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POLITICAL EARTHQUAKE IN TEXAS:

James Talarico Wins U.S. Senate Race as Gina Hinojosa Ousts Greg Abbott

Democrats Score Historic Double Victory as Talarico Ends Nearly Four Decades of Republican Control of Texas' U.S. Senate Seat and Hinojosa Becomes State's First Latina Governor

HOUSTON, Texas: Texas witnessed a historic political earthquake on November 3 as Democratic candidates James Talarico and Gina Hinojosa scored major victories, defeating Republicans Ken Paxton and incumbent Governor Greg Abbott in two closely watched statewide contests.

In the U.S. Senate race,

Continued on page 12



Talarico speaks at a watch party in Austin after winning the U.S. Senate race in Texas.



Gina Hinojosa, candidate for Texas governor, speaks with supporters at a polling location during Election Day on Tuesday.

Trump links midterm defeat to voter unhappiness over fuel costs

US president expresses willingness to cooperate with incoming Democratic majorities in Congress

WASHINGTON – Reflecting on his party's losses in Tuesday's midterm elections, President Donald Trump said that while voters support his posture on Iran, they probably were not willing to accept higher gasoline prices driven by the war.

"People agree with what I'm doing on Iran, but they really probably weren't willing to do the short-term consequence of paying … more for gasoline," Trump told Fox News Wednesday following the midterm vote, describing the price pressure as "a short-term problem, but for

Continued on page 12

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US Vice President JD Vance says Iran war is 'the reason we lost' midterms

US Vice President JD Vance said on Wednesday that the Iran war had doomed Republicans in the midterm elections, moving to distance himself from the unpopular conflict ahead of a possible 2028 White House run.

Continued on page 12

Former Houston City Councilwoman Letitia Plummer elected Harris County judge



Letitia Plummer speaks at an election watch party in Harris County on Nov. 3, 2026.

Former Houston councilwoman Letitia Plummer won the race for Harris County judge.

With all voting centers reporting reporting results on Wednesday, Plummer led Sanchez with nearly 61% of the vote compared

Continued on page 12

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Democrats Capture Congress in Historic Midterm Sweep; Muslim Americans Make Political History With First-Ever U.S. Senate Victory

Abdul El-Sayed becomes the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Senate as Democrats take control of both chambers of Congress. At least seven Muslim lawmakers win congressional seats, marking a significant milestone for Muslim-American political representation.

The November 3, 2026, U.S. midterm elections have produced a dramatic political realignment in Washington, with Democrats capturing both the Senate and House of Representatives in a sweeping setback for President Donald Trump and the Republican Party.

The election also marked a historic breakthrough for Muslim Americans. Democrat Abdul El-Sayed won Michigan's U.S. Senate race, becoming the first Muslim ever elected to the U.S. Senate. His victory, alongside gains by Muslim candidates in the House, represents a significant milestone for a community that has increasingly sought a stronger voice in American political and public affairs.

The results are particularly significant for Muslim-American voters, as several successful candidates campaigned on civil rights, religious freedom, humanitarian assistance, immigration, healthcare and a reassessment of unconditional American military support for Israel.

The election has also elevated candidates who have publicly advocated Palestinian rights and criticized U.S. policies concerning Gaza.

Muslim-American candidates make historic gains

The most significant victory came in Michigan, where Abdul El-Sayed defeated Republican Mike Rogers. A 42-year-old physician and former public health official, El-Sayed is the son of Egyptian immigrants.

His victory followed a campaign in which his Muslim identity became a subject of political attacks. Republican opponents and Trump allies attempted to associate him with extremist organizations, allegations he rejected.

El-Sayed also emerged as one of the strongest progressive voices challenging American military support for Israel. He called Israel's military campaign in Gaza genocide and advocated a comprehensive arms embargo, including restrictions on offensive and defensive weapons transfers. His campaign also emphasized healthcare, affordability, Medicare for All and limiting corporate influence in politics.

Muslim representatives elected to the U.S. Congress

According to preliminary reporting available on November 4, eight Muslim candidates have secured congressional victories: one Senate seat and seven House seats.

U.S. Senate

- Abdul El-Sayed – Michigan: First Muslim elected to the U.S. Senate.

U.S. House of Representatives

- Adam Hamawy – New Jersey, District 12: Defeated Republican Gregg Mele, becoming the first Muslim elected to represent New Jersey in Congress. Hamawy is a plastic surgeon, former U.S. Army combat physician and Iraq War veteran who volunteered at a hospital in Gaza in 2024. He supports universal healthcare and ending U.S. military assistance to Israel.

- Darializa Avila Chevalier – New York, District 13: A civil rights investigator and Muslim convert, she won the seat after defeating longtime incumbent Adriano Espaillat in the Democratic primary. Her campaign emphasized Palestinian rights and community organizing.

- Rashida Tlaib – Michigan, District 12: The Palestinian-American congresswoman secured a fifth term. She has consistently advocated Palestinian self-determination, civilian protection and restrictions on arms transfers.

- Ilhan Omar – Minnesota, District 5: Won a fifth term. The Somali-American congresswoman remains a prominent advocate for humanitarian assistance and greater oversight of American military support overseas.

- André Carson – Indiana, District 7: Retained his seat. Serving since 2008, he is the longest-serving Muslim member of the House.

- Lateefah Simon – California, District 12: Retained her East Bay congressional seat. Her political work has included civil rights and opposition to offensive U.S. arms deliveries.

- Aisha Wahab – California, District 14: Won a full congressional term after entering the House through an earlier special election.

These victories represent both new representation and the return of established Muslim voices to Congress.

Muslim-American victories across state legislatures

The impact extended well beyond Washington. Muslim candidates won or were leading in numerous state legislative contests, with particularly significant gains in the Midwest, Northeast and South.

Among the reported victories and leads:

State	Muslim-American candidates
Michigan:	Abbas Alawieh, Alabas Farhat and Jalal Abdallah
Ohio:	Munira Abdullahi and Ismail Mohamed
Illinois:	Nabeela Syed and Abdelnasser Rashid
Minnesota:	Omar Fateh, Zaynab Mohamed, Mohamud Noor and Samakab Hussein
Oregon:	Kayse Jama
Washington:	Osman Salahuddin
New York:	Aber Kawas and Robert Jackson
Connecticut:	Maryam Khan and Saud Anwar
Delaware:	Madinah Wilson-Anton
Pennsylvania:	Tarik Khan
Georgia:	Ruwa Romman, Sheikh Rahman and Farooq Mughal
North Carolina:	Mujtaba Mohammed
Colorado:	Iman Jodeh

Some of these were victories already reported, while others were preliminary leads or uncontested races. They should not all be interpreted as fully certified results.

Pakistani-American lawmakers strengthen their presence

The results were particularly encouraging for Pakistani-American communities, including voters in Texas.

Several Pakistani-American candidates secured victories:

- Salman Bhojani – Texas House District 92: Won reelection with approximately 67% of the vote.

- Dr. Suleman Lalani – Texas House District 76: Retained his seat.

- Maryam Khan – Connecticut State Senate District 2: Won reelection.

- Saud Anwar – Connecticut State Senate District 3: Retained his seat.

- Maryam Sabih – Pennsylvania State Assembly: Won a legislative seat.

- Farooq Mughal – Georgia House District 105: Won with approximately 60.8% of the vote.

Republican Pakistani-American candidate Imtiaz Mohammad lost his Florida state legislative race.

These victories further expand Pakistani-American representation in American public institutions, particularly in Texas, where Bhojani and Lalani will continue serving their constituencies.

Candidates who are not Muslim but campaigned on issues important to Muslim communities

Another important dimension of the election was the success of candidates who, although not Muslim themselves, advocated policies relevant to Muslim Americans and other religious and minority communities.

James Talarico – Texas U.S. Senate: Talarico defeated Republican Ken Paxton, becoming the first Democrat elected to the Texas Senate seat in more than three decades. His platform included religious freedom, opposition to Islamophobia and antisemitism, and protection against religious discrimination. He has supported the Do No Harm Act and advocated a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians. On military policy, he supports defensive assistance to Israel but opposes offensive weapons sales that could harm civilians.

Other progressive candidates who won congressional races campaigned for changes to American policy toward Israel, Palestinian rights and military assistance.

Their victories do not mean that all Democratic candidates share the same positions, or that the entire party has adopted a single policy toward the Middle East. However, the election strengthened the presence of lawmakers calling for greater accountability over American military assistance and humanitarian protections.

A number of these candidates also faced substantial opposition from pro-Israel political groups during their campaigns.

What the national election results mean

The Democratic victories extended across both chambers of Congress and several state governments.

- Senate: Democrats captured control, overturning the previous Republican majority. Early reporting put the Democratic advantage at approximately 54–44, with a small number of contests still unresolved.

- House: Democrats regained control of the 435-member chamber, crossing the 218-seat threshold required for a majority. Early reporting showed at least 228 Democratic seats against 139 Republican seats, with numerous races still awaiting final calls.

- Texas: James Talarico defeated Ken Paxton in the Senate race, while Democrat Gina Hinojosa defeated incumbent Greg Abbott in the gubernatorial contest, ending three decades of Republican control of the governor's office.

- Georgia: Keisha Lance Bottoms became the first Black woman elected governor of a U.S. state.

- New Mexico: Deb Haaland became the first Native American woman elected governor.

- Ohio: Democrat Amy Acton defeated Republican Vivek Ramaswamy.

- Kansas: Democrat Adam Hamilton won a historic Senate victory, ending a Republican hold on the seat dating back to 1932.

- South Carolina: Democrat Annie Andrews won a Senate seat, marking a major political breakthrough in a traditionally Republican state.

The results will give Democrats control of congressional committees, greater oversight powers and the ability to investigate the Trump administration. They will also be able to block legislation and presidential nominations, although Trump retains his veto power.

A growing Muslim-American political movement

The election results also reflect the growing political participation of American Muslims.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and its political advocacy affiliate, CAIR Action, announced that they had been tracking more than 160 Muslim-American candidates who contested local, state and federal offices during the 2026 election cycle.

CAIR also announced a nationwide Muslim voter exit poll examining political preferences, turnout, economic concerns, the war involving Iran, Gaza, Islamophobia and the political issues influencing Muslim voters.

The poll was scheduled for release on November 4. Its findings are important because they could help establish whether Muslim voters collectively shifted their political support and which issues most influenced their decisions. CAIR itself is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates.

A separate preliminary tally by Muslim Network TV reported at least 36 Muslim candidates winning or leading races nationwide, including eight congressional victories, 26 state legislative victories or leads, and two judicial or county-level contests. Some results remained unconfirmed as counting continued.

A new chapter for Muslim representation in America

The 2026 midterm elections have opened a significant new chapter in American politics. The election of the first Muslim U.S. senator, the expansion of Muslim representation in the House and the victories of Muslim candidates in state legislatures demonstrate the community's growing presence in the country's political institutions.

For Muslim Americans, the significance extends beyond the number of elected officials. It also concerns representation in debates over religious freedom, discrimination, immigration, civil rights, healthcare, foreign policy and the protection of civilian populations.

The election does not guarantee an immediate transformation of American policy toward Gaza, Israel or the wider Muslim world. However, the arrival of additional lawmakers willing to challenge existing policies could strengthen congressional debate and increase pressure for greater accountability.

For the Muslim-American community, the message from the November 3 election is unmistakable: its political participation and representation are becoming increasingly consequential in determining America's political future.

India's water blackmail

For years, New Delhi has strategically used international platforms and institutional levers to weaken Pakistan's economic foundations.

Khurram Abbas

SINCE April 2025, when India unilaterally suspended the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), most scholarship has treated it as a political decision by the BJP-led NDA government. While it is true that the BJP has been developing a narrative that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was 'rectifying' the 'mistakes' of the Nehruvian era, the decisions and developments during the past 18 months suggest that New Delhi is developing a long-term strategy to strangle Pakistan economically.

India's primary target in this strategic campaign is the Chenab river, which it is systematically converting into a long-term instrument of leverage to dictate Pakistan's foreign policy, weaken its stance on Kashmir, and dominate bilateral relations.

In the 18 months since it decided to keep the IWT in abeyance, India has aggressively leveraged this treaty vacuum to build a massive network of storage, regulation, and diversion infrastructure on the Chenab. New and accelerated hydroelectric power projects, primarily concentrated in the Chenab basin, have ballooned from a baseline capacity of 3,263 MW to 7,620.5 MW, supported by a massive financial outlay of approximately Indian rupees 414.04 billion.

No single dam or diversion canal can permanently dry up a river. However, a highly synchronised, connected network of mega structures, coupled with diversion canals, can fundamentally determine who controls the timing and volume of river flow.

India is trying to apply a two-pronged strategy, ie, increase storage capacity and enhance the ability to divert the Chenab's water. India's strategic roadmap involves five megaprojects alongside extensive local diversions. This includes Sawalkot (1,856 MW), Kirthai I & II (1,320 MW), Pakal Dul (1,000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), and Bursar Storage (800 MW).

India's infrastructure push began in May 2025, with the announcement of the tender for the Uri-II project (240 MW), followed quickly in June 2025 by the tender announcement for the Dulhasti-II project (260 MW). Activity accelerated in July 2025 with two major announcements — first, a tender for the removal of deposited sediments from the Salal Dam Reservoir, and second, the Sawalkot project (1,856 MW) tender under international competitive bidding. In March 2026, civil contracts were officially awarded for both the Uri-I stage II and Dulhasti stage-II projects, alongside the official tender announcement for the highly controversial Chenab-Beas Link Tunnel Project (Link-3). These aforementioned projects command a combined potential diversion and storage capacity of roughly 7.287 MAF.

The Chenab-Beas Link Project is particularly consequential. With a reported budget of Indian rupees 23.52bn, it proposes to transfer water from the Chandra river, a major Chenab tributary, through an 8.7-kilometre tunnel into the Beas basin and onward through a 113km canal network to eastern Indian states. The proposed diversion of 1.9 MAF annually from the Chenab basin raises serious questions about compliance with Article III of the IWT.

The threat of manipulation, or the Chenab's vulnerabilities, poses a direct risk to Pakistan's economic survival, social stability, and national security. The Chenab directly irrigates agricultural lands across more than 11 districts of central Punjab, the country's undisputed food basket. These districts form the densest core of the famous rice-wheat cropping zone. This 11-district area accounts for about 22 to 25 per cent of Pakistan's national food grain output. If India controls water flows during October to December or May to July, it may affect seasonal yields in this zone. In such a scenario, it could cause a direct blow of $9bn to $11bn to Pakistan's economy.

The broader impact would ripple through the national economy in several ways. Pakistan would be forced to spend billions of scarce foreign exchange reserves to import basic food commodities. Instead of generating $3.3bn to $4bn from booming rice exports, the country would face a multibillion-dollar trade deficit just trying to secure alternative grain imports. Second, any sustained restriction on, or unpredictable disruption to, these water flows would threaten the livelihoods of millions of farming households, while endangering crops and compromising national food security.

Therefore, Islamabad must view India's decision to place the IWT in abeyance as another dimension of New Delhi's long-standing and coordinated policy of economic strangulation of Pakistan. For years, New Delhi has strategically used international platforms and institutional levers to weaken Pakistan's economic foundations.

New Delhi has been consistently trying to restrict Islamabad's access to global capital and limit its trade capacity. A primary example is India's aggressive lobbying within the Financial Action Task Force, where it has consistently tried to politicise technical compliance and block Pakistan's removal from the grey list to discourage foreign direct investment and cripple its banking sector. Beyond regulatory warfare, India has systematically disrupted regional trade platforms, such as Saarc, effectively stalling economic integration across South Asia to keep Pakistan regionally isolated.

Faced with this asymmetric threat, Islamabad's response has been largely concentrated on the external front. Pakistan's state apparatus has consistently pursued international legal and diplomatic channels.

However, a dangerous policy gap exists on the domestic front. Ground-level preparedness is profoundly lacking. The agrarian communities, provincial irrigation departments, and economic sectors that will bear the immediate impact of India's upstream infrastructure remain highly vulnerable. Pakistan lacks the modern water-storage infrastructure, optimised canal lining, crop-switching strategies, and real-time early warning systems needed to survive sudden changes in river flows.

Hence, Islamabad should complement its legal and diplomatic efforts with urgent domestic reforms. Pakistan must declare a national water emergency, educate vulnerable communities in 11 districts of central Punjab that depend on the Chenab, expedite dam construction, and modernise irrigation. Without urgent preparedness, Islamabad will risk surrendering its agricultural security to Delhi's water blackmail.

The writer is a strategic analyst of international security. The views expressed are his own.

Pakistan's reforms deficit

Tahsin Shah

PAKISTAN has never suffered from a shortage of civil service reform proposals. It has suffered from a shortage of reforms that survive implementation.

Since independence, successive governments, commissions and committees have attempted to restructure the administrative machinery inherited from the colonial state. Yet familiar complaints persist: excessive generalism, weak accountability, politicisation, distorted incentives, slow decision-making and a bureaucracy often better equipped to process files than solve complex problems.

The latest reform package is significant not because Pakistan has rediscovered civil service reform, but because it attempts to address several structural weaknesses simultaneously.

It proposes 11 specialised professional cadres, competency-based recruitment, performance-linked remuneration, restructuring of training and human-resource management, and a National Executive Service (NES) under which BS-20 and above positions could be opened to serving officials, academics and private-sector professionals.

Pakistan inherited the powerful, generalist Civil Service of Pakistan from the colonial administrative tradition. The most dramatic restructuring came under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1973, when the CSP structure was abolished and occupational groups reorganised. But restructuring did not democratise opportunity within government.

The devolution reforms introduced under Gen Pervez Musharraf in 2001 represented another major intervention, transferring substantial authority towards elected local governments and altering traditional district administration. But institutional discontinuity and subsequent political changes prevented the system from developing into a durable architecture of local governance.

This history reveals Pakistan's recurring problem: reform is often treated as an event rather than a sustained process.

The strongest feature of the present package is its recognition that a modern state cannot be managed through transferable generalists. Professional cadres in fields including IT and telecom, energy, climate, engineering, health, education, law, agriculture and science address a genuine administrative weakness.

