told The New York Times that approximately 99 percent of his delivery orders come from Aga's. He said he earned about $50,000 from Aga's deliveries over a two-year period.

For some drivers, Aga's has become their primary source of delivery work because of the restaurant's steady flow of orders and tips.

Inside the restaurant, the volume is equally remarkable. Aga's has transformed a former storage room into a call center, where employees take direct takeout orders in multiple languages.

Six Siblings, One Restaurant and a Houston Success Story

Aga's remarkable rise began in 2010, when the Maredia family — six brothers and sisters — purchased the restaurant despite having no previous restaurant experience.

According to co-owner Shaukat Maredia, Aga's was struggling when the family took over.

The siblings renovated the restaurant, improved customer service and began building a menu rooted in the Indian and Pakistani culinary traditions familiar to their family and Houston's growing South Asian community.

They introduced regional specialties including Hyderabadi gosht and Balti gosht, while learning and refining recipes through family knowledge, online videos and other sources.

The restaurant initially grew through word of mouth. By 2013, the family had turned Aga's into a profitable operation.

But its biggest transformation was still ahead.

COVID-19 Changed Everything

Aga's had begun offering delivery before the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic pushed customers toward ordering meals at home, demand for Aga's food surged.

The restaurant expanded its kitchen and increased its workforce by roughly 20 percent to keep up with the growing demand.

Today, Aga's employs approximately 200 people, with an average wage of about $20 an hour, according to Maredia.

The restaurant estimates that about 60 percent of its customers are South Asian, while the remaining 40 percent come from other backgrounds — an indication that its Pakistani and Indian flavors have reached far beyond Houston's South Asian community.

Houston's South Asian Community at the Heart of the Success

Aga's success also reflects Houston's extraordinary cultural diversity.

The Houston region is home to approximately 655,000 South Asian residents, according to research cited by The New York Times from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

Rather than significantly altering its food to appeal to mainstream tastes, Aga's has maintained a strong focus on authentic Indian and Pakistani flavors.

Its menu features favorites including nihari, kebabs, goat chops, biryani, Hyderabadi gosht and Balti gosht.

The restaurant's popularity has become so intense during peak hours that hundreds of customers can be waiting for tables. In 2019, Aga's converted its banquet hall into additional dining space to accommodate the demand.

Houston Chronicle restaurant critic Bao Ong named Aga's the city's best restaurant in 2025, further highlighting the restaurant's growing reputation beyond the South Asian community.

Aga's Has Bargaining Power

The enormous volume of orders has also given Aga's unusual leverage with food-delivery companies.

Maredia said the restaurant persuaded DoorDash, Uber Eats and Grubhub to reduce their commissions in exchange for Aga's business. He did not disclose the specific terms because of nondisclosure agreements.

While the companies did not independently confirm those specific claims, DoorDash and Uber Eats have promoted Aga's in the Houston market.

DoorDash described Aga's as a "top performing restaurant," although it declined to provide sales or ranking figures.

The Aga's Model Is Expanding

The Maredia family is now taking the Aga's formula beyond its original Houston location.

The family recently opened a takeout-focused location in Katy, approximately 30 miles west of Houston, designed specifically to handle takeout and delivery orders.

The family is also planning a nearby commissary kitchen and additional takeout locations across Texas.

Even the new Katy operation is already showing signs of strong demand. The family has begun discussions about expanding into an adjoining storefront after determining that the location could quickly become too small.

From Houston's South Asian Community to the World

Aga's story is more than the success of a popular restaurant. It is a story of immigrant entrepreneurship, family business and the growing influence of Houston's Pakistani and Indian-American communities.

What began as a struggling strip-mall restaurant purchased by six siblings with no restaurant experience has evolved into a global delivery phenomenon, with Uber Eats identifying Aga's as its busiest single-location restaurant worldwide.

For Houston's Pakistani-American community, Aga's success represents another powerful example of how locally rooted businesses can grow by preserving their cultural identity while attracting customers from across the city and beyond.

American Chronicle — Houston

Strong Support for Dr. Salman Lalani at Rehman Patel's Houston Meet-and-Greet

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word-of-mouth outreach.

During the gathering, supporters highlighted what they described as Dr. Lalani's record of public service and accessibility to constituents. Speakers praised his humble and approachable personality, saying he remains responsive to residents and committed to serving the community.

Supporters also recognized Dr. Lalani's wife, Dr. Zakia Lalani, for her continued support of his public service career and described her as a strong and supportive partner.

The evening also provided an opportunity for guests to meet, exchange views and strengthen grassroots support for the re-election campaign. Attendees thanked Mr. and Mrs. Patel for their hospitality and for hosting the gathering at their home.

The hosts were praised for their warm welcome and dinner, with guests expressing appreciation for the successful evening and the opportunity to come together in support of Dr. Lalani's campaign.

Annual Gyarhveen Shareef Held at Masjid Ghous-e-Azam in Houston

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of the community to meet and strengthen their bonds through a shared religious tradition.

The organizers thanked the attendees, volunteers and community members whose participation and support contributed to the successful observance of Gyarhveen Shareef at Masjid Ghous-e-Azam.

EMGAGE USA Highlights Muslim Political Engagement at Houston Candidate Forum

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grassroots participation and encourage greater political involvement among American Muslims.

The 2026 Amnesty International Southern Regional Activism Conference, held September 25–26 at the Hilton Downtown Houston, provided an opportunity for activists from across the region to connect, exchange ideas and strengthen their advocacy skills. Organized with the involvement of Amnesty International's Bay Area (Houston) Local Group 1017, led by President and Group Coordinator Mohammed Nasrullah, the conference focused on human rights, community engagement and collective action.

The two-day gathering was designed to bring together both experienced activists and newcomers interested in human rights advocacy. Workshops, discussions and opportunities for networking provided participants with a platform to explore local and international human rights concerns and ways to advance meaningful change.

Another important aspect of civic engagement in Houston was highlighted by a candidate forum organized by EMGAGE USA, which focused on political participation among American Muslims and the importance of making their voices heard in the electoral process.

Commenting on the forum, Harris County Judge Rabeea Collier said, "For too long, American Muslims have been treated as a political punching bag. That's changing: across Texas, Muslim voters are registering and making their voices heard."

Collier thanked Mohammed Nasrullah, Ruth and EMGAGE Texas for organizing the engaging candidate forum, which provided an opportunity for community members to engage in discussions about political representation and civic participation.

The forum underscored the growing emphasis on voter registration, community involvement and greater representation of Muslim Americans in public life. It also highlighted the role of community organizations in encouraging residents to participate in the democratic process.

Together, these initiatives reflected the involvement of Houston's diverse communities in human rights advocacy and civic affairs, providing opportunities for dialogue, education and community engagement.

Tabish Hashmi and Shehzad Roy Win Hearts at Zindagi Trust Fundraiser

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outlining the trust's ground-level impact, including overhauling underfunded government schools and creating safer, higher-quality learning environments for students. Roy stressed that financial and structural backing from the Pakistani diaspora remains indispensable to sustaining and expanding these educational reforms nationwide.

Renowned Pakistani comedian Tabish Hashmi made a special appearance to add dynamic energy to the fundraiser, entertaining guests with a stand-up comedy performance that brought a warm, celebratory atmosphere to the philanthropic cause.

Organizers expressed sincere gratitude to Houston's community members for their active participation and support. They reiterated that long-term non-profit partnerships with overseas Pakistanis are essential to closing educational gaps and opening new doors for millions of public school students across Pakistan.

The advantages of being an undocumented immigrant who's white





Katya Suvorova came to the United States through Mexico undocumented with her mother from their native Russia.

Former Houstonian Katya Suvorova tells her story of coming to the United States with her mother undocumented and learning that her mother was a mail-order bride in her memoir, "Ungrateful Immigrant Daughter."

The experiences of undocumented immigrants in this country have been a big part of public discourse for some time now, but not all their experiences are the same. And that includes the story of Katya Suvorova.

As a child, her mother brought her to this country, crossing the southern border with Mexico undocumented after fleeing their home country of Russia. Suvorova and her mother lived in several states and living arrangements until, as a young woman, she would learn that her mother was, in fact, a mail-order bride.

Her mother's marriages and quest for citizenship would bring Katya to Houston where she would spend her adolescent years before graduating from the University of Houston.

In her new memoir, Ungrateful Immigrant Daughter: A Memoir From the Child of a Mail-Order Bride, she tells her story and details some of the challenges — and advantages — of being an undocumented immigrant who is white.