Opening senior positions to competition could be still more consequential. It could bring specialists into government who would otherwise never enter conventional public service and allow capable career officers to compete beyond rigid cadre boundaries. But lateral entry carries an equally obvious risk: without credible safeguards, it can become lateral patronage.

International experience offers principles rather than readymade templates. Pakistan should borrow principles, not blindly transplant institutions.

Performance-linked remuneration illustrates the challenge. Annual performance agreements for ministries, flowing down to individual officers, could improve accountability. But who determines whether a secretary has performed well? If targets are vague or assessments depend excessively upon political superiors, financial incentives could reward proximity to power rather than performance.

The ultimate measurement must therefore be governance. Does a business licence take days instead of months? Are teachers and doctors present? Are development projects completed on time? Can citizens obtain public services without intermediaries? Can civil servants make lawful professional decisions without seeking political protection?

Significantly, the Police Service and Foreign Service would remain outside the proposed NES. There are sound reasons for treating them as specialised career services requiring institutional continuity, accumulated professional experience and service-specific training. Their exclusion from the NES, however, need not mean exclusion from reform.

For the police, Pakistan does not need to start from scratch. In May 2018, then chief justice Mian Saqib Nisar initiated a Police Reforms Committee bringing together nine retired and seven serving Inspectors General of Police. After extensive deliberations, it produced the two-volume Police Reforms: Way Forward, launched in Jan 2019.

Building upon the Police Order 2002 and subsequent experience, the exercise addressed some of the most persistent weaknesses of policing: accountability, quality and independence of investigation, complaint redressal, urban policing, alternative dispute resolution, counterterrorism and the legal framework governing the police. It proposed a model police law while recognising the constitutional and administrative realities of Pakistan's federal system.

Yet the principal structural problems identified by the committee remain largely unresolved. Its convener, former IGP Afzal Ali Shigri, observed as recently as Feb 2026 that fragmented legal frameworks, weaknesses in investigation and uneven accountability mechanisms continue to impede reform.

The 2019 police reform report thus stands as a telling case study of Pakistan's persistent gap between designing reform and implementing it.

The exclusion of the Police Service from the NES presents an opportunity rather than necessarily a deficiency. Instead of forcing policing into an administrative model designed for civilian ministries, the government can revive Police Reforms: Way Forward, update it and implement its still-relevant recommendations. The Foreign Service can similarly retain its distinctive professional structure while pursuing the broader reform principles of merit, specialisation, transparent advancement and measurable performance.

The government proposes an ambitious implementation timetable for the new civil-service package. Speed can create momentum, but changing regulations is easier than changing administrative culture.

No examination reform can compensate for arbitrary postings. No specialised cadre can flourish if expertise is subordinated to connections. No performance contract creates accountability if influence protects poor performance. And no reform report, however professionally drafted, improves governance while it remains on a shelf.

Pakistan has spent decades reforming bureaucracy on paper. The real reform is to build institutions where competence matters more than cadre, performance more than seniority, expertise more than connections and public service more than institutional privilege.

The writer is a former Inspector General of Police and DG FIA.

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Is Rahul Gandhi ambitious?

Has anyone bothered to ask Rahul Gandhi if he was himself interested in the job that so many appear keen to award him?

Jawed Naqvi

MILLIONS of Indians evidently see Rahul Gandhi as their candidate to steer the country out of its deep mess driven by hate-filled divisive politics and a K-shaped economic trajectory plying unprecedented inequality. That seemed to be the unspoken sentiment, if not consensus, at the massive Sunday rally of opposition parties in Delhi against vote theft.

The issue has brought out angry youth on the streets. Rigging of polls betrays, however, an inability to secure popular support through clean elections, which is a blessing.

India is not alone in subverting democracy. Narendra Modi's ride-or-die friendship with Benjamin Netanyahu reveals a shared scorn for secular democracy and minority rights. Netanyahu hopes to disenfranchise Palestinian MPs (strategically called Arabs by a clever political fiat) even as they mock him in turn by holding the balance of power, principally against him, after last week's elections.

Likewise with Modi, whose controversial victories in Bihar and West Bengal recently benefited enormously as his hand-picked election commission disenfranchised millions of Muslim voters and other potential opponents of the regime. Netanyahu rewarded Modi's friendship by giving his government the Pegasus spyware among other contraptions to undermine democracy.

One would readily go along with the view that Gandhi makes for a great candidate to don the mantle of prime minister and also restore its prestige. He has displayed the drive to nurse Indian democracy back to health. But is he as equipped as, say, streetfighters like Priyank Kharge or M.K. Stalin or Akhilesh Yadav to deal frontally with the push which will inevitably arrive in the process of dismantling entrenched fascism?

That Sonia Gandhi and both her children — Rahul as the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, Priyanka Gandhi as an outspoken and gritty parliamentarian — called out Israel's genocide in Gaza, while major parties other than the left looked away is cause to celebrate the family — and also something to worry about as it puts them in the crosshairs of many a foreign and domestic interloper. The fact that the RSS chief hosted an Israeli diplomat as chief guest at the Hindutva body's annual day on Dussehra is troubling.

A pivotal question needs to be flagged here about widespread faux expertise over a future prime minister from the opposition. Has anyone bothered to ask Rahul Gandhi if he was himself interested in the job that so many appear keen to award him? A fair guess based on history and Nehru-Gandhi genealogy is that Rahul Gandhi harbours no such ambitions. We could perhaps glean the truth of this hunch from Sonia Gandhi's soon-to-be released memoirs.

The BJP routinely accuses Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter of political ambition. No Indian prime minister with a clear majority in parliament has offered to resign other than Nehru. In February 1950, Nehru offered to resign as prime minister over the refugee crisis after Partition. Sardar Patel persuaded him to withdraw the offer. Again, in 1958, Nehru announced his desire to step down and take a break from office, citing severe mental fatigue, fading idealism, and deteriorating public standards in Indian politics. A public outcry broke out, and the Congress begged him to stay on.

Did Nehru want his daughter to succeed him? On the contrary, there's plenty of evidence that he desired young socialist leader Jai Prakash Narayan as his deputy in 1952, which JP refused. There was not even a remote hint that he wanted his daughter in his cabinet or to succeed him.

Nehru was wary of Morarji Desai from the right-wing of the party. He engineered a plan for senior cabinet ministers to resign to work at the grassroots with the party. He inducted Lal Bahadur Shastri as a minister without portfolio in the prime minister's office, a clear signal who he was tapping as successor.

Shastri's demise in Tashkent set off another round of worry about Desai manoeuvring. Powerful regional satraps countered the move and promoted Indira Gandhi believing she could be manipulated. Mrs Gandhi favoured supporting Gulzari Lal Nanda.

The 'Syndicate' supporting her was essentially conservative, pro-business, and staunchly anti-socialist. Mrs Gandhi turned the tables on them in 1969 by staging a split with the support of the communist bloc. When the left abandoned her after the emergency — one of their defining errors — she was swamped by the conservatives including religious revivalists who were largely seen as devising her fateful Punjab policy that would eventually lay her low.

Rajiv Gandhi was a scrupulously private family man until Sanjay Gandhi's death in a plane crash required him to stand with his mother. Her assassination set him up as prime minister. There's no dearth of recorded evidence of Sonia Gandhi opposing his entry into politics. In an emotional showdown, she forbade him from becoming prime minister, presciently fearing he, too, would be killed. Rajiv's response was: "I am her son … if I don't do it, who will?" Ambition?

Did Sonia Gandhi try to be prime minister in 1999 when she met the president with a list of 272 supporters? The world knows that she backed Manmohan Singh as prime minister in 2004. But a 2014 book by R.D. Pradhan, a civil servant close to Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi, described how Sonia Gandhi had Manmohan Singh in mind as early as 1999.

On her part, Sonia Gandhi did one better. She set up a very effective advisory council to informally but crucially advise the Singh government on progressive issues ranging from poverty alleviation, right to information, right to education, halting disinvestment in public sector undertakings — everything that Nehru and Indira Gandhi would approve of.

Rahul Gandhi would in all likelihood follow the precepts. His politically correct upbringing could struggle against the ugliness of right-wing politics that prompted Nehru to offer to resign. There are many more roughly hewn leaders in the progressive pack to confront an ugly pushback that would come from a cornered fascist order.

The writer is Journalist from Delhi.

Lancet report and Pakistan's public health crisis

Dr Rana Jawad Asghar

When I moved back to Pakistan, I had never imagined the scale of our health challenges. Having worked in some of the poorest countries in Africa, I assumed that Pakistan would be much better on different indicators. Unfortunately, every passing year we fall behind on health indicators compared to many poorer countries. Wild polio has been eradicated from all over the world even from war-torn countries, except for Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Pakistan, according to WHO, every single day 675 newborns and 27 mothers die in childbirth. Pakistan's maternal mortality rate is highest in South Asia when compared with India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

One of the world's top medical journals, The Lancet has published "The 2026 Global Report of the Lancet Countdown", documenting how climate change is affecting our health. It is a separate discussion as to who is responsible for climate degradation and how much they should be held responsible for financial compensation. We must now think about safeguarding our already vulnerable population from increased health risks due to climate degradation.

According to this report, the number of moderate or higher heat stress hours has increased significantly in both Pakistan and India (more than 2000 hours/year), costing Pakistan $17 billion and India $174 billion (of course, due to its larger population and economy). Increased heat is also increasing favourable months for transmission of mosquito-borne diseases like malaria and dengue. This year though our underreporting of dengue is showing few dengue cases. However, I myself was recently infected by dengue even though I was always meticulous about protecting myself. There is a limit to individual preventive measures if infectious diseases are not being controlled at the population level.

Climate change is also bringing extreme floods and droughts in the region. In Pakistan, the 2022 floods damaged around 1,500 health facilities. Thirty-five percent of Pakistan's land has experienced extreme drought annually for the last many years.

According to the same report, air pollution is now one of the major challenges, costing India $500 billion and Pakistan $33 billion. These numbers should alert decision-makers, even if we don't talk about the immense health costs of air pollution. A 20 30% increase in mortality from heart diseases, cancers and strokes is linked to air pollution. This year too both Indian and Pakistani cities are occupying four to five top slots in the top ten most polluted cities in the world.

The Lancet report suggests some priority actions. First, consider the consequences of climate change like health emergencies, and start preparing for them. Since frequent floods and droughts are now part of regular cycles, be prepared. Build resilience by making sure there are flood-resilient health facilities with solar electricity and cold chains for vaccinations. Deploy mobile health services to operate in natural emergencies. Establish a real-time, representative and effective disease surveillance and response system.

These are important steps to prepare for climate-induced health emergencies. But unless we address the core issues of our public health - such as population growth, safe drinking water and nutrition - our preparedness for emergencies will only be tinkering at the edges.

Pakistan is an agricultural country, but 40% of our children are stunted. Severe malnutrition may reduce 10 to 15 IQ points in children. Over the decades, successive governments did nothing to improve the situation.

Pakistan's fertility rate is around 3.5 while every other country in South Asia has a fertility rate of around 2 or lower. Our population explosion is now threatening national security as we can't provide food, health and education for our children. Our population is already physically and mentally disadvantaged, and the fast-approaching climate health crisis will affect us even more. We were already struggling with uncontrolled infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases, and this climate-related health emergency now completes a triple whammy of health crises.

We need to strengthen our foundations while still repairing our roof for the incoming rains.

Qaim Khani Martyrs' Memorial Inaugurated: A Shining Chapter of the Community's Sacrifices

Qaim Khani Education Trust honours fallen soldiers with a permanent memorial in Hyderabad, celebrating their courage, patriotism and supreme sacrifices for the motherland.



By Amjad Qaim Khani | Houston

In recent days, a solemn and dignified ceremony was held in the courtyard of the Qaim Khani Hostel in Hyderabad. The event marked not merely the inauguration of a memorial but a living testament to the spirit, sacrifice, and honour of the Qaim Khani community. Organised under the auspices of the Qaim Khani Education Trust, the Yadgar-e-Shuhada (Martyrs' Memorial) was formally inaugurated, and heartfelt tributes were paid to the Qaim Khani soldiers who laid down their lives in the service of the nation.

During the brief yet impressive ceremony, senior Pakistani military officials expressed profound gratitude to the elders of the community and to the Qaim Khani martyrs. Their words carried the weight of official recognition from the state of Pakistan itself.

This was no ordinary formal opening. It was a public acknowledgement of the eternal sacrifices of those brave sons who offered their lives for the defence of the motherland's borders, for peace, and for freedom. The Qaim Khani community has always played its part in national defence, and the establishment of this memorial continues that proud tradition.

The memorial stands as living proof that the community never forgets its martyrs. Their sacrifices serve as a guiding light for the present generation and as enduring examples of patriotism, courage, and selflessness for generations yet to come. Placing the memorial within an educational institution such as the Qaim Khani Hostel underscores a vital truth: knowledge and sacrifice are inseparable. Young people who come here to learn must also be introduced to the sacrifices of those who came before them.

Those who attended the ceremony stood shoulder to shoulder with the families of the martyrs, sharing their grief and affirming the greatness of their loved ones. The gathering was more than the founding of a monument; it was a demonstration of the community's collective spirit, unity, and deep respect for its brave sons.

The Qaim Khani people have repeatedly shown that their greatness lies not merely in name but in character. Through this memorial, tributes have been paid to the fallen, and a clear message has been sent to the next generation: service to the homeland is the highest form of worship.

The exact number of people present at this historic occasion is of secondary importance. What matters is the powerful message delivered jointly by the state and the Qaim Khani community—a message that will be remembered for a long time. Most importantly, this memorial will stand permanently, continuing to tell the story of the community's honour, sacrifice, and love of country.

It is for this reason that the resonance of the ceremony and of the Qaim Khani Martyrs' Memorial is not confined to the city, the village, the street corner, or private gatherings. In today's global village, wherever Pakistanis and members of the Qaim Khani community live, the echo of this event is being heard.

May Almighty Allah grant the highest ranks to all Qaim Khani martyrs, bestow patience and fortitude upon their bereaved families, and give the community the strength to honour their sacrifices in full measure. Ameen.

Justice lost in indices

Dr Shahid Hussain Kamboyo

International rankings influence public opinion, but their meaning can be distorted when numbers are detached from what they measure. Pakistan's position in the World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2025 has often been presented as a verdict on the judiciary. The concern is understandable, but the interpretation is incomplete. A national assessment covering institutions cannot fairly become the scorecard of one. Accountability begins with identifying who is responsible for what.

Pakistan ranked 130th among 143 countries, scoring 0.37. The Index examines eight dimensions, including constraints on government powers, corruption, open government, fundamental rights, order and security, regulatory enforcement, civil justice and criminal justice. Courts influence several of these dimensions, but do not determine them all. Pakistan stood last in Order and Security, a measure principally concerned with public safety. A country's overall standing must therefore be read as a picture of its wider rule-of-law environment, not an exclusive judgment on its courts.

Comparisons reinforce the distinction. Pakistan ranked 129th in Civil Justice and 101st in Criminal Justice. Bangladesh, although ranked 125th overall, stood 132nd and 118th in these categories. Türkiye ranked 118th overall but 106th in Criminal Justice; the Russian Federation stood 119th overall but 128th in that category. Brazil, despite ranking 78th overall, stood 111th in Criminal Justice. These figures establish no superiority of Pakistan's judiciary. They simply show that an overall ranking and its individual components tell different stories. Statistics are useful only when the conclusions drawn from them remain faithful to their meaning.

The World Bank's World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law underscores the importance of institutional cooperation and effective implementation. Investigation, prosecution, adjudication and enforcement form different parts of the justice process. Their responsibilities intersect, but they are not interchangeable. Fair criticism should illuminate these connections rather than obscure them.

Yet the WJP scorecard also identifies weaknesses that cannot be explained away. Pakistan scored 0.36 on accessibility and affordability of civil justice, 0.28 on unreasonable delay and 0.35 on effective enforcement. For people seeking justice, these are not abstract deficiencies. A court visit may cost a labourer a day's wages. A lawyer's fee may compete with school expenses or medicines. A widow pursuing inheritance may struggle simply to understand where to begin. A right guaranteed by law has limited meaning if the person entitled to it cannot afford to claim it. Justice must therefore become accessible beyond the formal promise of an open courtroom.

This is why the Supreme Court's Journey Through Reform & Innovation 2026 deserves attention. Its 86-point agenda, pursued since November 2024, addresses barriers of cost, distance, information and delay. The September 2026 reform matrix records 64 completed actions, with others still requiring implementation. Such progress offers grounds for hope, but a completed administrative task is not necessarily a transformed public experience. Reform earns confidence when its benefits reach the people for whom it was designed.

The Public Facilitation Centre provides a clearer point of contact for court-related information and assistance. Digital processing of certified copies and video-link facilities can spare litigants unnecessary journeys, while advanced electronic filing remains under development. The Overseas Litigants' Facilitation Cell assists those separated from proceedings by distance. Free legal advice arrangements and improvements in women-centred facilities, alongside plans for dedicated Women Facilitation Centres, seek to reduce barriers faced by vulnerable court users. These are practical responses to the WJP's concerns about accessibility and affordability. Their promise lies in bringing judicial services closer to citizens, rather than leaving citizens to navigate every obstacle alone.

Delay demands equal attention. The Supreme Court recorded approximately 56 per cent more case disposals in 2024□25 than in 2023□24, while performance remained substantially above the earlier level in 2025□26. District courts decided approximately 1.47 million time-bound cases between September 2025 and July 2026. Better case management, prioritised hearings and monitoring indicate sustained efforts, although disposal totals cannot by themselves prove that waiting times have fallen for everyone. A judgment delivered after years of hardship may vindicate a right without restoring what delay has taken. Judicial efficiency must ultimately be measured in time saved for litigants, not numbers alone.

Enforcement presents another challenge. A favourable civil judgment means little if its remedy remains beyond reach. Criminal justice likewise depends upon credible investigation, effective prosecution, fair trials and lawful correctional processes. Each institution must discharge its own duties, while cooperation ensures that a legal decision becomes practical relief. The rule of law is strengthened when responsibility is shared appropriately, not when accountability is shifted elsewhere.

International indices can reveal shortcomings and encourage reform, but surveys and expert assessments should be considered alongside institutional records and lived experience. Some evidence underlying annual assessments predates recent changes, whose effects may take time to emerge. Pakistan's ranking warrants reflection, neither dismissal nor indiscriminate blame. Ultimately, justice must be felt in the worker who recovers his wages, the widow who secures her inheritance, and the pensioner who receives relief while it still matters. The true measure of progress is not a better place on a table, but a lasting public confidence that the law will protect people when they need it most.


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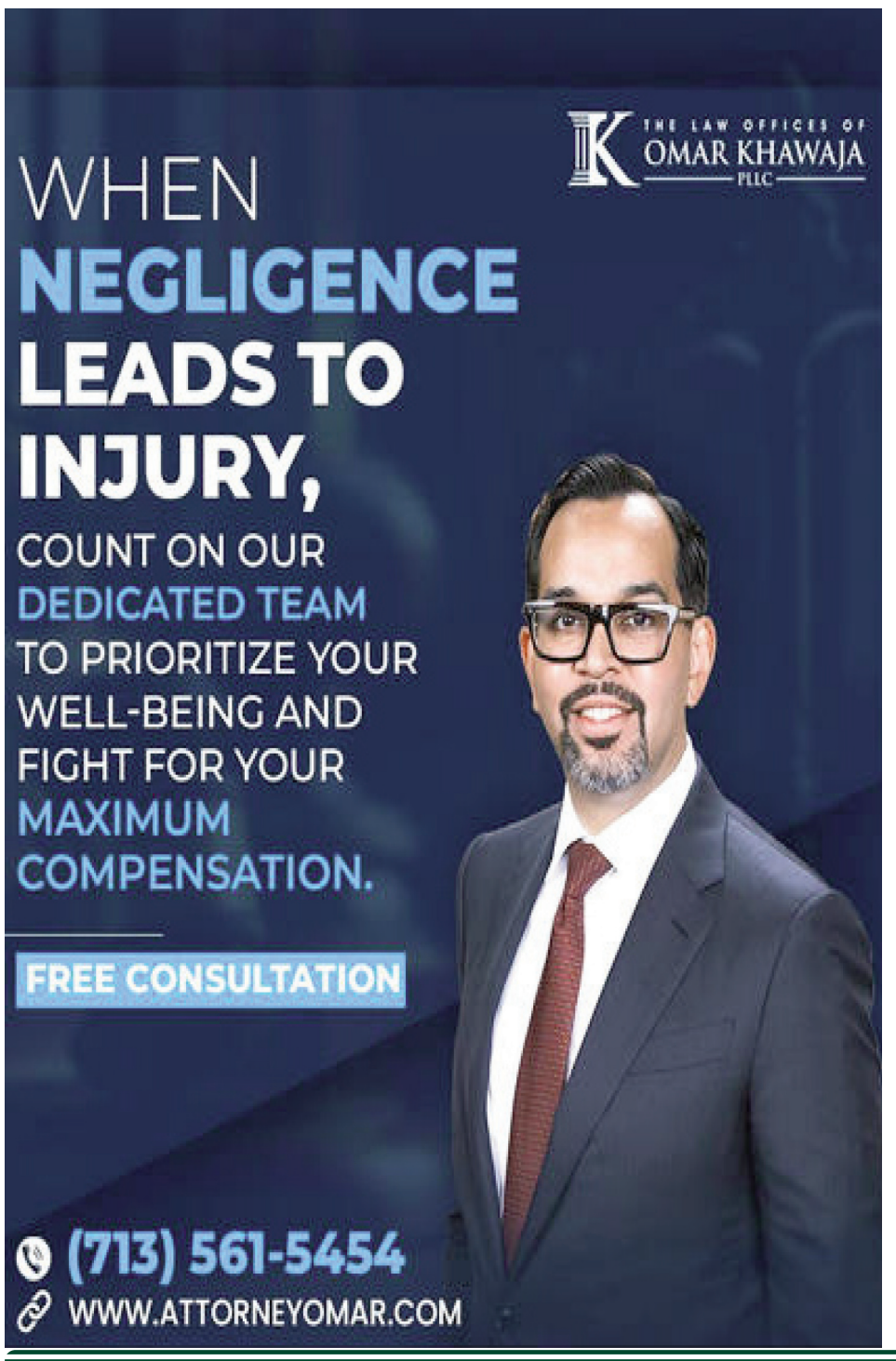
A Community United by Compassion: Houston Gala Raises $1.6 Million for Indus Hospital

In a powerful celebration of humanity, 650 guests unite with Pakistani stars Ahsan Khan and Sania Saeed to turn generosity into hope for patients in need, reaffirming a community's commitment to compassionate, life-saving healthcare.




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POLICY: GEOPOLITICAL TETRIS

As global power shifts, the world gets reconfigured and crises become increasingly interconnected, Pakistan must decide which relationships to prioritise — and which commitments it can no longer afford

Majid Ehsan

Tetris is an interestingly simple but challenging game. Blocks of different shapes descend on to a confined board and the player must continuously find space to accommodate them. Every placement affects the next move. As the board fills, choices diminish, mistakes become increasingly expensive, and even the right piece arriving at the wrong time can become a problem.

The evolving global geopolitical landscape bears an astonishing resemblance to this game. Yet the intrinsic simplicity of the game is missing: the blocks are getting larger, time and space are shrinking, and states have less freedom to position themselves without new vulnerabilities.

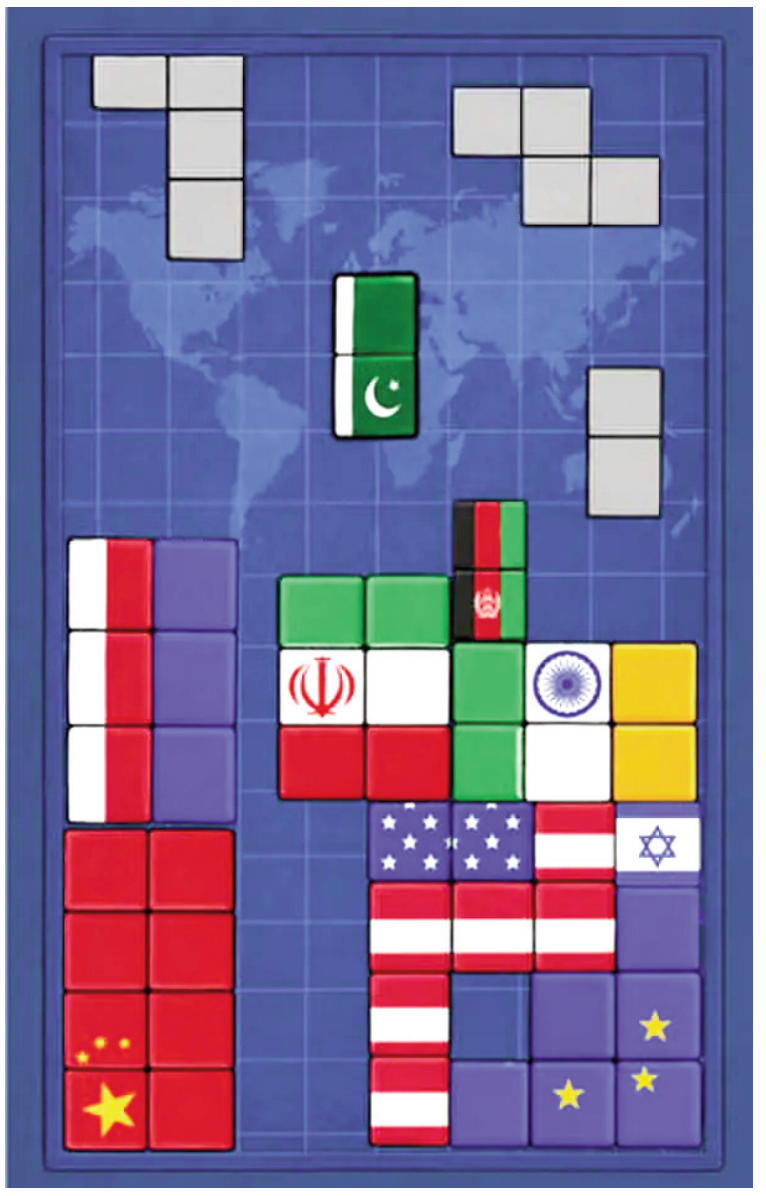
A bird's eye view of the prevailing environment reveals that Russia remains locked in Ukraine in a contest it portrays in terms of security, strategic identity and its place in the European order. Europe, meanwhile, is grappling with the perceived long-term threat from Russia, the burden of sustaining Ukraine, changing ties with Washington, the demands for greater burden-sharing, energy insecurity and sluggish growth.

Long-standing assumptions underpinning European security no longer appear immutable. In the Middle East, the widening confrontation involving Iran, Israel and the United States has transformed an already unstable region, where escalation can have consequences far beyond its geographical boundaries. A prolonged crisis in the Gulf can rapidly translate into higher energy costs, inflation, disrupted supply chains and slower growth in South and Southeast Asia.

Amid this deafening strategic noise, China has displayed what may be described as strategic restraint. Beijing has enormous economic stakes in the stability of the Middle East and the international trading system, yet it prefers to remain cautious of direct entanglement in these conflicts. Whether this represents deliberate patience or a preference to let others exhaust themselves is debatable. China's willingness to help shape the emerging order remains uncertain.

Such is perhaps the defining characteristic of today's geopolitical Tetris: the pieces are no longer independent of one another. A conflict in Ukraine alters Europe's security and energy calculations. War in the Middle East affects Asian economies. Competition between Washington and Beijing influences technology, trade, investment and supply chains across continents.

Global interdependence has erased the geographical separation between



crises. The question, therefore, is not how individual crises will end, but what international system will emerge as the pieces settle.

THREE WAYS TO READ THE BOARD

Let us see how various schools of thought view the changing global landscape.

Offensive realism holds that great powers operating in an uncertain international system seek power, favourable balances and regional predominance, because they cannot entrust their survival to the intentions of others. Viewed through this prism, the present turbulence may represent less an aberration than a redistribution of global power.

Such an order may contain several poles yet revolve predominantly around two centres of gravity: the US and China. Russia, India, Europe and other consequential powers will occupy important spaces, but much of international politics could increasingly be influenced by competition between Washington and Beijing. At its extreme, this could produce informal spheres of influence, accompanied by expectations of non-interference in each other's core strategic spaces.

Another view sees the turbulence of [US President Donald] Trump 2.0 as a disruption rather than the definitive end of the US-led international order. Institutions, alliances, financial networks and economic relationships built over eight decades possess considerable resilience. A post-Trump US could return to its traditional alliances and restore much of the tone and tenor of the previous order, albeit under changed circumstances.

A third viewpoint holds that the emerging system may be neither conventionally bipolar nor genuinely multipolar. It could become an untidy combination of both, with several centres of power operating beneath an overarching US-China rivalry. A country may depend upon China for infrastructure, the US for technology and finance, the Gulf for energy, Europe for exports and another state for security cooperation. Geopolitical blocs increasingly overlap. This is almost the projection of the existing fragmented order in a more orderly manner.

WHERE PAKISTAN FITS

For Pakistan, this geopolitical Tetris raises several practical questions. Should Pakistan lean towards China or rebalance towards the US? Should it privilege its Gulf relationships or accommodate Iran? Should regional connectivity or traditional security considerations determine its approach towards India?

In my view, Pakistan must equally avoid strategic overextension. It neither has the economic capacity nor needs the ambition to seek a leading role in global geopolitics. Its priorities should remain economic growth, development, political stability and regional integration. Strategic relevance should follow national strength, rather than become a substitute for it.

There is, however, a limit to how long strategic optionality can be preserved. As in Tetris, the available space diminishes with every falling block. The time may be approaching when Pakistan will have to make harder choices, use the lifelines available to it and place some blocks decisively before the space to manoeuvre disappears altogether. Strategic autonomy should therefore not become an excuse for indecision.

Pakistan must have the confidence to say no when its vital interests are compromised, say yes when enduring national interests converge, and exercise restraint when involvement would overstretch its capabilities without commensurate gains. The test should not be who is asking, but what serves Pakistan's long term national interests.

If the world evolves towards a sharper US China bipolarity, Pakistan should avoid becoming a frontline state in their competition. But it cannot disregard the depth, geography and strategic significance of its relationship with China. China should remain Pakistan's principal strategic anchor, while Islamabad preserves the scope for productive relations with the US, wherever interests converge.

If a multipolar order emerges, Pakistan should exploit the greater diplomatic space it offers. Stronger economic and political engagement with the US, Russia, Europe, the Gulf, Iran, Türkiye and Central Asia can coexist with its relationship with China. But multipolarity offers greater room for manoeuvre only to a Pakistan economically strong to use it.

However, if the US-led order regains much of its earlier character after the Trump era, Pakistan should avoid both unnecessary confrontation with it and a return to dependency that characterised earlier phases of the relationship. Engagement with Washington should remain substantive and mutually beneficial, without being at the expense of relationships that serve Pakistan's longer-term interests.

THE DOMESTIC FOUNDATION

One constant across all three eventualities is that Pakistan's future lies principally in its own region. China will remain its neighbour and strategic partner; Central Asia will remain a potential gateway for connectivity; Iran and Afghanistan will continue to influence its western security environment; the Gulf will remain vital for energy, investment and economic linkages; and India will remain a neighbour with which competition must be managed and a more stable modus vivendi sought.

However, no external relationship, however strong, can compensate for domestic weakness. A weak economy constrains foreign policy choices before external demands even arise. Our strategic investment must therefore remain domestic, focusing on economic growth, political stability, human development, energy security, stronger institutions, technological capacity and the expansion of our productive base.

Pakistan does not need to be present at every geopolitical table, mediate every conflict or seek relevance in every contest. There is strategic wisdom in knowing where not to become involved. A state overstretched abroad while economically fragile at home eventually discovers that visibility is not the same as influence.

The emerging world order may be bipolar, multipolar or a modified restoration of the old order. Pakistan cannot determine which will take shape, but it can determine whether it enters that order economically vulnerable and strategically dependent, or internally stronger, regionally integrated and confident enough to make choices on its own terms.

Tetris offers one final lesson: a player cannot wait indefinitely for the perfect block. Decisions must be made with the pieces available and the space that remains. For Pakistan, that moment may be approaching. The challenge is to recognise which options are worth preserving and which choices can no longer be postponed.

Pakistan cannot determine the shape or sequence of the blocks descending on to the geopolitical board. But it can strengthen its foundations, secure its regional space and choose its placements wisely. In the emerging geopolitical Tetris, survival may depend not on fitting everywhere, but on knowing where Pakistan truly belongs.

The writer is a retired lieutenant general of the Pakistan Army and president of the Islamabad Policy Research Institute

Trump links midterm defeat to voter unhappiness over fuel costs

Continued from front page

long-term gain."

Trump warned that American forces could "finish the job" if Tehran fails to cooperate, though he maintained that a diplomatic agreement remains achievable if it establishes binding restrictions on nuclear weapons.

He also reiterated his decision to cut aid to Israel, saying it has "become quite rich" and no longer needs $4 billion in annual aid.

The remarks came as Democrats were projected by US media to win control of the Senate and appeared on course to secure a majority in the House of Representatives, threatening to constrain Trump's legislative agenda.

Acknowledging the outcome, Trump commended opposition candidates for fighting "hard" and said he can work with Democrats "on a lot of things," including immigration issues.

He separately told Politico that while he retains the constitutional authority to veto legislation, he prefers working with lawmakers rather than spending two years vetoing bills.

Political Earthquake in Texas: James Talarico Wins U.S. Senate Race as Gina Hinojosa Ousts Greg Abbott

Continued from front page

Democratic State Representative James Talarico defeated Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton, marking the first time since 1988 that a Democrat has won a Texas U.S. Senate election. The victory represents a major political milestone in a state that has remained a Republican stronghold for decades.

Talarico's campaign attracted national attention as he challenged Paxton in one of the country's most closely watched Senate contests. His victory ends nearly four decades of Republican representation in the state's U.S. Senate delegation through an elected Democratic senator.

In the gubernatorial race, Democratic State Representative Gina Hinojosa defeated three-term Republican Governor Greg Abbott, ending his bid for an unprecedented fourth consecutive term. Hinojosa's victory carries additional historical significance, as she will become the first Latina governor of Texas.

Her election also marks the return of a Democrat to the governor's mansion for the first time since Ann Richards left office in 1995.

A state representative from Austin, Hinojosa built her campaign around public education, affordability, government accountability and concerns over the influence of wealthy corporations and special interests in state government. Despite facing an established incumbent with substantial political and financial resources, she secured a historic victory.

Abbott acknowledged the election outcome and congratulated Hinojosa following his defeat.

The victories of Talarico and Hinojosa represent a significant turning point in Texas politics, challenging the state's longstanding Republican dominance and potentially reshaping its political priorities.

The results also carry national implications, drawing attention to changing political dynamics in one of the country's largest and most influential states.

With a new senator and governor preparing to take office, Texas is entering a new political chapter, as voters across the state await how the incoming Democratic leadership will translate its campaign commitments into public policy and governance.

US Vice President JD Vance says Iran war is 'the reason we lost' midterms

Continued from front page

"The reason we lost is the war. The president himself said so last night," Vance said in a lengthy post on X — apparently referring to President Donald Trump's remarks that the Iran war was "part of it" but that it was still justified.

"If you'd like to argue it was worth it, that losing the Senate for the next 6 years was worth it, then do so. Argue it was a worthwhile cost to pay. Agree or disagree, that's at least honest," added Vance.

"But everyone knows why we lost. And any honest conversation about where we go from here must start there."

The Democratic wave in Tuesday's midterms has raised major questions over Vance's previous status as the frontrunner for the Republican nomination in the 2028 presidential election. He has not yet formally declared that he will run.

Vance, a longtime vocal critic of US foreign interventionism, had reportedly been sceptical behind the scenes about the war on Iran that Trump and Israel launched in late February.

Vance also acknowledged that Republican voters who backed Trump and himself two years ago had switched sides due to the war and its effects on the US economy.

"The main problem is that many people who voted for Trump/Vance in 2024 voted for Democrats in 2026," the vice president said.

He said a pollster that he respected showed that the Iran war and the economy were key factors in voters abandoning Republicans.