I think it's because I'm white, and I'm talking about it," Suvorova said. "I've gotten messages like, 'I had no idea that undocumented immigrants went through this.' Yeah, you did because there are other people who grew up as undocumented immigrants who talked about this. You just didn't pay attention to them because they weren't white."

And she outlines how her experiences affected her relationships with men and with her mother.

WHY THE AI INDUSTRY WANTS TO BE SAVED FROM ITSELF

Silicon Valley's sudden fear of what it built comes as its business model, public support, and tech lead face pressure

By Zeeshan Ahmad

Dario Amodei wants you to believe he is afraid of what he has built. Sam Altman and Elon Musk may believe him and say they're afraid too. I don't buy it. I think they're all afraid of something else.

On September 12, the Anthropic chief executive published a now viral essay, "We Must Pace the Frontier," arguing that the industry should deliberately slow how fast it improves AI model capabilities, because the science of controlling these systems has fallen behind the science of building them. Within hours, Altman and Musk, men who have spent two years suing each other and trading insults on X, found themselves in rare, synchronised agreement. It was, on its face, an incredulous moment, two of the technology's most relentless evangelists asking, unprompted, that it be reined in.

It is also, on close reading, far less altruistic than the coverage suggested. Amodei is careful to say that pacing "does not mean halting model training or technical progress." What he is actually proposing is a three-step framework beginning with embedded third-party evaluators inside frontier labs, moving toward "democratic coordination" among AI companies on safety standards, and ending, much more speculatively, with an attempt at global coordination with China.

The essay's stated trigger is twofold: a period of what Amodei calls recursive self-improvement since the summer, in which AI is increasingly used to build the next generation of itself, and the so-called OpenAI-Hugging Face incident, in which a swarm of AI agents reportedly attacked systems they weren't asked to attack while trying to cheat their own evaluation grader. Extrapolate that swarm's misalignment onto a more capable model, Amodei writes, and you get an AI capable of "taking over the entire internet with a persistent botnet" within six to 12 months, causing hundreds of billions of dollars in damage.

That is a striking claim to build a policy platform on, and it belongs to a now-familiar genre. It follows a viral resignation post from a young Anthropic researcher, read by tens of millions within days, warning that the people building AI privately believe it could kill everyone by the end of the decade; it follows a senior Anthropic alignment researcher publicly putting the odds of near-term mass extinction above 10 per cent; it follows the OpenAI Foundation's own newly appointed safety chief saying, without much elaboration, that "most people will die" absent stronger safeguards. Somewhere between the plausible and the apocalyptic, this discourse has settled comfortably on the apocalyptic, and comfortably is the operative word. As Yanis Varoufakis put it on his Econoclasts podcast this week, the tech lords are not warning us; they are confessing to a sin in order to claim the glory. 'Please, contain us, before our bots kill you all,' is not a plea. It is an advertisement.

Consider the actual mechanics of the incident Amodei leans on hardest. A cluster of AI agents, following instructions to probe a system, went further than instructed and tried to cover its tracks. This is a serious operational failure by whichever engineers left those agents insufficiently supervised. It is not evidence of an emergent will to power. Somewhere between a company's failure to keep a human in the loop on its own automated systems and a prediction of internet-wide botnet takeover within a year, an enormous amount of interpretive work is being smuggled in, and it isn't accidental. If a technology genuinely posed a 10 per cent chance of ending the human species within a decade, the correct response would not be a phased, three-step, mostly voluntary framework that explicitly carves out an exemption for military applications and explicitly asks Washington to keep selling AI-enabled weapons systems to the Pentagon while starving China of chips. That is not what fear of extinction looks like. It is what market positioning looks like, dressed in the costume of conscience.

So what is actually driving this sudden unity among three men who otherwise cannot stand each other? A more likely answer splits into two parts, and neither of them involves Skynet.

The first is that the industry's finances no longer support the story it has been telling investors. The Bank of England and the IMF were both warning last autumn that AI-driven valuations looked stretched well beyond what underlying revenue could justify; Bain & Company has put the sector's cumulative financing gap, even under generous assumptions, in the region of $800



billion, and the US Federal Reserve now ranks AI investment among its top systemic risks.