"In his polling, he saw that a lot of Trump 2024 voters were angry and planning to vote for Democrats," Vance wrote. "He asked those voters who had abandoned us what would cause them to come back on our team. The top four answers, accounting for nearly all of the responses, were:

- End the war
- Focus on cost of living/inflation
- Put America First
- Change our relationship to Israel."

Top Senate Democrat says Iran war 'must end'

Meanwhile, Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said that the Iran war "must end" and suggested his party's incoming majority in Congress could use their control over government funding to press for that goal.

"The American people don't know what the heck we're fighting for in Iran," Schumer tells journalists, adding that Trump has never made it clear and "changes his mind day to day, minute to minute".

"This war must end. It must end," Schumer added.

He later noted that the "power of the purse" is "one of the ways of deterring a president who does war without the consent of the American people".

"Make no mistake: whenever Trump defies the will of the American people or the law, we will launch investigations, take him to court and entangle him in legislative razor wire," Schumer warns. "The days of Trump's supplicant Senate are over."

Former Houston City Councilwoman Letitia Plummer elected Harris County judge

Continued from front page

to Sanchez's 39%, according to early unofficial results from the county. Plummer is the first African American to be elected Harris County judge.

"I did not sign up for this job because I thought it would be easy, because nothing in my life has," Plummer said. "I ran because I believe that I can absolutely make a difference as your public servant with your support."

Shortly after 9 p.m., Sanchez conceded the election to Plummer.

"The voters of Harris County have made their decision, and while it's not the outcome that we had hoped for, I respect the judgment of the people that we sought to serve," Sanchez said. "I just spoke with Dr. Letitia Plummer. I congratulated her and conceded the race."

Plummer, a dentist by trade, started her political career with a bid for Congress in 2018. The effort fell short before she was elected to serve as the Houston City Council's at-large councilmember in 2019.

She resigned from her seat on city council earlier this year after announcing her intention to seek the county judge's position, held by current Democratic County Judge Lina Hidalgo for seven years.

The former councilwoman will be charged with leading Harris County Commissioners Court, a five-member governing body that oversees the operations of the county. The court deals with countywide road and infrastructure projects, sets yearly property taxes and makes funding decisions on flood control initiatives.

Plummer has advocated for building a stronger union between members of the commissioners court. In recent years, Democratic and Republican members of the court have increasingly engaged in spats over flood bond project delays, staggering pay increases for county law enforcement and bridging million-dollar budget deficits.

Sanchez, a former Harris County Treasurer, has been in the local political scene for decades. During his bid for the county judge's seat, he called for routine audits of county departments, slashing property taxes and cutting costs to fix the county's budget issues.

Earlier this year, Sanchez edged out the competition for the Republican nomination and advanced in runoff elections against his GOP challengers, Warren Howell, a local businessman, and firefighters union president Marty Lancton, who was endorsed by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott.

During a debate between the candidates last month, hosted by Houston Public Media in partnership with the Houston Chronicle and Univision 45, both candidates agreed that Harris County should branch out and expand their relationships with other elected bodies — but they differed in how that looks in practice.

Plummer criticized the state government for exerting authority over Harris County. She cited the governor's efforts to remove rainbow crosswalks from Montrose and the state takeover of the Houston Independent School District. In an effort to offset costs on the county, she has also called for working close with city government — particularly Houston Mayor John Whitmire.

Democratic commissioners Adrian Garcia and Lesley Briones have retained their seats on Harris County Commissioners Court after successful re-election bids this week, keeping the five-member governing body that oversees the nation's third largest county in Democratic control.

For now, Precinct 3 Commissioner Tom Ramsey will remain as the only Republican on the governing body that oversees the nation's third largest county.

"We are making history throughout Texas and throughout the United States of America," Briones said in a fiery victory speech on Tuesday night. "Tonight we are getting the Texas we deserve."

Briones' Republican challenger, former county commissioner Steve Radack, fell short in his bid for Briones' seat with just 37 percent of the vote, according to early election returns.

Garcia was re-elected for a third term on Tuesday night to oversee Precinct 2.

He received 65 percent of the vote against his Republican challenger, Richard Vega, a businessman and U.S. Army veteran.

In September, the Supreme Court of Texas denied Vega's legal challenge to remove Garcia from office, whose appointment to a local flood resiliency board was previously determined to be illegal.

In Vega's lawsuit against the Harris County Commissioners Court, he argued Garcia effectively vacated his seat on commissioners court in 2021 when he was appointed to the Gulf Coast Protection District, a local government entity. The effort was also struck down by a Harris County district court in 2025 and the First Court of Appeals in April.

Pakistani-Origin Judge Rabia Sultan Collier Wins Third Consecutive Term in Texas



HOUSTON: Pakistani-origin American judge Rabia Sultan Collier has secured a historic third consecutive term as judge of the 113th District Court in Texas, reaffirming the confidence of voters in her leadership, judicial experience and commitment to public service.

Collier's re-election marks another significant milestone for the Pakistani-American community and Muslim Americans, highlighting their growing representation and achievements in public service in the United States. Her continued electoral success also reflects the increasing participation and influence of South Asian Americans in the country's political, legal and judicial institutions.

She is recognized as the first Muslim and Pakistani-origin American woman elected as a judge to a Texas state court. With her latest electoral victory, Collier will continue serving on the 113th District Court for another term, extending her record of judicial service and further strengthening her place in Texas's legal history.

Her achievement carries particular significance for women and members of immigrant communities who aspire to enter professions traditionally underrepresented by their communities. Her journey to the Texas judiciary demonstrates how dedication, professional achievement and public engagement can create opportunities for greater representation in important institutions of American democracy.

As a district court judge, Collier holds an important responsibility within the Texas judicial system, where district courts handle a wide range of significant legal matters. Her continued service will allow her to build upon her judicial experience and maintain her role in the administration of justice.

Her third consecutive electoral victory is also being celebrated by Pakistani Americans as a moment of collective pride. For many in the community, her success represents more than an individual political achievement; it symbolizes the progress of Pakistani Americans in American public life and their growing contribution to the country's civic and institutional leadership.

Collier's re-election is particularly inspiring for younger generations of Pakistani-American and Muslim women, demonstrating that people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds can reach positions of responsibility and distinction in the United States.

Endocrinologists Share 5 Habits to Break for Healthier Blood Sugar

Plus, some everyday habits endocrinologists recommend instead.

After enjoying something sweet, you may notice a quick burst of energy followed by a slump. That's because—similar to a roller coaster—blood sugar levels naturally rise and fall throughout the day. While these fluctuations are normal, frequent highs and lows over time aren't ideal for long-term health, as they can increase the risk of conditions like prediabetes and type 2 diabetes.

As endocrinologist Jennifer Cheng, D.O., explains, "There are millions of undiagnosed, diabetic and prediabetic people in the U.S. There are significant complications when people develop diabetes that can be potentially preventable."2 So, how can we keep blood sugar levels in a healthy range? We asked endocrinologists which habits to stop for healthier blood sugar, and they shared five.

1. Drinking Sugary Drinks

From soda to sports drinks to sweetened coffee, tea, cocktails and mocktails, there are many ways to gulp down sugar—often without realizing just how much is in your go-to beverage. Yet sugar-sweetened beverages are the leading source of added sugar in Americans' diets.

The issue with these drinks is that, unlike solid foods, they don't contain fiber, protein or fat, so the sugar is absorbed quickly. "This can lead to sharp rises in blood sugar and insulin levels," says Sowjanya Naha, M.D. "Research shows that regular intake of sugar-sweetened beverages, and even fruit juice in large amounts, is linked with a higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Beyond that, these beverages don't offer much nutritional value. So what's a better option? Dietitians recommend water, seltzers or sparkling water, or unsweetened flavored beverages like herbal tea or infused water.

2. Staying Sedentary All Day

Whether we're at our desks trying to crank out work before a deadline, in meetings, in the car or on the couch, one habit worth breaking for better blood sugar control is sitting for long periods of time.

"Sitting for long periods reduces the body's sensitivity to insulin, making it harder to control blood sugar. Even small increases in daily movement—such as walking more often—can improve how the body regulates glucose," says Naha.

Physical activity helps the body increase glucose uptake by the muscles, effectively lowering circulating blood sugar even without additional insulin, explains Cheng. A simple strategy: Set an alarm to get up each hour, and make it a habit to move after meals. Research suggests that even a short walk after eating can help lower blood sugar.

"Walking, even for 15 minutes after eating, can help sensitize your body's response to insulin," explains Anastasios Manessis, M.D. If you're glued to your desk or couch throughout the day, try quick bursts of movement like body-weight squats, lunges or jumping jacks for 30-second intervals.

3. Relying on Refined Carbohydrates

A common knee-jerk reaction to improving blood sugar is to cut carbs entirely—but endocrinologists say not so fast. The type and amount of carbohydrates matter most.

Carbs worth limiting are those low in fiber, such as sugary cereals, baked goods and snack foods like pretzels and chips. Experts say regularly relying on these foods can lead to more significant blood sugar swings. "Research using continuous glucose monitors suggests that diets higher in these types of carbohydrates tend to cause larger swings in blood sugar throughout the day. These ups and downs may place more strain on metabolic health over time," shares Naha.

So what should you choose instead? "Whole carbs like fruits, vegetables and whole grains are not only good for your blood sugar, but your overall health," says Manessis. "These nutrients are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber, which can help support heart health, brain health, weight management and so much more."

And don't be too quick to cut fruit. "Whole fruit is bound in fiber and nutrients which can support a healthy blood sugar response," Manessis adds. In fact, research has found that people who consume moderate amounts of whole fruit tend to have better insulin function and a lower risk of diabetes, showing an inverse relationship between fruit intake and diabetes risk.

For a steadier blood sugar response, pair fruit with a source of protein or healthy fat, such as a handful of nuts or seeds, or Greek yogurt or cottage cheese.



4. Getting Poor Sleep

Another habit worth breaking: not getting enough quality sleep.

"Poor or inconsistent sleep can raise blood sugar levels and make it harder to maintain control. Research shows that sleep restriction and circadian disruption can impair glucose metabolism and increase insulin resistance," says Naha.

Lack of sleep may also affect stress hormones because when you're not getting enough sleep, cortisol levels can rise, explains Cheng. "This causes more insulin resistance and higher sugars in the blood. Chronic high stress or cortisol levels may increase risk of diabetes and high blood pressure, leading to more disease."

On top of that, poor sleep may leave us reaching for more carb-rich foods throughout the day to keep energy levels up, points out Manessis. Research suggests that even two nights of poor sleep may increase hunger hormones and lower appetite-suppressing hormones.

So how can you improve your sleep? Aim to maintain a consistent sleep and wake schedule, target seven to nine hours of sleep each night and limit caffeine and screen time before bed to support healthier glucose regulation, says Naha.

5. Skipping Meals or Eating at Irregular Times

Keeping consistent meal times and avoiding regularly skipping meals may help support healthy blood sugar levels.

"Eating at irregular times or late at night can interfere with the body's natural rhythms for processing glucose. Studies show that when eating is out of sync with these rhythms, the body handles sugar less effectively, leading to higher and more variable blood sugar levels," says Naha.

Skipping meals may have a similar effect—including skipping breakfast. "Our bodies love consistency and regularity, so starting the day off with a strong, protein-rich breakfast can be helpful to stabilize our blood sugars and set the tone for the day," explains Manessis.

Try eating around the same times each day when possible. And if you find yourself consistently skipping meals like breakfast, consider prepping something the night before—such as overnight oats or breakfast burritos—so you always have an easy option ready to go.

Other Tips for Healthy Blood Sugar Levels

When it comes to maintaining healthy blood sugar levels, endocrinologists shared these additional tips:

Pair protein and fat with carbohydrates. Pairing carbs with a source of protein or healthy fat may help support healthier blood sugar levels. Try adding nut butter to a waffle, or pair fruit with cottage cheese.

Eat more fiber. Dietary fiber is essential for slowing the absorption of glucose, which significantly stabilizes sugar levels, says Cheng. Aim to include fiber-rich foods at meals and snacks, such as veggies, fruits, beans, nuts, lentils, seeds and whole grains.

Manage stress. "Ongoing stress has been associated with greater variability in glucose levels and increased metabolic risk," says Naha. Incorporating stress-relief practices—whether a few minutes of mindfulness, deep breathing or yoga—may help support overall blood sugar regulation.

Stay hydrated. "Proper fluid intake assists your kidneys in filtering excess glucose from the bloodstream via urination," says Cheng. Keep a water bottle nearby or set reminders throughout the day to help make hydration a habit.

Exercise regularly. Physical activity can improve insulin sensitivity and support healthy blood sugar levels even after exercise. Find movement you enjoy—whether it's walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, hiking or taking a fitness class—to make consistency easier.

Our Expert Take

For healthier blood sugar levels, endocrinologists recommend moving away from habits like drinking sugary drinks, staying sedentary all day, eating only refined carbs, getting poor sleep and skipping meals. Instead, focus on supportive habits such as pairing protein and fat with carbohydrates, eating more fiber-rich foods, managing stress, staying hydrated and exercising regularly. "Blood sugar control is shaped by patterns over time rather than single decisions. Even small daily habits can have a meaningful impact when practiced consistently," says Naha.

SOCIETY: BALOCHISTAN'S UNENDING CYCLES OF POVERTY

For agricultural workers in Balochistan, a lifetime of labour may still not be enough to escape poverty. Debt, unequal share-cropping arrangements and climate shocks can trap entire families in a vicious cycle of dependence



Farm workers in Balochistan often work more than the stipulated eight hour daily, while often earning less than the minimum wage. Some even work for food | Photo by Zaheer Baloch

Imtiaz Baloch

Mian Dad has spent much of his life ploughing fields on a tractor. He started as a young boy, helping drive a tractor that tilled land for a local landlord in his village in Tamboo, Nasirabad district, Balochistan.

Now, Mian drives the tractor himself, earns just Rs14,000 per month — a little over a third of the provincial minimum wage of Rs37,000. During peak cultivation season, he tells Eos, the work-day can stretch up to 16 hours — double the standard eight hours.

But Mian isn't complaining. He now makes "a lot more" than what he earned as a tractor helper. It is still not enough, however, to feed his family, including his 11 children. "We look for odd jobs or work for food during the off-season," he says. "When that doesn't work, we have to beg."

THE BOTTOM RUNG

Mian's situation is not unusual in a province where poverty remains widespread. An estimated 47 percent of the population in Balochistan lives in poverty, compared with a national average of 28.9 percent, according to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2025-26.

Poverty is particularly acute in rural districts, where livelihoods depend mostly on agriculture. In a 2025 study by the global not-for-profit Population Council, District Vulnerability Index for Pakistan, 17 Balochistan districts were listed among the 20 most-vulnerable districts in the country. Nasirabad was towards the bottom in both provincial and national lists, ranking 11th most vulnerable out of 31 districts in Balochistan and 13th most vulnerable among the 129 districts assessed nationwide.

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood in Tamboo, Mian's hometown, which has a population of around 130,000. As elsewhere in Balochistan, agricultural production in Tamboo involves a network of tribal chieftains, landlords, intermediaries known as bothars, farmers, tractor drivers, technicians and sharecroppers.

Workers like Mian Dad occupy the lower rungs of this hierarchy, often putting in long hours to cultivate the land. Locally, they are also referred to as begaar — which refers to a historical practice of forced, unpaid labour that was widely practised during the British era, including in princely states.

In today's Balochistan, unpaid labour may arise from a lack of alternative employment, obligations linked to debt or, in some cases, pressure arising from tribal and social relationships.

INHERITED DEBT

It can take decades for those starting work as peasants to move up in this hierarchy.

Qadir Naseeb, whose family worked as peasants for generations in the Chattar area of Nasirabad, says his family didn't have access to clean drinking water. He recently installed a tubewell near his hut. "Before [installing] the tubewell, the women in my family had to filter the water through a cloth to make it drinkable," he tells Eos.

One of the reasons why upward mobility can take peasants decades, explains local researcher Muhammad Nawaz Khosa, is because they are often caught up in a cycle of debt. "Households often have to rely on interest-based loans to meet everyday expenses as well as the costs associated with cultivating the very land on which they work," he explains.

In his book Balochistan Ki Nehri Zaraat [Canal-Irrigated Agriculture in Balochistan], Khosa writes that peasants often work as sharecroppers. In such cases, the peasants are responsible for managing production and handling expenses — often financed in the form of loans acquired from the landlord's bothar.

The eventual harvest is then divided between the landowners and the peasant, with the peasant using his share of the harvest to pay off the loan. If the harvest fails to return a profit, the loss has to be borne by the peasant, leaving him mired in a vicious debt trap.

Such agreements also don't factor in force majeure — whether it's a pest attack or floods. In the case of a loss of harvest, the sharecropper has to pay off his debt to the landlord. In some instances, writes Khosa, peasants are also expected to bear the expenses associated with the landlord's hujra [guest area], a system rooted in longstanding feudal traditions of the region.

This is something that Mian Dad and many others have experienced. Mian had to borrow Rs200,000 following the floods in 2022. The amount equals more than 14 months of his pay. While Mian was repaying the debt, a medical emergency forced him to take on another loan. He says he is now trapped in a cycle of that debt, worried that his future generations will have to work to pay it off.

Parts of Balochistan continue to exhibit forms of bonded labour, particularly within the households and estates of tribal and feudal elites, says Asad Baloch, a researcher who hails from a tribal family. Baloch says this practice has "considerably decreased" in Nasirabad as compared to previous generations. "But yes, remnants of such practices can be found in parts of the province," he tells Eos.

In rural and remote parts of the province, he explains, the tribal chiefs function not just as cultural leaders, but as economic masters. Impoverished tribesmen often rely on their chiefs for basic survival, protection and mediation.

In some villages, there is a custom where one child from every household has to be in service of the tribal chief. In some cases, individuals work as guards or domestic workers, for minimal wages. Over time, limited economic opportunities and restricted access to education and alternative livelihoods continue to make it difficult for some individuals to pursue other means of earning a living.

RESETTING THE CLOCK

The 2022 floods that pushed Mian Dad into debt were not the first to disrupt the relationship between landlords and agricultural workers in Nasirabad. Dr Abid Mir, a lecturer at Government Degree College, Quetta, says the 2010 floods weakened some landlords' hold over the families who worked for them.

"Widespread agricultural losses weakened some landlords' ability to retain regular workers, prompting many peasant families to seek employment elsewhere," he tells Eos. For some, this opened up the possibility of finding work on their own terms and seeking better education, healthcare and basic amenities for their families.

But the effects of climate-related disasters have been uneven. Families who remained in rural areas continued to face crop losses, declining incomes and mounting debts, Mir explains. For those already struggling to make ends meet, another failed harvest or flood could mean borrowing again simply to survive.

The same disaster that may loosen one family's dependence on a landlord can deepen another's debt to one. For agricultural workers such as Mian Dad, recovering from a disaster is not simply a matter of rebuilding a home or returning to the fields. It can mean years of repayment — and the fear that their children will inherit the debt.

The writer is a journalist and researcher.

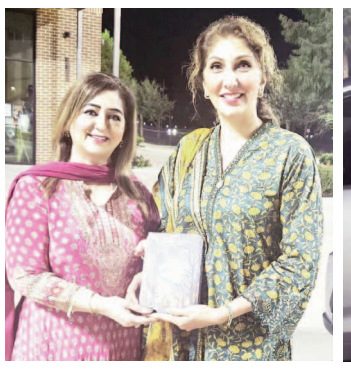
Poetry, Passion and Hospitality: Farah Iqbal Hosts a Special Literary Gathering

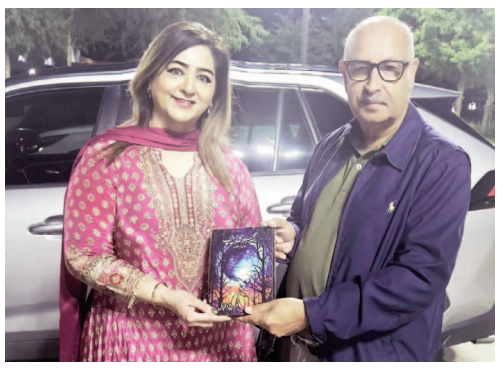
Renowned poet Farah Iqbal hosted an elegant literary evening welcoming distinguished guests, including Qayyum Taher and Nazar Naqvi from Florida, along with Dr. Yasmin Qureshi, Fahim Akhund, Arif Azim, Rafiq Sudhry, Basit Jaleeli, Saira Ejaz and Naheed Sudhry. Print media representatives Mahmood Ahmed, Shamim Syed and Jamil Siddiqui also joined the gathering. The memorable evening featured gracious hospitality, an elaborate dinner, engaging conversations and an enchanting Urdu poetry session, celebrating friendship and the enduring love of Urdu literature.

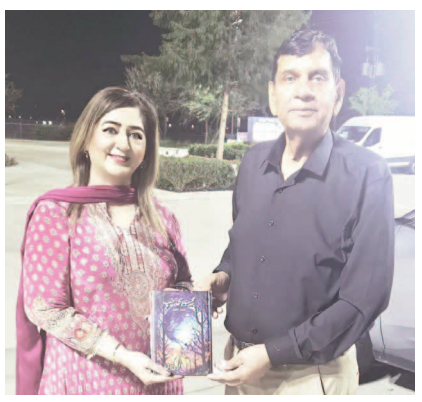
































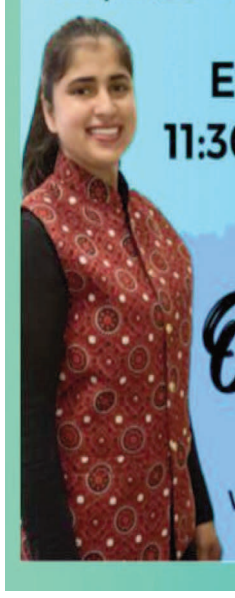
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AMERICAN CHRONICLE COMMUNITY

Connecting Communities Friday, November 06, 2026



Avicenna Allied Health Institute Celebrates Graduates at Houston Ceremony

Nasruddin Rupani attends as chief guest; Ibn Sina Foundation provides $50,000 in support of healthcare education



HOUSTON: Avicenna Allied Health Institute (AAHI), an initiative of the Ibn Sina Foundation, celebrated the dedication, perseverance and achievements of its graduating students at a special Graduate Recognition Ceremony held October 27, 2026, in Houston.

Continued on page 30

Farah Iqbal Hosts an Unforgettable Evening of Urdu Poetry, Friendship and Celebration



An elegant evening celebrating Urdu literature, friendship and cultural camaraderie was held in a warm and welcoming atmosphere, bringing together distinguished guests, writers, community leaders and members of the Pakistani-American community.

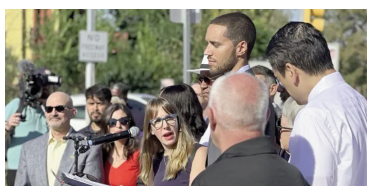
The arrival of esteemed guests from Islamabad, Pakistan, along with Qayyum Taher and Nazar Naqvi from Florida, added a special significance to the gathering. Hosted by renowned poet Farah Iqbal, the special literary session featured engaging conversations, gracious hospitality, an elaborate dinner and an enchanting Urdu poetry session that created an atmosphere of literary appreciation and cultural connection.

The gathering was particularly distinguished by the presence of several prominent community members,

Continued on page 28

Top Harris County elected officials keep their seats in a Democratic sweep

Several of the county's top elected leaders were on the ballot this week. Voters also selected a new Harris County Judge to lead the nation's third largest county.



HCC member Abbie Kamin speaks alongside other elected officials in front of the rainbow crosswalks in Montrose on Oct. 14, 2025.



Harris County Treasurer Carla Wyatt



Harris County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth discussing the upcoming election during a press conference on Oct. 20, 2023.

Several of the county's top elected leaders were on the ballot this week. Voters also selected a new Harris County Judge to lead the nation's third largest county.

Most incumbent Harris County elected officials kept their seats in Tuesday night's slate of local

Continued on page 28

Third Pakistan Literature Festival Concludes in Houston Amid Literary Celebrations and Organizational Challenges



HOUSTON, TEXAS — The Third International Pakistan Literature Festival concluded November 1 after two days of literary discussions, cultural celebrations, intellectual exchange and artistic performances, bringing together distinguished writers, poets, journalists, scholars and cultural personalities

Continued on page 28

ISGH North Zone Raises $110,000 for Waller Masjid; Highlights Community Healthcare Initiative

Fundraising dinner organized by Dr. Muhammad Usman Khan brings together Houston's Muslim community, while the ISGH Healthcare Access Card Program aims to make affordable medical care accessible to financially struggling families.



HOUSTON: The Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) North Zone raised $110,000 for the Waller Masjid project during a fundraising dinner held October 30 at Mezbaan Restaurant on Hillcroft in Houston.

The event was organized under the leadership of ISGH North Zone Director Dr. Muhammad Usman Khan, bringing together community members and donors to support the development of the masjid at Waller Cemetery.

ISGH President Emran Ghazi, General Secretary Muhammad Ali, members of the ISGH Shura Council and other office-bearers attended the gathering and expressed their support for the initiative.

Shaikh Ameer Hamza was the guest speaker at the evening. In addition to the fundraising appeal, the program featured updates on the ISGH Healthcare Access Card Program and North Zone activities, including community initiatives, masjid projects and future plans.

A significant part of the evening focused on the ISGH Healthcare Access Card Program, a community-driven healthcare assistance initiative pioneered and administered by Dr. M. Usman Khan. Launched as a pilot

Continued on page 29





Pictorial Highlights: Pakistani-American Community's Active Role in Houston Elections

Glimpses of Pakistani-American community leaders, volunteers and residents participating in election activities across Greater Houston, promoting voter awareness, mobilizing voters and exercising their democratic right during the November 3 U.S. midterm elections.















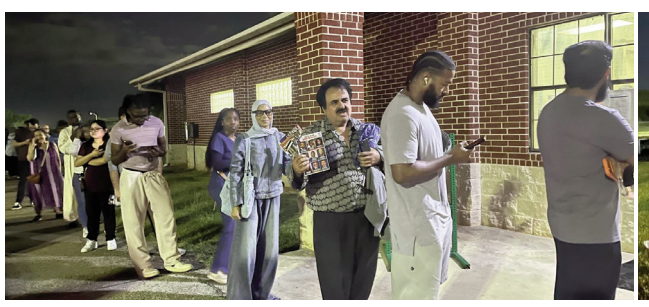










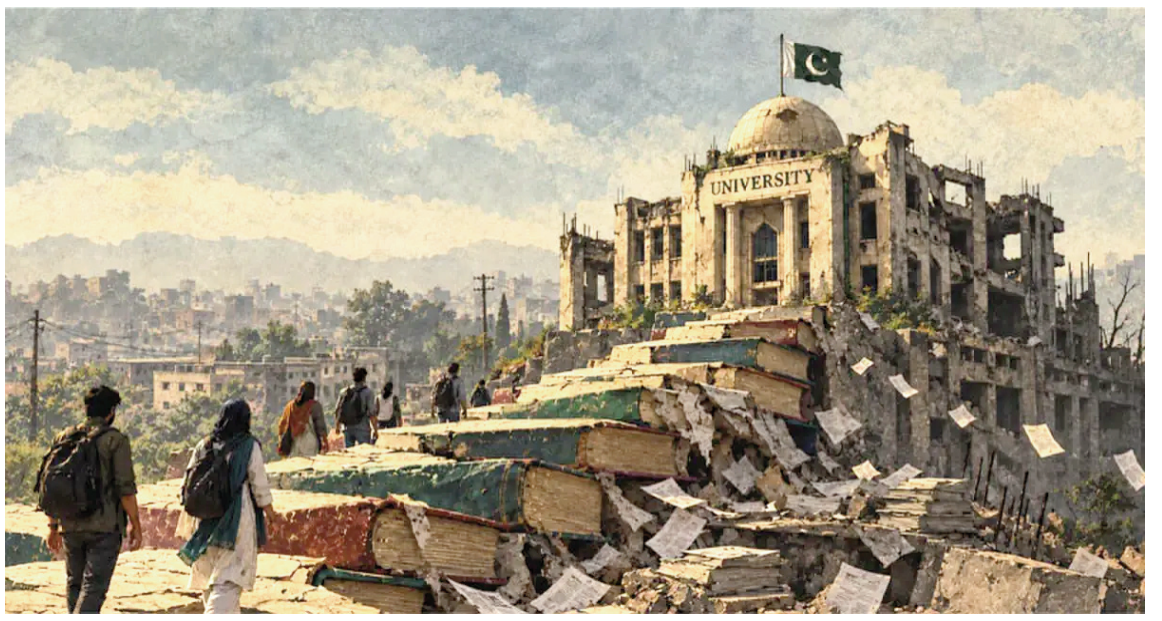





PAKISTAN'S MIRAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Launched in 2002 with unprecedented funding and ambitious reforms, Pakistan's higher education experiment once attracted international attention. Today, Pakistan has nearly 280 universities, millions of students and a rapidly expanding research output. Yet, beneath the impressive statistics lies a system struggling with mounting debts, poor educational outcomes and questionable scholarship. What has gone wrong? And is there any way out?

Taha Ali



Twenty-four years ago, on September 11, 2002, Gen Pervez Musharraf signed the Higher Education Commission Ordinance that formally launched Pakistan's ground-breaking higher education reforms.

This legislation dissolved the University Grants Commission and, in its place, created the Higher Education Commission (HEC) with vast regulatory, financial and administrative autonomy, and an express mandate to restructure the national higher education system and set Pakistan on course to become a knowledge economy.

Over the next five years, the budget allocation for higher education went up by 5,000 percent. Billions were poured into setting up new universities. A landmark agreement was negotiated with the US to launch what was then considered the world's largest Fulbright scholarship programme, worth $150 million. Some 5,000 PhD level scholarships were announced for foreign universities, the largest such programme undertaken by a developing country, as well as 3,000 indigenous scholarships. A tenure track system with very competitive salaries was launched to attract and retain the finest academics.

To term these plans 'ambitious' would be an understatement. Other countries sat up and took notice. Professor C.N.R. Rao, former chairman of India's Scientific Advisory Council, told former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh in 2006, "Science is a lucrative profession in Pakistan. It has tripled the salaries of its scientists in the last few years." This was reported in the Hindustan Times and this particular story carried the by-line: "Pakistan may soon join China in giving India serious competition in science."

Bangladesh is a big fan of Pakistan's higher education reforms to this day. Large-scale academic delegations from Bangladesh have visited Pakistan frequently over the last two years, touring our universities, building institutional ties and doing homework for their own reforms. In 2025, Bangladesh's Ministry of Education released the draft Higher Education Commission Ordinance, explicitly modelled on our framework.

It was an auspicious start, but it was not to last.

Within a decade, the HEC's autonomy was challenged and higher education funding was dramatically slashed. In an earlier piece, we tracked the collapse of Pakistan's tenure track system and the mass exodus of Pakistan's best and brightest academics. Now, as our higher education experiment enters its 25th year — its silver jubilee — it is time to ask the big questions: where do we stand today? What have we accomplished? What mistakes have we made? And, most importantly, how do we move ahead?

Here is a look at the good, the bad and the ugly in the wide-ranging landscape of our higher education system today.

LET A THOUSAND UNIVERSITIES BLOOM

The most obvious indicator of success is the explosive growth of our universities. As per HEC data, in 2001-2002, we had a total of 58 higher education institutions in the country. This count almost doubled to 116 in 2005-2006 and crossed the 200 mark in 2017-2018. As per the Pakistan Economic Survey 2025-26, we now have 278 universities, an increase of almost 400 percent, an unprecedented achievement.

Leading Pakistani institutions now routinely feature in international university rankings. Exact positions tend to fluctuate year by year — and we seem unable to break into the global top-350 universities category — but it is most definitely a win.

Student enrolments have similarly skyrocketed, from around 276,000 in 2001-2002 to more than two million in 2023-2024, an increase of more than 600 percent. Moreover, in 2002, student enrolments were split with 63 percent males to 37 percent females. By 2025, this gender gap had almost hit parity, with 52 percent males versus 48 percent females.

Another very remarkable milestone is that in our first 54 years of Independence (up to 2002, when our higher education reforms were launched), Pakistan had produced almost 3,000 PhDs. Now we produce more than 3,000 PhDs in a single year.

This also reflects in our academic publication count, which has simply exploded. Our global academic publication count ranking has climbed from 51 to 26 in 25 years. As per the SCImago database, Pakistan's indexed publications increased from approximately 1,600 in 2002 to over 45,000 in 2025. This March, the HEC formally honoured over a thousand Pakistani researchers featured in a list (curated by Stanford University) of the world's top two percent scientists.

These are landmark achievements. Very few countries can claim such incredible progress in so short a period of time. After surveying these highly impressive statistics, one would not be remiss in thinking that our higher education experiment is faring very well indeed.

FROM BOOM TO BAILOUT

Unfortunately, one has only to scratch the surface to unearth grim realities beneath.

Our massive university expansion is now collapsing under its own weight. This issue burst into the spotlight last year with news that almost all public universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) were experiencing severe financial distress. A leading academic staff association has demanded a Rs25 billion package to bail out the entire sector.

This is not just a KP issue. Deficits are running high in many prestigious universities, salaries are being doled out in instalments, pension payments are being delayed and staff are striking and heading for the courts.

This August, the federal government approved a Rs2 billion bailout for Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad. Mounting costs had completely exhausted the university's pension fund. It was a struggle to fund even basic operations, such as replenishing laboratory chemical supplies.

In Sindh, Karachi University reported a Rs1.3 billion deficit, followed by a paralysing strike that made nationwide headlines. The Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences and Technology in Karachi has piled up a backlog of Rs1.2 billion in salaries, pensions and other liabilities, and requires another Rs1.7 billion infusion for daily operations. Sindh University's 2026-27 budget includes Rs3.75 billion in grants from the provincial government and Rs1.716 billion from the federal government and the HEC.

This March, the Balochistan government stepped in with Rs857 million payment to 11 universities in the province. Soon after, in a rare and very welcome move, Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail announced an increase in the public universities' budget from Rs2.5 billion to Rs8 billion.

The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir has reported a shortfall of more than Rs1.3 billion, with staff threatening campus shutdowns. Punjab University has reported a Rs3.68 billion deficit, which they intend to address through internal borrowing.

THE WALKING DEAD — UNIVERSITY EDITION

These numbers are just some highlights, but this crisis has been a decade in the making and the entire sector is on life support today. So, what's the worst case scenario?

In 2024, reports emerged that a leading international lending agency — its identity was not revealed — floated a study indicating that around 80 percent of our public universities would default within three to four years. This reads like a mass-extinction event. There are multiple reasons for this.

First and foremost, the federal government has capped the recurring budget for universities at Rs65 billion, a limit in place since 2017-18. But back in 2017, we had almost a hundred universities less than we do today. And, of course, in 2017, the US dollar averaged Rs105. Those were the 'good old' days.

This year, the HEC had internally calculated a requirement of Rs138 billion and had requested the government for at least Rs100 billion, but that requirement was not met. The provinces have also been grossly remiss in their contributions. This trend is not a higher education problem, it applies to the entire education sector as a whole. Last year's Pakistan Economic Survey revealed that Pakistan's education spending had dropped precipitously to just 0.8 percent of the country's GDP, far below Unesco's recommended benchmark of four to six percent.

It gets much worse. To get a sense of this Rs65 billion number, I looked up the balance sheet of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia, where I did my own postgraduate studies. In 2025, UNSW reported operational expenses amounting to AUD3.28 billion, around Rs630 billion. In short, this one university in Australia — an undeniably good international university, but certainly no global superstar like the Ivy League universities in the US or the Russell Group universities in the UK — has an annual budget almost tenfold what our government allocates to all of Pakistan's public sector universities put together.

THE GREAT 'SUPERMARKETIFICATION'

Setting up new universities in Pakistan has also taken on an unfortunate 'franchise' mentality — as first documented by the historian Dr Yaqoob Bangash — akin to setting up branches of a departmental store chain. Little thought is given to genuine need, excellence and standards or long term sustainability. For instance, last year in KP, with most universities on the brink of collapse, the provincial government moved to set up two new universities.