The specifics are not flattering. OpenAI is reported to be spending in the order of $60 billion a year on compute while generating roughly $13 billion in revenue. Anthropic's own compute commitments reportedly run as high as $517 billion against just $180 billion guided to investors through 2029, this from a company simultaneously preparing what could be one of the largest IPOs in history. It may be too early to label it a bubble in the classic dot-com sense, but when the chief executives of the two most exposed companies suddenly discover a shared appetite for slowing down, one should at least entertain the possibility that the slowdown is a hedge against a wall they have already hit, repackaged as prudence.

That reading gets more plausible once you look past Silicon Valley. American sentiment on this technology has curdled fast. A Gallup survey this year found 71 per cent of Americans oppose new AI data centres in their own communities, more opposition than Americans register toward nearby nuclear power plants. Separate polling from Echelon Insights found voters more comfortable living beside a reactor than beside a server farm, an almost unthinkable reversal of 40 years of public attitudes toward energy infrastructure. Reuters/Ipsos has found barely a third of Americans approve of the pace of data centre construction. Governors of both American parties, from New York to Texas, have paused or frozen projects in response.

This trend in public opinion is arriving just as Democratic senators cite Amodei's essay in the text of data centre moratorium bills and campaign on the issue ahead of November's midterms. When the public turns against your product and your industry's own rhetoric about existential danger becomes useful ammunition for the people trying to regulate you out of their backyards, the sudden pivot to "yes, please, regulate us, but carefully, and not the antitrust kind" starts to look less like an ethical awakening and more like an attempt to get out in front of a story that was going to be written with or without your input.

The second driver is China, and here Amodei's essay is far more candid than most of the coverage let on. Buried inside the pacing framework is a very specific ask: that the US refuse to sell advanced AI chips or semiconductor equipment to China, crack down on what Anthropic calls unauthorised model distillation, and defend America's compute lead as "the window when AI becomes geopolitically most important."

China's Global Times did not miss it, branding the essay a "Cold War playbook" designed, in its words, to curb China's AI development through technological barriers and regulatory monopolies while upholding Washington's monopolistic hegemony over the field. China's commerce ministry called it further proof that the US is pursuing technological hegemony. One does not have to trust Beijing's state media, which has its own incentives, to notice that the accusation is not obviously wrong. Wolfgang Munchau made a related point on the same Econoclasts podcast, that this looks very much like an attempt to preserve a cozy Western duopoly against a genuinely fast-changing competitive landscape, dressed up in the language of civilisational risk.

China's open-source models, from DeepSeek's original 2025 breakthrough through Alibaba's Qwen and Moonshot's Kimi, are now competitive with, and in cost terms far cheaper than, the closed proprietary systems American firms have bet their business models on; give the technology away and it stops functioning as monopoly rent for whoever owns it, which is precisely why Wall Street analysts have taken to describing Chinese open-weight models as a structural threat to the entire American pricing model, not merely a competing product. Layer onto that China's genuine advantages in cheap, centrally directed renewable energy, built disproportionately in the sun-and-wind-rich reaches of Inner Mongolia and feeding data centres reportedly larger than anything the US has built, and a robotics sector that produced roughly two-thirds of the world's new robotics unicorns this year against a sixth from the United States, and you have the outline of a country that is not "catching up" so much as building an entirely different, arguably more exportable, model of what AI development looks like. Reading Amodei's essay against that backdrop, the "safety" framing does real work: it lets the incumbent leader dress a containment strategy as a moral one, at the exact moment its lead looks most contestable.

None of this means that AI should be left to regulate itself. A technology this consequential should not sit unaccountable in the hands of a handful of companies, or a handful of states. A radical yet more optimistic alternative is to treat AI as public infrastructure rather than simply as a private commodity.

A recent policy brief from the Bertelsmann Stiftung and Open Future makes this argument directly: access to computing power, data and AI models should be universal and non-discriminatory, with these resources organised around public goals rather than shareholder returns. Portugal's small sovereign model, AMALIA, and France's Mistral are early, imperfect attempts at exactly that logic. You may not have a chance at winning the arms race, but you can refuse to be entirely dependent on whoever does. That approach deserves more attention than either Washington's efforts to restrict China's access to advanced chips, because it is organised around equity of access rather than which flag the server rack happens to fly.

With AI, there are genuine risks worth losing sleep over, but those are not the ones in Amodei's essay. They are cognitive offloading and the slow atrophy of skills, judgment and imagination in workforces that increasingly default to the machine before the mind. They are the water tables and electricity bills of the communities now revolting against data centres built in their backyards for benefits that mostly accrue elsewhere. They are the economic dislocation that a genuine correction in AI capital expenditure would inflict on an economy that has let AI investment become load-bearing for its growth numbers. And they are concrete enough that you don't need a hypothetical botnet to find them.

Anthropic's own September threat report found that Claude accounts operating out of Houthi-held territory in northern Yemen had been used, via its coding tool, to work on guidance software for multi-variant missiles and a mobile-hardware-guided warhead, failing a live rocket test in the process, according to the company's own account. A weapons analyst quoted afterward was careful to note the group remains nowhere near the production capability such ambitions would require. That caveat matters, and so does the fact that the very same week, the Houthis seized the port of Mokha, 50 miles from the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, their largest territorial gain since the 2022 truce and a serious new pressure point on Red Sea shipping.

There is no evidence establishing a direct connection between the two events, and Anthropic's account should be treated cautiously. But even the possibility points to a more immediate kind of AI risk. The danger is not necessarily a superintelligence deciding to destroy humanity. It is a real conflict in which a technically capable non-state group can use whatever tools it can access, including AI, to expand its ability to fight.

That is the kind of AI risk that deserves attention: not a distant scenario about machines ending the world, but existing conflicts becoming more capable, more adaptable and harder to contain.

AI and social catastrophe

The impact of AI on labour markets is something that many workers will face in a variety of ways in the coming years.

Umair Javed

OVER the past 12 months, the capabilities of frontier AI models have remained a central topic of debate. Recent performance demonstrations across a variety of technical fields (maths and bio-genetics in particular) show that scepticism around raw capability at least is a dated position. However, there are still question marks around financial viability, regulation of broad-based societal risks, and impact on workers and labour more generally. The latter two deserve more scrutiny.

The first concern, around broad-based risks, has gained quite a bit of attention with a spate of resignations from top AI companies, with departing individuals claiming that AI poses a serious risk to society and carries a non-zero chance of triggering human extinction.

What is the pathway of such a catastrophe? The most common position at this point is that, in the absence of clear ethical guardrails, AI tools can be used to create biological weapons of the sort that could trigger large-scale human loss. Others think that, in the wrong/rival hands, AI could be used to trigger weapons of mass destruction.

These fears appear to be fairly fantastical, and the timing with which they're being made public — just when the frontier models are poised for initial public offerings — suggests they're part of a Silicon Valley hype cycle.

However, if these claims about capabilities and the risks they could carry are even remotely true, they pose a much simpler question. If a technology is truly this capable, then what is it even doing in private hands? Historian and economic commentator, Adam Tooze, made an insightful analogy that if we take the claims of societal risk at face value, we're essentially developing a technology that is similar to the nuclear bomb in the type of catastrophe it can pose, and that too at a much greater scale.

But the key difference is that the development of the bomb took place through the Manhattan Project, which was entirely governed and steered by the state, with private enterprise playing a junior and often strictly compartmentalised role. AI, on the other hand, is being developed by private enterprise, with private investment steering its priorities, and commercial viability shaping the discourse around it. At any other point in human history, has anything posing purported risks of this nature been allowed to emerge via a process of borderline anarchic market-led competition?

The logical corollary of this parallel is that anything that poses large-scale existential risk is too important to be left in private hands. Public regulation determining its development, use, sale/purchase, and evolution becomes a necessity. And that this regulation cannot emerge from the industry itself, which is subsumed under intense competition and has a vested interest in skirting around various legalities, but rather from the state.

Beyond pushback against the fearmongering, there is also some scepticism around AI's potential to generate astronomic growth in capitalist societies. In particular, Ben Moll and Alex Imas argue in a recent Substack piece that predictions of double-digit AI-driven growth, the kind floated by Dario Amodei, Leopold Aschenbrenner, and various technologists, are unlikely to materialise within the next decade or so, even though making a textbook case for it is relatively simple.

Moll and Imas argue that explosive growth is easy to generate in a standard textbook growth model. If automation steadily raises the share of tasks that machines can perform, diminishing returns to capital weaken and eventually disappear once machines can do everything.