Launching universities has also become a potent grift, a way for politicians and administrators to score political benefits, securing

Continued on Page 20

PAKISTAN'S MIRAGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Continued From Page 19

lucrative development contracts, setting up employment avenues and putting the government on the hook. In this model, explicated by former member of the Planning Commission Waqas bin Najib in his Dawn Op-Ed 'Building the Knowledge Economy', universities may be conceptualised as "patronage vehicles." And the HEC acts as "a real estate fund manager."

Our universities are also decades behind international best practices, featuring cumbersome processes and paperwork reminiscent of our colonial era and abysmal governance.

A Supreme Court order of 2024 noted that most universities are in contravention of their own laws and are being run on the "personal whims" of those in charge. Almost all public sector universities have too many non-academic staff, significantly in excess of the HEC's prescribed 1:1.5 ratio of academics versus non-academics. A recent HEC survey found that a staggering 40 percent of key faculty and administrative positions in universities were lying vacant.

With numbers like these, one cannot help but wonder: how are things still even working?

THE EMPEROR'S NEW DEGREES

But, are things really working?

A common refrain we academics hear is that universities are not producing skilled and capable graduates. There is little hard data for this claim. Our systems are very good at recording and advertising glittering statistics, such as university counts, student enrolment and publications, but relatively quiet when it comes to graduate outcomes, employment numbers, career progression etc.

But, every now and then, we get hints that lay bare the sheer magnitude of this problem.

For instance, at a session organised by the American Business Forum (ABF) and the Lahore University of Management Sciences (Lums) this September, Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja revealed the results of a national baseline test of 33,000 final year computer science students from 190 universities. Across 10 employability competencies, only 0.4 percent students scored above 80 percent. A mere four percent scored above 68 percent. Overall, 61 percent students languished below the 50 percent mark.

Likewise, the Central Superior Services (CSS) written examination results were announced in August. Of over 16,000 candidates appearing in all papers, only 476 qualified for the next stage, a share of 2.74 percent. This brutal rate is not an anomaly; the CSS exams are certainly very competitive. But examiners noted a definite decline in standards. In a written note to the National Assembly, Senator Ahad Khan Cheema attributed this high failure rate to poor academic background, weak analytical and comprehension skills and subpar written expression.

The most alarming story I personally came across is from 2023, when the KP Public Service Commission (PSC) revealed that candidates with postgraduate degrees struggled to solve basic math problems without calculators. In language and literature tests, students' grammar, syntax and pronunciation were found to be abysmal.

"It has been noted that the quality and extent of knowledge of the candidates, having postgraduate qualification, is superficial," stated their report, noting that candidates were "shaky and lack confidence" during interviews. They then asked the obvious question: "Are the teaching institutions properly equipped with teaching faculty and do they provide a scholarly environment to their students?"

These examples are deeply unsettling. And even as there is growing recognition of this collapse in educational outcomes, we have yet to see serious meaningful solutions. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has called for audits and urgent reforms. The HEC has mandated professional internships and industry-relevant certifications for undergrad degree programmes. The Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, has directed the chairman of the HEC to undertake an immediate and comprehensive review of all university degree programmes and curricula across Pakistan to align programmes with industrial trends.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW RESEARCH

University research output tells an equally disturbing story.

Behind the glitzy numbers, the overwhelming trend in Pakistani academia is now to publish papers in journals of middling to low quality — typically predatory or mega-journals — which charge extravagant article processing fees to rush publication without rigorous peer review. The end result is a flood of papers of mediocre and questionable quality, but which nevertheless tick all the boxes needed to get promoted in our system.

This practice is not research, it is more akin to a transaction. An entire industry of shady journals now operates, earning billions every year in pumping up the research credentials of academics in developing countries like ours. This practice is widely acknowledged in our circles and is usually met with a shrug. But it has now reached critical proportions that we can now only ignore at our peril.

For instance, a study from 2024 analysed around 500 social sciences and humanities articles published by 50 Pakistani professors over a five-year period. They found that almost 70 percent of the



A rally organised by the protesting employees of Karachi University (KU) on July 9, 2026 against the non-payment of dues: it was reported earlier this year that KU is facing a deficit of Rs1.3 billion | White Star

sampled papers were published in journals that were unrecognised by the HEC's online journal recognition system and classed as predatory. Another study, also from 2024, focusing on the physical education and sports sciences domains, found that almost 90 percent of sampled papers appeared in questionable or predatory journals.

These are catastrophic numbers. However, these are just snapshots of the overall sector. We urgently need more comprehensive studies to tell us how deep this rot really runs.

THE RANKINGS REALITY CHECK

The standards of our research output also reflects in international rankings, which specifically prioritise research quality over quantity.

The Times Higher Education University Rankings are particularly research-driven and this year they included 56 Pakistani universities. However, the results were abysmal. No Pakistani university features in the global top 500. Quaid-i-Azam University, our highest-ranked institution, shows up in the 551-600 range. The vast majority of Pakistani universities are ranked 801-1,000.

The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) — popularly referred to as the Shanghai rankings — which places a very high premium on quality research, included only four Pakistani universities in its assessment this year: COMSATS University, the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Quaid-i-Azam University and the University of the Punjab. All of them were in the 801-900 global range.

Likewise, the SCImago Institutions Rankings, a research and innovation-focused system, ranks COMSATS University Islamabad as Pakistan's best at the 1,715 position globally. NUST is second at 2,126. The majority of Pakistani universities show up after the 5,000 mark.

THE INTEGRITY DEFICIT

Unethical practices also feature prominently in our system.

A 2025 study undertaken by the renowned John Ioannidis from Stanford University, a pioneer in the study of research practices, ranks Pakistan as one of the world's leaders in paper retraction rates (at 28.1 retracted papers per 10,000). This rate lags only slightly behind Saudi Arabia (30.6) and is almost double that of India (15.2).

A retraction indicates a research paper that can no longer be trusted and is therefore withdrawn from the record. This could be because of an honest mistake or oversight on the part of the authors or publisher. However, it is, more often than not, due to falsified data, fraud or plagiarism.

In their 2025 study, Ioannidis and colleagues matched retraction records against their database of the world's top-cited scientists in their sub-domains. Of the handful of Pakistani authors on the list, they found that almost 30 percent also had retracted papers on their record.

In an article in the renowned journal Scientometrics, Ioannidis again highlights Pakistan prominently in his list of countries where "extreme publishing" is sharply on the rise. He identifies "spurious practices", such as consortium agreements, self-citation and gift authorships, which researchers use to inflate their publication metrics.

What do these terms mean exactly? A recent study on Pakistan's publication culture titled 'Research Culture in Pakistan's Higher Education Institutions' features a despairing quote by an anonymous academic: "People tend to self-cite or ask their peers and students to cite their work abundantly to appear in the so-called two percent list published by Stanford University. This number game has produced research cartels and people seem to scratch each other's back."

We certainly have local researchers who are no doubt genuinely prolific, sincere to their calling and their valuable achievements should be celebrated. But our universities lack the institutional checks and, more importantly, the will to stop this unscrupulous numbers game.

A METRIC THAT MATTERS

When unethical practices become institutionalised and systemic, they invariably get flagged at the international level. For corruption, we have the Transparency International ranking, for democracy, there is the Freedom House score and the Economist's Democracy Index. For research, we have the recently developed Research Integrity Risk Index.

This tool evaluates universities using a metric focused on retracted papers and anomalous citation patterns. Of 19 leading Pakistani universities featured in this system this year, almost all were flagged as red flag (extreme or significant deviation from global norms), high risk, or on the watch list. Only one university (Aga Khan University) was classed as relatively normal. No Pakistani university exhibited low risk, ie "strong adherence to publishing integrity norms."

The results of this index have generated heated debate in countries such as India, Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia and Morocco. Unfortunately, it's crickets here in Pakistan.

REFORM BEGINS WITH RECKONING

So, here we stand today. The bold reforms of 2002 that were to transform Pakistan into a knowledge economy have instead mutated into a gargantuan Frankenstein's monster, which limps into its 25th year, too big to fail and too difficult to reform.

We want a knowledge economy but we do not seem to care about knowledge at all.

I have written on national-level issues before — our perennial smog problem, broken elections etc — and I often get emails from readers telling me they enjoyed the piece but wish I had offered 'solutions'. Unfortunately, there are no magic bullets here. Our problems are immense, fiendishly complex and infuriatingly bound up with our colonial baggage.

The only real suggestion I can offer would read as painfully naïve: that stakeholders confront these inconvenient truths, make education a priority — the priority — set aside their egos to engage with critics and sceptics in good faith, and rebuild this system brick-by-brick. The hard truth is that many people saw this collapse coming from miles away and they sounded the alarm, but were largely ignored.

As an academic who has worked with government ministries, civil servants and politicians, I also realise this is a very difficult ask. It is much more tempting to set up yet another high-powered committee, call in the international consultants or introduce some new foreign and glamorous system. In short, business as usual.

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

It might surprise many to learn that the original architects of our higher education enterprise foresaw this collapse. They even spelt it out explicitly for us in the original Task Force report of 2002, the founding document of our higher education experiment, which resulted in the Higher Education Commission Ordinance and the creation of the HEC.

Early in the report, they listed prominent challenges faced by Pakistan's higher education sector, amid logistical and material issues, infrastructure, governance, politicisation and the like. They noted the curious problem of "[s]trong scepticism about the realisation of reform." At the very end of their report, they quoted a report penned in 1959 by the Commission on National Education, one of the earliest attempts to reform Pakistan's education system. And the authors of that particular report did not mince their words, which is why their statements are worth quoting at length:

"Education… can meet its responsibilities only if a revision of attitudes on the part of the professional

educator is accompanied by a change in the view point of the government and the public… In education, the prevailing attitude of the public and those responsible in government was that it warranted low priority… Although our leaders were now the architects of policy rather than the implementers of the policy of others, education was neither in fact nor theory given the importance that would enable it to meet the needs of a people who controlled their own destiny…

"We cannot escape the conclusion that our fundamental need is for a revolution in attitudes, through which the cynicism, lethargy, opportunism, suspicion, dishonesty and indifference that have characterised the outlook of so many of our people and officials in the past will give way to a spirit of individual initiative, personal integrity, pride in accomplishment, trust in one's fellow men and a 'private sense of public duty.' We have no illusion that this reorientation of values can be brought about quickly or completely, or that it can be realised only through fiat, yet come it must if we are to achieve any substantial improvement in our education system or any other sphere of national endeavour."

Nearly 65 years later, these words could not ring more true. One is sorely tempted to frame them and set them up on the desk of every higher education professional in the country, not just teachers and researchers, but especially the administrators, the vice-chancellors and the bureaucrats.

It would be apt to close here with another prophecy all too self-evident in Pakistan today. This is a quotation by the novelist and historian H. G. Wells, which opens the World Bank's landmark 'Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise' report from 2000: "Human history becomes more and more of a race between education and catastrophe."

This is the second in an investigative series that does a deep dive into the myriad issues faced by Pakistan's higher education sector

The author is an academic based in Islamabad. He is grateful to colleagues for extensive discussions and feedback on this article. He can be reached at taha.ali@gmail.com

SOCIETY: THE SCARS OF KAAL DAANA

In Balochistan, girls and women with cutaneous leishmaniasis face not only the disease but also the prejudice attached to visible scars, compounded by barriers to healthcare



In cutaneous leishmaniasis, lesions usually appear on exposed body parts, including face and limbs | Photos by the writer



Malaika, 13, looks in the mirror after applying make-up to conceal the lesion on her lower lip before heading to school



In cutaneous leishmaniasis, lesions usually appear on exposed body parts, including face and limbs | Photos by the writer

Rafiullah Mandokhail

Fifth-grader Malaika carefully applies kohl to her eyes as she looks into the mirror. But the reflection reminds her of an ordeal that upsets her almost every morning as she heads to school in Muslim Bagh, a town in Balochistan's Killa Saifullah district.

A lesion on her lower lip — caused by cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL), a skin disease locally known as 'kaal daana' — has made eating difficult. But physical discomfort is only part of Malaika's ordeal.

At school, she says, other girls laugh at her. "'What happened to your lip?' is the question I hear most often," she tells Eos. The ridicule is not limited to school and accompanies her even when she steps out, she adds.

"I tell my classmates and friends that it is due to a mosquito or fly bite," Malaika says. Her voice trembles as she recalls another girl who left school after classmates repeatedly mocked a lesion on her nose.

Malaika's story is not unusual in an area where access to healthcare is limited, treatment can be costly, diagnosis is often delayed and awareness of the disease remains low.

THE BITE AND ITS AFTERMATH

Leishmaniasis is a vector-borne disease that is transmitted to humans through the bite of infected female sandflies. Cutaneous leishmaniasis, its most common form, usually affects exposed areas of the skin, including the face and limbs. It causes skin lesions and may result in permanent scarring, but it is rarely fatal.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 600,000 to one million cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis occur worldwide each year, though only 200,000 are reported. Pakistan is among the countries that account for a large share of the reported cases.

A 2026 study in the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, titled 'Epidemiology and Risk Factors for Cutaneous Leishmaniasis in Pakistan', estimated that Pakistan records between 21 ,000 and 35,000 cases annually.

The study estimates that the total number of cases in Pakistan is around 400,000 — 10 percent of the global estimated total of four million cases. It identified Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the most affected provinces, especially their rural areas.

According to WHO data, Zhob, Killa Saifullah, Killa Abdullah, Kalat and Lasbela are among the worst-affected districts in Balochistan, with 1,500 cases of CL registered at the WHO's diagnosis centre in Zhob in 2025.

BEYOND THE VISIBLE WOUND

Patients in the region can seek diagnosis and treatment at a centre in Zhob, about 200 kilometres from Muslim Bagh, or at a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) facility in Kuchlak, on the outskirts of Quetta. MSF also runs three facilities in Quetta, providing free diagnosis, treatment and medicines, along with mental health support and health education.

"In our society, any woman with a scar or lesion on her face is considered incomplete, or even ugly," says Pashtana, 24, who was at the Zhob centre for the French-manufactured Glucantime injection to treat her wound.

Pashtana says facial lesions that heal with permanent scars can become a source of stigma at home, at school and in the community.

Some cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis can heal without treatment, but recovery can take months or even years. The outcome depends on the parasite species and the patient's immune response.

But not getting the lesion treated can result in discomfort, itching and soreness. And leave a permanent scar. "While the disease affects men more, it can shatter a woman's world, especially if you are young," says Pashtana. "Girls have to pay the highest price. You can die a spinster."

WHEN CARE IS OUT OF REACH

Razia, a middle-aged housewife, could not afford the journey to a treatment centre and did not receive timely care. As a result, she tried a local remedy, but without success. "When you are living in a remote area, getting proper medical care is not easy," she says.

Razia's experience highlights the barriers facing women in remote towns who must travel to urban areas for repeated treatment. For some, travel is further complicated by social expectations, even compulsion, that they be accompanied by a male relative.

Dr Anne Marie Morales of MSF says delayed treatment can worsen the lesions and increase the risk of scarring. The wound can be made worse by traditional remedies, such as plant extracts, caustic substances and even battery fluid, which can make treatment more difficult and increase the risk of permanent scarring.

Razia says people started avoiding her, worried that she could infect them. "Others thought I had cancer, and I was even blamed when my brother's children developed a lesion," she tells Eos.

Dr Kamal Khan of the Balochistan Institute of Psychiatry says people affected by leishmaniasis may experience embarrassment, fear of judgement and social rejection, and may avoid gatherings. "Patients and their families may worry that visible lesions or scars could negatively influence marriage prospects or acceptance by a prospective spouse and their family," he says.

Such concerns can cause significant emotional distress, reduce self-confidence and create anxiety about the future. Dr Khan says patients need empathy and support, rather than judgement based on their appearance.

For Malaika, the wish is simple: to study without being laughed at, to attend weddings without people staring at her and to look into the mirror without feeling defined by her scar.

The lesion on her lip may eventually heal. Ensuring that its social scars do not endure will require more than medical treatment; it will also mean improving access to care and challenging the stigma surrounding the disease.

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The Best Time to Eat Lunch If You Have Diabetes, According to Diabetes Educators

If you're eating later in the day, you may want to rethink your lunch hour for better blood sugars.

Diabetes affects nearly 12% of the U.S. population, which means you, or someone you know, has likely received this diagnosis.1 While managing diabetes can feel overwhelming, a few practical nutrition habits, including eating balanced meals at consistent times, can help keep blood sugar levels within a healthy range.

However, busy schedules can make it tempting to delay lunch to squeeze in another meeting or finish a task. Diabetes experts caution against making this a habit, as meal timing can play an important role in blood sugar management. In general, they recommend eating lunch about three to four hours after breakfast, noting time frames will vary depending on when you have your morning meal.

"When it comes to planning lunch with diabetes, timing is just as important as the composition of your plate," says Erin Palinski-Wade, RD, CDCES. "If you eat lunch too close to your breakfast meal, you run the risk of elevating blood sugar levels. Instead, aim to eat around three to four hours after breakfast to help promote stable blood sugar levels while preventing excessive hunger from waiting too long."

Read on for why this timing matters so much for diabetes management, as well as strategies for building a balanced, blood sugar–friendly lunch.

Why Eating Approximately 4 Hours After Breakfast Is Best

It Supports the Body's Natural Circadian Rhythms

"The body benefits from predictable rhythms", shares Kimberley Rose-Francis, RD, CDCES. "Eating meals at consistent times daily may help support these natural rhythms."23 Research supports this connection. The body's circadian system helps regulate glucose metabolism, insulin secretion and energy balance. Following a structured meal schedule may work with these natural rhythms to support steadier blood sugar and better metabolic health.3 In contrast, frequent or irregular eating periods have been associated with a less favorable metabolic risk profile.

Palinski-Wade agrees, adding, "Eating at the same time consistently day after day can help with everything from blood sugar balance to appetite regulation and even balanced circadian rhythms. When you eat on a consistent schedule, your body knows what to expect and performs accordingly."

Jill Weisenberger, M.S., RDN, CDCES, adds, "Circadian rhythms are influenced by light and dark, periods of sleep and wakefulness, as well as timing of eating and fasting. That's not to say you have to be rigid and eat by the clock, but keeping a rhythm to your eating is a smart behavior."