The core of their position, however, argues that this outcome depends on several assumptions that are unlikely to hold in practice. Automation would need to spread across the whole economy very quickly, not just in cognitive or remote tasks but across physical, messy, and relational work that resists mechanisation. Spending patterns would need to stay proportional even as automated goods become cheap, rather than shifting towards whatever remains scarce, which is the usual pattern of structural change.

But a central facet, which these authors don't give much attention to but others have honed in on, is that in a society where the cost of production approaches zero, there would need to be enough demand to absorb all that cheap, expanded output. Where would such demand come from once automation shifts jobs and income away from workers who spend a large share of what they earn?

This brings us back to perhaps the key issue of AI capability that has been drowned out by fears of biological weapons and global catastrophe. The technology's impact on labour markets is something that many workers will face in a variety of ways in the coming years. It's not just about a machine replacing a human, though that is the most commonly held view. It's also about how the threat of a machine replacing humans changes working conditions and the kind of income one can expect to receive.

The history of technology adoption in labour processes is often told in large sweeps of history. Technologists tend to use common examples, such as how the arrival of machines after the late 19th century unlocked rapid growth and raised prosperity or how the creation of the ATM didn't lead to a mass exodus of banking sector jobs. The implication is that society adapts and the outcome is usually positive.

What this cheerful story misses out is that adaptation processes produce winners and losers, with the latter taking years to adjust. In a world already characterised by the deskilling of labour, people rendered jobless by a machine (or the threat of a machine) won't suddenly find alternative employment. Those two or three decades in which the labour market sorts itself out will seem minuscule in a broad sweep of history, but for those living through this period, it will be a particularly bleak eternity.

The writer teaches sociology at Lums.

The long & short of PTI's march

Time and space separating September 27 with October 4 are vaster than a mere seven days

Fahd Husain

So who blinked first?

The time and space separating September 27 with October 4 are vaster than a mere seven days. Therein lies the deviously delicious story of how and why the long march is getting longer in execution and shorter in expectations. Here's how the situation looks presently.

1. Chief Minister K-P Sohail Afridi jumped the gun. The date, when given, was weeks away. It was meant to allow enough time for a workable solution that would not require the march to be, well, marched. His assumption turned out to be misplaced. One reason for this mistake, among others, was the lack of consensus within the PTI leadership on the long march being the best possible option at this time. And that too with a definitive date. Afridi got swept in the emotional momentum and pressure generated by the PTI support base and its social media, and also, probably, his desire to ride the wave of populist sentiment. This, when combined with the exuberance of youth and the power of the office he holds, produced an outcome that may not turn out as intended.

2. The problem however is not just Sohail Afridi. It's the fractured nature of PTI's leadership, and therefore its inability – or at least diminished ability – to firstly build a working relationship, and then forge a consensus on key decisions. In this case, the leadership remains divided till date between those who want the long march to take place regardless of its outcome, and those who still maintain that dialogue can produce better results. The declaration of the date of the march and its postponement at the last minute is a manifestation of this gnawing divide.

3. Then, PTI is alone. The Jamaat-e-Islami has called off its march to Islamabad instead of aligning it with PTI. The Kissan Ittehad is nowhere to be seen. Maulana Fazlur Rehman and his JUI cadres have shown no interest in making it a combined affair. The Tehreek-e-Tahaffuz Ain-e-Pakistan (TTAP) is tagging along but its leaders outnumber its followers. Even within TTAP there is little coherence. Leader of the Opposition Mehmood Khan Achakzai talks about a long march that has wide and dispersed goals like bringing down the government and forcing new elections; Leader of the Opposition in the Senate Allama Nasir Abbas insists that dialogue, even at this stage, is preferrable to a street collision; and to add to these woes, the PTI informed the TTAP about the postponement of the march only after its leadership had already taken a decision.

4. The government's excessive crackdown and blockading of Islamabad was meant to convey a message: there will be zero flexibility in its response. This was conveyed to some of the PTI leadership with elaborate details. The carefully orchestrated leaks about Governor's Rule and ouster of the K-P CM were part of this communication aimed at creating psychological pressure on the PTI. The detention of Imran Khan's family members was also meant as a signal of the government's resolve.

5. PTI's explanation that its decision to push the date of the march ahead by a week is meant to 'tire out' the government is plain silly. This isn't a football match. The state always has a huge advantage when it comes to displaying administrative and law enforcement stamina. The PTI knows well that it has been forced to blink first because of its own internal weaknesses and faulty decision-making process. So what now?