It Increases Energy

Think about the last time you tried to power through the day on an empty stomach. Much like a car can't run without gas, your body needs consistent nourishment to function at its best. Weisenberger explains, "Irregular eating can have you bouncing back and forth between high and low blood sugars, leading to fatigue, headaches and moodiness. Skimping on two meals to overindulge during a third can make a mess of your blood sugars."

Instead, she recommends following a regular meal pattern to help sustain energy throughout the day. Research suggests that eating meals on a consistent schedule may support energy homeostasis, or the body's ability to balance its energy needs, so you feel better equipped to handle whatever the day brings.

It Creates a Structure for Other Habits

Another benefit of following a structured eating schedule? It can create more opportunities to build other healthy habits into your day. Weisenberger explains, "Structured meals can even help create order in your day. They can be a framework for other activities, including work, exercise, social events and household chores."

Think about it: When you plan time for lunch, you may be more likely to make room for other beneficial activities, such as taking a quick afternoon walk. A balanced meal can also provide the energy you need to stay active and productive throughout the rest of your day.

Consistent meal timing may support better sleep, too.56 Research suggests that allowing enough time between your last meal and bedtime gives your body time to digest and may promote better sleep.5 Because quality sleep plays an important role in diabetes management, establishing an eating routine that supports healthy sleep habits may also benefit blood sugar regulation.

Tips to Build a Blood Sugar–Friendly Lunch

Experts agree you don't have to spend hours in the kitchen planning your lunch meals to make them work with your blood sugar. Instead, they recommend following a few key strategies to make your meals work for better blood sugar management. Keep these tips in mind as you think about what you're going to add to your cart this week.

Aim for balanced meals. A combination of lean protein, fiber-rich carbohydrates and healthy fat delivers a variety of nutrients while helping slow digestion and promote a more gradual rise in blood sugar. It can also help you avoid eating what Rose-Francis calls a "naked carb." She explains, "Pairing carbs with protein and healthy fats helps slow digestion and support steadier blood sugar levels."

Prioritize vegetables at lunch. Vegetables add satisfying volume to your plate while helping you increase your intake of fiber, a key nutrient for supporting steadier blood sugar levels. Try adding leafy greens to a sandwich, mixing chopped vegetables into a grain bowl or enjoying raw vegetables alongside your meal.

Consider the rule of thirds when building your plate. Palinski-Wade recommends visualizing your plate or bowl divided into three equal sections to prioritize lean protein, healthy fats and fiber-filled veggies and whole grains at your lunch meal. This could look like a grilled chicken shawarma bowl with bulgur, hummus and vegetables, or a protein-rich veggie burger on a whole-grain bun topped with avocado, lettuce, tomato and onion.

Be mindful of portions. Variety is important, but so is eating amounts that meet your individual needs, notes Weisenberger. Portion meals and snacks before eating rather than grazing from an open package at your desk or while standing in the kitchen. Even nutrient-dense foods, such as nuts and whole-grain crackers, can be easier to overeat when served straight from the bag.

Avicenna Allied Health Institute Celebrates Graduates at Houston Ceremony

Avicenna Allied Health Institute (AAHI) celebrates its graduates in Houston as Nasruddin Rupani attends as chief guest, Consul General Muhammad Aftab Chaudhry graces the occasion, and the Ibn Sina Foundation contributes $50,000 toward healthcare education.





WHERE WORDS UNITE WORLDS: PAKISTAN'S LITERARY CELEBRATION IN HOUSTON

The Third International Pakistan Literature Festival, organized by the International Academy of Letters USA, was held October 31–November 1 in Sugar Land and Stafford, Texas. The festival brought together distinguished writers, poets, journalists, scholars and cultural personalities from across the world. Two days of literary discussions, thought-provoking panel sessions, cultural activities and live Qawwali celebrated Urdu literature, Pakistani identity and the power of storytelling.





















Too precious to replace

From old beds to family recordings, people hold on to treasured possessions that preserve memories of their loved ones

By Nabil Tahir

There is usually something in every home that has outlived its usefulness. It could be an old watch that no longer tells the correct time, a chair that has seen better days, or a piece of furniture that has followed the family from one house to another. Replacing it might be easier, and sometimes cheaper, but the thought of letting it go is difficult. Not because of what it is worth, but because of who it reminds us of, or the memories associated with it.

At 72, Shakil Ahmed still sleeps on a bed he bought nearly 30 years ago. It is a single bed made of sheesham wood, with a short headboard and traditional carvings. Over the years, it has been polished and repainted, but Ahmed has never considered replacing it. The bed once belonged to his mother, and for him, that is reason enough to keep it.

Ahmed remembers how pleased his mother was when he bought it for her. She loved the bed and would proudly tell her friends about it. In the final years of her life, when her declining health left her mostly bedridden, it became the place where much of the family's time together was spent.

Her grandchildren would sit beside her or climb onto the bed to sleep. She would tell them stories, share meals with the family and laugh with them, even as her movements became increasingly restricted. For Ahmed, those everyday moments have stayed with him long after his mother's death.

“Even today, whenever I look at it, I can picture my mother sitting there with a smile on her face,” he says.

The bed has accompanied Ahmed through the years, even as he has moved between homes and travelled frequently. Although it has needed occasional maintenance, he says he has never paid much attention to how much was spent on keeping it in good condition. The quality of the wood has helped it survive, but it is the memories associated with it that make him unwilling to part with it.

There have been suggestions that he should replace the bed with something newer. Ahmed has always refused. He continues to sleep on it and says knowing that it belonged to his mother brings him comfort.

For someone else, it might simply be an ageing piece of furniture, old-fashioned and easily replaceable. For Ahmed, however, keeping the bed is a way of holding on to the years when his mother was still around, surrounded by the family.

And he is not the only one willing to keep an old possession long after replacing it might seem the more practical choice.

The cost of holding on

At the Liaquatabad Furniture Market in Karachi, 63-year-old Faryad Iqbal regularly comes across customers who would rather repair an old piece of furniture than buy a new one. Some bring beds, others chairs, stools or wooden storage boxes that have been in their families for generations. According to Iqbal, around 30 per cent of his customers come to him with old or inherited furniture.

While older furniture is often made from stronger wood, years of use can weaken its joints, damage its base or loosen the fittings. Polishing is among the most common requests, but some customers are particular about retaining the original material and design, even when repairs become expensive.

“Even if the wood is broken, they ask us to use the same wood, despite it being expensive. They want the same look and feel,” says Iqbal.

Matching the original wood and craftsmanship can sometimes cost more than buying new furniture. Yet, for many of his customers, changing the appearance is not an option.

Iqbal recalls a customer who repeatedly brought in his grandfather's chair for repairs. Eventually, the chair became too weak to withstand regular use. Rather than discard it, the man placed it in his room, where it remains unused.

“Most of them want to preserve the original look, which is a really difficult job to do,” Iqbal explains.

For some customers, restoring furniture means making it usable again. For others, like the man with his grandfather's chair, simply being able to keep it is enough.

Family heirlooms

Not every possession is kept because of memories of someone who has passed away. Some are preserved because they have become part of a family's traditions, passed from one generation to another with the expectation that the next will care for them just as carefully.

For 68-year-old Naila Latif, that responsibility came in the form of a gold necklace that, according to her family's history, dates back to 1928. For generations, it has been passed from a mother-in-law to the eldest daughter-in-law. Naila was the fourth generation to receive it, and she has since handed it over to her eldest son’s wife.

There have been suggestions that he should replace the bed with something newer. Ahmed has always refused. He continues to sleep on it and says knowing that it belonged to his mother brings him comfort

The necklace has three gold coins on either side, with stones and beads arranged between them and a traditional gold design at the centre. Rather than hanging from a gold chain, it is held together by a thread, a detail the family has deliberately preserved.

Over the years, the necklace has been polished occasionally, and the thread has been replaced once. But changing its original appearance has never been considered necessary.

When Naila received it as a new bride, her mother-in-law explained its history and the tradition associated with it. Years later, Naila found herself having the same conversation with her daughter-in-law, explaining where the necklace had come from and why it needed to be kept safe. “You don't realise it when it's passed on, but in a way, it keeps the family ties strong and preserves the family history,” she says.

While Naila’s family necklace has changed hands for nearly a century, 39-year-old Areeba Iqbal's attachment to her grandmother's brass paandaan began with childhood visits.

Whenever Areeba visited her grandmother, she was fascinated by the hexagonal brass container, decorated with traditional designs reminiscent of the pre-Partition era. She remembers being asked to bring it to her grandmother and then watching as she prepared paan, taking ingredients from its separate compartments.

Iqbal had wanted the paandaan since childhood. Two years ago, when her grandmother, now in her 90s, received a new steel one from her son, she decided to give the old brass container to the granddaughter who had always admired it.

“Although I don't use it, having it with me is a dream come true,” says Areeba.

She keeps it in her room and occasionally opens it to revisit those childhood memories. Karachi's weather means the brass requires regular attention, so every four to six months she takes it to a jeweller for polishing, with specific instructions not to rub too hard and damage its decorative patterns.

Areeba hopes to pass the paandaan to her daughter one day, along with the stories of how her grandmother used it. For Naila, passing on the necklace means continuing an established family tradition. For Areeba, it is a chance to begin one of her own.

The voices that remain

When Shahid Ismail's father returned to Pakistan from the United Kingdom in the 1960s, he brought home a reel-to-reel tape recorder with two large circular reels and a set of speakers. Such machines were rare in Pakistan at the time, and for Ismail, who was around eight years old, it soon became a source of fascination. His father would use it to record conversations at home, sometimes asking his children to speak into it, tell stories or simply talk to one another.

Nearly six decades later, the 70-year-old still has the machine, along with many of the recordings his father made. What began as ordinary family conversations have become some of his most treasured possessions, particularly since his father's death.

The tapes contain the voices of Ismail and his siblings as children, their conversations and stories, and moments when their father would offer advice about life. At the time, the children did not always understand what he was trying to teach them. It was only years later, as they grew older and began dealing with the responsibilities of adult life, that some of those conversations started to make sense.

“Some of the things our father told us didn't seem useful back then. But now, as adults, we can relate to what he was saying,” says Ismail.

Listening to the recordings also brings back memories of the family being together. The voices may be older recordings, but for Ismail, they still carry the familiarity of those childhood days. “It feels like I go back to those days, sitting in the same room with all my siblings,” he says.

Keeping the recorder working, however, has become increasingly difficult. The machine occasionally jams because of wear and tear in its internal components, while the tapes themselves have become fragile with age. Some portions of the recordings have already been lost because of damage, despite Ismail's efforts to repair and preserve them.

For years, the family has relied on the same technician to keep the machine running. Fareed Hassan, now 65, repaired the recorder when it belonged to the senior Ismail and continues to look after it. After repeated visits for a particular fault, Hassan even taught him how to fix the problem himself.

Hassan has been repairing tape recorders for more than 30 years. He first became familiar with the equipment while living in Saudi Arabia. After returning to Pakistan, he began experimenting with repairs at a time when such machines were expensive and owners preferred fixing them rather than purchasing replacements. He eventually opened his own repair shop.

Today, repairing these machines requires considerably more effort. Many of the components used in older tape recorders are no longer manufactured, leaving Hassan dependent on whatever spare parts he can find. He has kept several old machines in his workshop, removing components from them whenever another recorder needs repairing.

“There are some parts which I make myself to keep the tape recorder working,” he explains.

Even that is not always enough. Hassan says there are occasions when he tells customers their machines cannot be repaired because the necessary parts are unavailable. Some become upset and insist that he try again, prompting him to look for alternatives or make replacement components. Such work can take considerable time, particularly because he must avoid damaging other ageing parts.

His children also work with him, but their attention is largely on newer electronics, including LCD televisions, mobile phones and sound systems. Hassan understands why. Repairing older equipment is time-consuming and generally less profitable. Still, he continues because he has seen how much these possessions mean to their owners.

“I feel the emotions attached to people who want their old things repaired, and that is why I do it,” he says, although he is uncertain how much longer he will be able to continue.

Ismail, meanwhile, has already transferred his family recordings into digital form to protect what remains of them. But he has no intention of giving up the original recorder. He wants his children and grandchildren to experience the recordings through the same machine that once filled his childhood home with familiar voices.

“Now we send thousands of voice notes, and they get lost somewhere among all the others,” he says. “Things like these tapes are gold.”

What we leave behind

What happens to these possessions when the people who have cared for them are no longer around is something their owners have also begun to consider. After spending years protecting old furniture, jewellery and household objects, many hope that the next generation will find a reason to keep them.

For Naila, that responsibility has already passed to her daughter-in-law, along with the gold necklace and the story behind it. Areeba, meanwhile, hopes her daughter will one day take care of the brass paandaan that she spent much of her childhood admiring. Whether her daughter will feel the same attachment to it remains to be seen, but Areeba wants her to know how it was used and why her grandmother treasured it.

Ismail has similar hopes for his father's tape recorder. Although he has preserved the recordings digitally, he wants his children and grandchildren to hear them on the original machine, just as he did growing up. Keeping it working may become more difficult with time, but for now, he continues to have it repaired.

For Ahmed, the question is what will become of his mother's bed. He believes his brothers and sons, who were equally close to her, will understand why he has kept it for so long. He hopes one of them will continue looking after it when he no longer can.

“My brothers share my sentiments and understand the emotional value of the bed,” he says. “My sons also loved and cared for their grandmother deeply.”

Ahmed has never been particularly concerned about how much it costs to maintain the bed. What matters to him is that it remains in the family, where the people who knew and loved his mother can continue to look after it.

For now, he is content knowing that whenever he wants to remember her, he still has something his mother once loved and was so proud to call her own.

Islamic movements need broader human agenda, JI chief says

ANKARA, Türkiye – Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman, the Ameer, or chief, of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan — one of the country's oldest Islamic political parties — has urged Islamic political movements worldwide to move beyond old ideological confrontations and build a broader agenda addressing the economic, political and social challenges facing humanity.

Touring Türkiye, Rehman spoke to MNTV in an exclusive interview in the Turkish capital, discussing the future of Islamic movements, their relationship with democracy, the growing concentration of global wealth, Islamophobia in Western societies, and the prospects for cooperation among religious and secular organizations.

Top Harris County elected officials keep their seats in a Democratic sweep

Continued from page 17

elections.

Several of the county's top elected leaders were on the ballot this week and voters also selected a new Harris County Judge to lead the nation's third-largest county.

Democrat and former Houston City Councilwoman Letitia Plummer won that race with 60 % of the vote against her Republican challenger, former Harris County Treasurer Orlando Sanchez, according to early returns.

Democratic Commissioners Lesley Briones and Adrian Garcia were re-elected by voters on Tuesday and will each serve on commissioners court, a five-member governing body that oversees the county's operations.

Kamin wins race as county's chief legal advisor

Incumbent Harris County Attorney Abbie Kamin — who was appointed to the position by commissioners court earlier this year — was officially elected to serve in the position against Republican candidate Jaqueline Lucci Smith.

"I'm honored to continue to serve our county, and I'm going to keep fighting for all of our families as fiercely as I fight for my own," Kamin said in a statement Wednesday morning. "My team and I are working hard every single day to protect our neighborhoods, safeguard our rights, and keep local government moving forward."

Kamin resigned her seat on Houston City Council earlier this year after announcing her bid for the position.

Her appointment came after a lengthy executive session during a commissioners court meeting in April and after Jonathan Fombonne — who had served as interim county attorney since January — submitted his resignation from the position. Fombonne briefly served in the position as the county's interim chief legal advisor after then-County Attorney Christian Menefee announced his run for Houston's 18th Congressional District.

Kamin's office set up an election protection legal taskforce of over 30 attorneys ahead of Tuesday's election. In an interview with Houston Public Media, she said the team includes former employees of the U.S. Department of Justice, whom she recruited for their expertise in civil rights and voting rights.

Her office also tapped prominent voting rights attorney Chad Dunn as outside counsel, along with additional subject matter experts whom she declined to name but said would be focused on threats from the federal government.

Embattled county treasurer re-elected for a second term

County Treasurer Carla Wyatt, whose office is under threat of dissolvement in next year's legislative session, was re-elected for a second term Tuesday.

She retained her seat against Republican candidate Marc Cowart after receiving just under 60% of the vote, according to unofficial election results.

While county commissioners have made it a priority to eliminate Wyatt's office, the effort would require the approval of voters across the state and county. Even if Wyatt's office is dissolved next year, she will keep her seat through the end of 2027.

In September, commissioners declined a $40,000 salary increase request from Wyatt. A publicly-led Harris County salary grievance committee had earlier voted to recommend the raise for Wyatt, which was about $126,000 less than the raise she originally requested.

Wyatt is actively facing a misdemeanor DWI charge out of Galveston County. In May, just weeks after a grand jury declined to indict her on a previous criminal burglary charge, Wyatt was arrested in Galveston County for allegedly driving while intoxicated, according to an arrest affidavit obtained by Houston Public Media.

Before that, she was arrested last December and accused of breaking into another person's vehicle in a restaurant parking lot with intent to commit theft.

Her pleas for higher pay came months after county commissioners stripped her office of a key function and voted unanimously to pursue dissolving the county treasurer's office.

If a bill to eliminate the Harris County Treasurer's Office receives two-thirds of the vote in the legislature, the question will go before voters across the state. Galveston County successfully eliminated its county treasurer's office after voters elected Hank Dugie to the position, who ran on a campaign to eventually dissolve his own position.

Hudspeth gets a second term to oversee local elections

Harris County Clerk Teneshia Hudspeth was re-elected with 62% of the vote to serve a second term. Her office oversees the administration of local elections across the county.

Hudspeth, a Democrat, won her re-election bid against her opponent, Mike Wolfe, whose campaign centered around making a more efficient elections administration process.

Harris County, which covers most of Houston and is the most populous in the state, has for years faced intense scrutiny and intervention from the state government. In 2022, paper ballot shortages and offline voting machines led to long wait times and some voters being turned away at a handful of polling sites. The issues also triggered several GOP-backed lawsuits that challenged the results of the election.

Earlier this year, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott said that the county "should be stripped of operating elections" while referencing a Houston Public Media report about the local tax office finding more than 100 voter registrations linked to P.O. boxes in violation of state law.