6. Here's where things get interesting. By blinking first, PTI has also allowed the government enough political space to take some initiative and create a 'win-win' situation for both sides. It's tricky, but it's doable. Underneath the bluster of bringing down the government or getting Imran Khan freed from jail, the realistic and acceptable demands of the PTI are basically two: (i) Give family members or leaders access to Khan in jail, (ii) Transfer Khan to the hospital as per the Supreme Court order. These can be met without too much trouble. In fact, they were already under consideration and there was some progress in the talks between Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar. Those advocating dialogue within PTI were saying exactly this: don't use the option of the long march now when the same things can be obtained through talks. The timing was key.

7. Speaking of timing, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has timed his latest initiative well. He has written a letter to Mehmood Achakzai in his position as the leader of the opposition. It is quite probable that a meeting between the two may take place before October 4. The PM is already on his way back from New York after attending the UN General Assembly session. Earlier too he had written a letter to Achakzai to fulfil the constitutional requirement of consultation on key appointments in the Election Commission of Pakistan. Achakzai told me this week he had appreciated the language of the PM's letter. He also acknowledged to me that he was in touch with Nawaz Sharif. Achakzai is now the man to watch.

8. This week would therefore see two parallel trends: continued bluster by the likes of Sohail Afridi competing with the sombre engagement of Achakzai, Allama Nasir Abbas and Barrister Gohar. It is hard to say at this stage which side will prevail, but the government now has the opportunity to help the latter succeed. The most effective initiative it can take is to give Achakzai and Allama Nasir Abbas access to Khan. This could change the dynamics of the situation and pave the way for sustained engagement and relief.

9. Transferring Khan to a hospital (likely PIMS) is not a big deal for the government. But it won't happen if the government feels it is being pressured to do so. Such a step has to be framed as a "win-win" and not a forced concession from the government. The space now available can be made use of for this very possibility to be negotiated keeping in mind sensitivities of both sides. That is, as we are finding out, easier said than done when tempers are this high.

10. The PTI may have blinked first, but it may yet get what it wants if it plays its cards well. For that to happen, the CM K-P may have to take a back seat.

From Division to Mutual Aid: Rethinking South Asia's Water Future





Kumail Hasan

In April 2025, following Pahalgam and the military escalation that accompanied it, India placed the Indus Waters Treaty in "abeyance." "Abeyance" is not a legal term recognised within the treaty itself, and in June 2025 the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague confirmed that, issuing a supplemental award thereby reaffirming its jurisdiction and stating unambiguously that the treaty does not provide for unilateral suspension. India rejected the ruling, declared the tribunal "illegally constituted," and maintained its position.

As of now the 65-year-old agreement that survived three wars and sustained bilateral hostility sits in a state of deliberate obfuscation due to it being dismantled by the unilateral will of one party. This is, by any sober reading of international law, an illegal act. The principle of pacta sunt servanda, one of the foundational norms of international relations, binds states to their treaty obligations regardless of political grievance. Former Foreign Minister and Ambassador Jalil Abbas Jilani in April 2025, warned that "by suspending the IWT, it sets a precedent that could one day haunt India." This warning I believe ought to be taken seriously within the Indian foreign policy establishment as an observation about India's own geography.

India is simultaneously upstream to Pakistan on the Indus system and downstream to China on the Brahmaputra, the Sutlej, and the upper Indus. It holds no formal river water treaty with China. What exists instead is a set of non-binding Memoranda of Understanding and an Expert Level Mechanism for data sharing, neither of which carries the legal gravitas of the IWT. In December 2024, China approved construction of the Motuo hydropower station on the Yarlung Tsangpo, which will become the world's largest dam and will triple the capacity of the Three Gorges. The Brahmaputra, as the river is known after it crosses into India, supplies an estimated 30 percent of India's freshwater and approximately 44 percent of its total hydropower potential.

China has already demonstrated its willingness to use upstream leverage, for instance, during the 2017 Doklam standoff, it suspended the sharing of hydrological data on the Brahmaputra, a preview of what a policy of coercion from the north can look like. India has now normalised the doctrine of unilateral abeyance as a legitimate instrument of its statecraft. The question it should be asking is whether it wishes to live in a world where that doctrine is applied to it in return. This is the trap at the heart of India's decision, and it points toward a deeper problem within South Asian water governance.

The Indus Waters Treaty was, at its core, a division treaty. It partitioned the six rivers of the Indus system between the two states by assigning fixed shares, and created a framework premised on separation of flows rather than exchange of flows. Division treaties of this kind are brittle under political stress, because the act of defection, one state withdrawing from its obligations, carries limited immediate cost to the defecting party. India can suspend the IWT without losing access to the Indus rivers it already uses. The asymmetry between the cost of defection and the benefit of leverage is precisely what made the abeyance tempting and precisely what makes it dangerous as a precedent. Exchange architectures work differently.

In Central Asia, the five post-Soviet republics inherited from Moscow, apart from nationhood, a hydraulic barter system in which upstream Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan released water during summer for the irrigation needs of downstream Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and in return received energy, food, and market access during winter. The currencies were linked across borders. This system, formalised through the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination established by the 1992 Almaty Agreement, was imperfect from the outset and has frequently broken down.

In 2023, when drought reduced Kyrgyzstan's water flows to Kazakhstan's sugar beet farms, Kazakhstan throttled cargo crossings at the Ak-Tilek border crossing, reducing clearance from twenty vehicles an hour to six per day and leaving hundreds of trucks stranded. The standoff required presidential intervention from both parties to resolve. However even when the exchange architecture broke down, the self-flagellation mechanisms immediately engaged. Kazakhstan could not indefinitely harm Kyrgyzstan's trade without harming its own supply. The coercive act was therefore self-limiting in ways that the IWT abeyance simply is not. Central Asia is also not acting from a position of abundance.

The region is warming at a rate twice the global average. The Fergana Valley, shared among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, faces chronic and intensifying water stress. Water shortages linked to drought, which occurred every five to six years historically, now recur approximately every other year. The 2021 and 2022 clashes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan over water distribution points in the Batken region left over 100 people dead and displaced more than 100,000 Kyrgyz citizens. The barter architecture did not prevent those conflicts but it created the conditions under which, by the end of 2024, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan had settled their final border disputes and signed new agreements on shared resource management, and upstream Kyrgyzstan, downstream Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan agreed to jointly finance the Kambarata-1 hydroelectric project despite its being located entirely on Kyrgyz territory.

Shared financial stakes in upstream infrastructure created a form of interdependence that purely divisional frameworks cannot sow the seeds of. The IWT did not create mutual financial exposure, linked currencies of exchange, or mechanisms by which the downstream state holds a meaningful stake in upstream infrastructure. When political relations between India and Pakistan deteriorated, as they tend to, there was no economic cost to Indian defection from the treaty, no Pakistani stake in Indian hydropower, no Indian stake in Pakistani agricultural stability that the treaty's suspension would automatically threaten. The architecture provided no self-correcting mechanism. This is where I believe mutual aid ought to intervene.

It is the observation, developed through the study of how cooperation emerges among interdependent actors under conditions of shared threat, that voluntary cooperation sustained by mutual benefit is more resilient than coercive or purely divisional agreements. Central Asia inherited the architecture from the Soviet system and has been, imperfectly and painfully, trying to maintain it because the alternative, a purely competitive division of shared resources among states with no linked currencies of exchange, produces exactly the kind of zero-sum crisis that South Asia is now entering.

India's decision to place the IWT in abeyance revealed the innate vacuum in South Asian water governance and announced to all actors that India intends to operate without the one normative constraint, respect for downstream rights, that would give it any standing to demand restraint from China on the Brahmaputra. Ambassador Jilani's warning was that the precedent that could haunt India will not come from Islamabad. But rather it will come from Beijing, on a river where India has 44 percent of its hydropower at stake, no binding treaty, and no legal vindication left to appeal to that it has not already discarded.

The lesson of Central Asia is not that exchange architectures are peaceful. They are not. The lesson is that they are more durable under stress than purely divisive infrastructure, and that the states which invest in them early, even imperfectly, retain mechanisms for de-escalation that purely competitive frameworks destroy. South Asia, with its shared river systems, its accelerating climate vulnerability, and its nuclear-armed nature, cannot afford the architecture it currently has.

Kumail Hasan is an author who writes on international order, strategic competition, and the political economy of resource conflicts, with a particular focus on South and Central Asian politics.

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