Harris County commissioners, who are mostly Democrats, have argued that efforts to scrutinize the county's election administration are politically charged and intended to undermine the county's credibility.

Voters select a new District Clerk

Harris County voters also selected Democratic candidate Darrell Jordan Jr. to serve as the county's next district clerk. He won his bid for the seat Tuesday with 60% of the vote against Republican candidate and former district clerk Chris Daniel, according to early returns.

Jordan Jr. will be the county's newest district clerk in over eight years after former District Clerk Marilyn Burgess announced last year she wouldn't seek re-election for her seat.

That came after Houston Public Media first reported that Burgess voted in a salary grievance committee meeting to raise her own salary by $81,000, prompting commissioners to raise red flags about a possible conflict of interest.

The potential conflict, which county legal staff said didn't appear to be illegal, prompted commissioners to call for the issue to be placed on the county's next legislative agenda.

Jordan Jr., who served as a county court-at-law judge for eight years, advanced to the November election after he received just over 19% of the vote in a Democratic runoff for the seat against 23-year-old educator Jose "Alex" Maldonado.

In a Facebook post on Wednesday morning, Jordan Jr. said he was grateful for voters turning out to the polls to make their voices heard.

"I am also a man of faith, and I know God carried me here," Jordan Jr. said. "He allowed me to serve as a judge in the third-largest county in America, to help bring transformational change to a bail system whose reform has reverberated across the country, and now to lead an office of more than 500 employees and a $50 million budget."

The district clerk oversees an office that, last year, processed 5.8 million civil and criminal court documents and oversees 83 statutory courts and more than 30 specialty courts.

Third Pakistan Literature Festival Concludes in Houston Amid Literary..

Continued from page 17

from Pakistan, the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany.

Despite the impressive lineup of distinguished guests and an ambitious program, the festival experienced some organizational and scheduling challenges. The proceedings did not begin entirely according to the announced schedule, while delays and adjustments affected the smooth flow of several sessions. Coordination between different activities could have been more effective, and timely communication with participants and attendees could have helped ensure a more seamless experience.

For an international gathering of this scale, involving prominent speakers and guests traveling from different countries, effective planning, time management and coordination are essential. Although such challenges are understandable in a large event, greater attention to scheduling and program management would have further enhanced the festival's overall impact. These observations are offered constructively, with the hope that future editions will benefit from the experience and achieve an even higher standard of organization.

Held October 31 and November 1 in Sugar Land and Stafford, Texas, the festival was presented by the International Academy of Letters USA. It provided an international platform to celebrate Pakistani literature, Urdu language, cultural heritage and meaningful discussions on issues shaping society and Pakistan's future.

The two-day program featured keynote addresses, literary talks, panel discussions and opportunities for participants to interact with respected intellectuals and cultural personalities. Complimentary lunch and dinner were also arranged for attendees on both days, while Saturday evening featured a live Qawwali Night celebrating Pakistan's rich Sufi and musical traditions.

The opening day featured engaging discussions on Pakistani identity, women's voices, generational differences, mental health awareness, Pakistani cinema and television, and the influence of literature on society.

Sessions including "Pakistan Journey: Pride of Identity," "Women's Voices" and "Two Cultures, Two Generations" explored the importance of preserving cultural heritage, recognizing women's contributions and addressing the challenges Pakistani-American families face while balancing traditional values with American culture.

Mental health awareness received special attention through a panel titled "Mental Health Issues: Challenges and Solutions," where speakers discussed the importance of awareness, understanding and creating space for open conversations.

Another discussion, "How Literature Impacts Society," examined the power of literature and storytelling in shaping public thought, influencing social change and inspiring future generations.

A notable discussion on Pakistani drama and storytelling featured Nusrat Haris. The conversation explored how Pakistan's television industry continues to evolve while remaining connected to its cultural roots. From timeless family stories to contemporary narratives addressing changing social realities, the discussion celebrated the industry's ability to connect with audiences across generations.

The second day, held at the Tuscany Ballroom at Spark by Hilton in Stafford, featured prominent sessions on Allama Iqbal, the future of Urdu, Pakistani media, journalism and Pakistan's future.

The session "The Future of Urdu" brought together Khwaja Razi Haider, Mahboob Babar, Irfan Sattar, Qayyum Tahir and Basit Jalili to discuss the future of the Urdu language, its literary heritage and its relevance to younger generations.

The panel "Pakistani Media: Truth and Responsibility" featured Shahab Zuberi, Raza Rumi, Ashraf Shad, Fazil Jamili, Faysal Aziz Khan and Khurram Shahzad, with Hasham Hashmi serving as moderator. The discussion examined media ethics, journalistic responsibility and the importance of truth and accountability.

Another major session, "Reimagining Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities," featured Shabbar Zaidi, Fawad Hassan Fawad, Nasira Zuberi and Ghaznifar Hashmi. The panel explored the challenges confronting Pakistan and opportunities for shaping its future.

The festival also paid tribute to Allama Iqbal's enduring literary and intellectual legacy, while art exhibitions, paintings, book stalls and cultural displays provided visitors with opportunities to experience Pakistan's artistic and literary traditions.

The grand Closing Ceremony on Sunday brought the two-day gathering to its conclusion, with the official Master of Ceremonies expressing gratitude for the opportunity to lead the final proceedings. Organizers also recognized members of the event management and coordination team for their contributions behind the scenes.

Beyond the discussions, the festival provided an opportunity for Pakistani-American community members, poets and literary enthusiasts from across the United States and abroad to meet distinguished guests visiting from Pakistan and exchange ideas across generations and cultures.

Despite the organizational challenges, the Third International Pakistan Literature Festival offered a valuable platform for promoting Urdu literature, preserving Pakistani heritage and strengthening cultural connections internationally. Its successful literary participation and diverse discussions demonstrated the continuing interest in Pakistan's intellectual and creative traditions.

The experience also underscored an important lesson: a distinguished lineup of speakers and an excellent program deserve equally strong organization and execution. With improved planning, scheduling and coordination, future editions can build on this year's achievements and deliver an even more memorable experience for the literary community.

Farah Iqbal Hosts an Unforgettable Evening of Urdu Poetry, Friendship and Celebration

Continued from page 17

including Dr. Yasmin Qureshi, Fahim Akhund, Arif Azim, Rafiq Sudhry, Basit Jaleeli, Saira Ejaz and Naheed Sudhry. Their participation and warm interaction contributed to making the evening a memorable celebration of friendship and shared cultural values.

Representatives of the print media, including Mahmood Ahmed, Shamim Syed and Jamil Siddiqui, were also acknowledged for their continued support and cooperation in promoting Urdu literature and community activities.

Beyond the hospitality and festivities, the evening reflected the enduring bond among lovers of Urdu poetry and literature. The exchange of thoughts, literary expressions and heartfelt conversations highlighted the important role such gatherings play in preserving and promoting the richness of Urdu literary traditions.

Expressing her gratitude, Farah Iqbal thanked all the distinguished guests for their presence, affection and participation, acknowledging their contributions in making the gathering a truly beautiful and memorable occasion.

ISGH North Zone Raises $110,000 for Waller Masjid; Highlights Community Healthcare Initiative

Continued from page 17

project at Masjid As-Salam, the program aims to help financially challenged individuals and families in the Greater Houston area gain access to affordable medical services.

Through the Health Access Card, eligible applicants can access a growing network of participating physicians and independent medical clinics that offer healthcare services at reduced costs. The initiative is designed to address the financial barriers that often prevent families from seeking timely medical attention.

According to the program's official website, its participating provider network includes a broad range of medical specialties, such as primary care, family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, cardiology, dental care, nephrology, psychiatry, gastroenterology, pulmonology, vascular surgery and general surgery.

The program is particularly significant for families facing financial difficulties who may struggle to afford routine consultations, specialist appointments and other essential healthcare services. Depending on eligibility and participating providers, patients can receive reduced-cost medical services. Some participating clinics also offer discounted laboratory testing and pharmacy services.

The application process is free and confidential. Applicants are required to provide basic personal, household and financial information for eligibility assessment. According to the program's FAQs, applications are generally reviewed within 10 to 14 business days. Once approved, participants can begin arranging appointments through the provider network.

The initiative also welcomes medical professionals, clinics and community volunteers interested in expanding the network and helping more families access affordable healthcare.

The program is not health insurance; rather, it serves as a community-based assistance initiative connecting eligible individuals with independent healthcare providers offering reduced-cost services.

Dr. Usman Khan's initiative reflects ISGH's broader commitment to community welfare beyond religious services, addressing an important need for accessible healthcare among financially vulnerable families.

The fundraising dinner concluded with renewed community support for the Waller Masjid project and the organization's ongoing efforts to strengthen religious, social and public-service initiatives throughout Greater Houston.

When the Towers Fell: America's Blue Reckoning

On election night in Texas and beyond, voters reminded the powerful of something they always forget: what the people give, the people can take back.



By Raja Zahid Akhtar Khanzada

Some defeats are not simply election results. They are the announcement that one era has ended and another, uncertain and unfinished, has begun. People who sit in the high chambers of power forget this with remarkable ease. They come to believe that a throne, once taken, belongs to them, and that the silence of the governed is consent. It is not. Silence is often only patience, and patience runs out. Then one day the ballot boxes open, and that long silence becomes a verdict whose echo will be heard for years.

That is what happened in America on the night of Nov. 3, 2026.

The blue wave of the midterm elections did not merely shift the balance of power; it overturned it. Democrats took control of both chambers of Congress. And the change reached places that for a generation had been treated as Republican fortresses, as though their walls had been built to stand forever.

Nowhere was this more startling than in Texas. Republicans had held the governor's mansion there for three decades, and that line was broken. Greg Abbott had been, for most of the past 10 years, the face of the state's politics and of its hard line on immigration. He was defeated by the Democrat Gina Hinojosa.

Ms. Hinojosa won about 53 percent of the vote to Mr. Abbott's 46 percent. She will be the first Latina governor in the history of Texas. In the same state, James Talarico defeated the Republican Ken Paxton and carried a United States Senate seat into Democratic hands.

This is the same Texas where Governor Abbott made razor wire on the border central to his politics. His government cracked down hard on undocumented immigrants and bused them to other states, and it fought the federal government without pause. His supporters called this the rule of law, the simple duty of guarding a border. His critics called it something else: a failure of the most basic obligation a state owes to human beings, which is to see them as human. Both sides believed they were defending something precious. That is usually how it is in America, and it is why our quarrels go so deep.

But on Nov. 3, the voters of Texas decided to change who leads them. It would be too easy, and not quite honest, to call this a referendum on immigration alone. People were also voting on what they pay for groceries and rent, on the strain of making a living, on their schools and their health, and on the question of whom their state government actually serves. Texas was once described as a red state slowly turning purple. Now the way has opened for a blue flag over the governor's mansion. No single election makes a state permanently Democratic, and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. But this result is a turning point in the history of Texas, and history will record it as one.

Texas was only one story that night. The real change could be read across the whole map of the country. Republicans had tried to protect their advantage by redrawing district lines. The lines were drawn, but the water did not obey them. On the night of Nov. 3, that water rose into a blue wave and broke against fortress after fortress of American politics.

Thirty-five of the Senate's 100 seats were on the ballot. In the early results, Democrats took seven seats from Republicans. By the morning of Nov. 4, the Democratic caucus stood at 54 seats and the Republicans at 44, with two races still undecided.

All 435 seats in the House of Representatives were contested. Democrats passed the 218 seats needed for a majority, reaching 231 in the early count, with votes still being tallied in many districts.

For the remaining two years of his term, President Donald Trump will face a Congress in which the opposition controls both chambers. On government spending, presidential appointments, executive decisions and possible investigations, Congress will matter far more than it has.

Still, the Constitution keeps a careful distance between impeaching a president and removing one. The House can impeach by a simple majority. Removal requires the votes of two-thirds of the senators present. A political majority, however large, is not a guarantee that any president will be removed.

There is another story in these elections, and it may prove the more lasting one. Voices have grown stronger in American politics that take a different view of Israel's military campaign in Gaza, of the rights of Palestinians and of American military aid to Israel.

According to NPR, at least five candidates affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America won House seats. They are Dariáliza Ávila Chevalier and Claire Valdez of New York, Melat Kiros of Colorado, Donavan McKinney of Michigan and Chris Rabb of Pennsylvania.

Three candidates endorsed by Zohran Mamdani, the mayor of New York, also won. In New York, a Palestinian American candidate won a seat in the State Senate. In Michigan, Abdul El-Sayed won a seat in the United States Senate, and in doing so wrote a new chapter in the history of Muslim representation in this country.

Perhaps the most moving human story of this entire election belongs to Dr. Adam Hamawy.

He is a former Army surgeon who saw the war in Iraq, and he treated wounded Palestinians in the hospitals of Gaza. Now he is going to Congress from New Jersey. He has called for an end to American military aid to Israel.

The hands that only yesterday were dressing the wounds of war will now be raised in the chambers where war and peace are decided. There is a terrible and necessary justice in that. A man who has seen what bombs do to a child's body cannot easily be told that such things are abstractions.

None of these victories guarantees an immediate change in American policy toward Israel. But new voices have entered that argument, and they will not easily be ushered out. The Israeli outlet Ynet gave prominent coverage to the success of candidates who support Palestinian rights, a sign of how far beyond our borders this change is being felt.

These elections also revealed the growing political presence of Pakistani Americans.

In Texas, Salman Bhojani and Dr. Suleman Lalani held their seats in the State House. In Connecticut, Maryam Khan and Dr. Saud Anwar won. In Georgia, Farooq Mughal won his race. In Pennsylvania, Meriam Sabih took an early lead in a close contest against the Republican Milou Mackenzie. In Florida, the Pakistani American Republican candidate Imtiaz Mohammad was defeated, and the results for several other candidates had yet to be confirmed.

These victories trace the journey of immigrant families who once came to America looking for a better future, often with very little except the stubborn belief that this country might keep its promise. Today their children are helping to write its laws, shape its policies and decide its future. That is not a small thing. It is, in fact, the whole American argument, made flesh.

Among these South Asian Americans is Nabeela Syed of Illinois, who has traveled from the state's House to its Senate. Her campaign focused on the data centers that power artificial intelligence, on electricity costs and on the environment.

Her race points to a question that is only beginning to surface in American politics: how do we weigh the billions of dollars that new technology produces against the economic and environmental price that ordinary people are asked to pay for it?

Meanwhile, the financial markets moved in mixed directions. On Wall Street, investors weighed the new political landscape alongside interest rates, regulation and the future of the economy. On Nov. 3, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq rose while the Dow Jones fell. It would be a mistake to attribute every movement of the market to the election alone.

For all these changes, the other side of history must be kept in view.

Midterm elections in America have often been unkind to the president's party. In 1994 Bill Clinton's party suffered a severe defeat, and in 2010 so did Barack Obama's, yet both men went on to win second terms. The results of Nov. 3 should therefore be read not as a permanent verdict but also as voters' judgment of the present moment and of how they have been governed.

But this election has made one thing plain. However dazzling the heights of power may be, they rest on the trust of ordinary people. Parties can write laws. Rulers can issue decrees. The wealthy can pour money into campaigns. In a democracy, it is the people who finally decide how long power lasts.

Power nearly always forgets that it is held in trust and is not owned. Issuing decrees is easy; answering for them is hard. Rulers begin to imagine that their strength is permanent, but the wheel of history has never stopped for any one man or any one party. Those who mistake the people's silence for weakness forget what happens when that silence becomes a vote: then even the tallest towers of power begin to tremble.

A century ago, the poet Muhammad Iqbal wrote that in the workshop of nature, stillness is impossible, and that in this world, only change is permanent.

سکوں محال ہے قدرت کے کارخانے میں
ثبات ایک تغیر کو ہے زمانے میں

On the night of Nov. 3, the American voter wrote that change onto the ballot. The real test now belongs to those who will walk into the new halls of power. In a democracy, victory is not only a cause for celebration. It is the beginning of a new accountability to the people.

That is the lesson of history. Thrones change and the institutions endure. Power belongs to no one as an inheritance. The people place it in a pair of hands as a trust, and when the time comes, they keep the right to take it back from those same hands.

Avicenna Allied Health Institute Celebrates Graduates at Houston Ceremony

Continued from page 17

Nasruddin Rupani, Founder and Chairman of the Rupani Foundation, attended the ceremony as the chief guest. Pakistan Consul General in Houston Muhammad Aftab Chaudhry also graced the occasion, joining other distinguished guests in celebrating the graduates' achievements and recognizing their commitment to pursuing careers in healthcare.

In a significant contribution toward supporting healthcare education, the Ibn Sina Foundation provided $50,000 in funding for the institute's educational initiatives. The contribution reflects the foundation's commitment to developing skilled healthcare professionals and expanding educational opportunities for individuals seeking careers in the medical field.

The ceremony acknowledged the graduates' hard work and the efforts of instructors, staff and families whose guidance and encouragement helped students successfully complete their training. For the graduates, the occasion marked an important transition from academic preparation to professional life.

Avicenna Allied Health Institute offers career-oriented training in several healthcare disciplines, including Medical Assisting, Dental Assisting, Medical Billing and Coding, and Behavioral Health Technology. Its programs combine classroom instruction, laboratory practice and supervised clinical experience to equip students with practical knowledge and skills required in healthcare settings.

Operating under the umbrella of the Ibn Sina Foundation, the institute aims to create accessible pathways into the healthcare profession while addressing the growing demand for trained allied health workers.

The graduation celebration highlighted the importance of education, community investment and institutional support in preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals. As the graduates move forward, their achievements represent a new beginning and an opportunity to contribute their skills and services to the wider community.

Houston to require better wages, health benefits for businesses receiving tax breaks

An $18 minimum wage, health insurance and workers' compensation for injuries — those are among the new requirements for businesses receiving tax abatements from the city of Houston.

"Tax abatements are an important tool that cities can use, but we have to use them wisely," council member Alejandra Salinas, who spearheaded many of the provisions, told Houston Public Media. "We have to use them in a way that benefits all Houstonians, not just the companies that receive the tax break."

The new rules approved by the Houston City Council on Wednesday tie workers' pay to the city's minimum wage for municipal employees — $18 an hour as of July — or to prevailing wages for construction work. The updated program also strengthens and expands requirements for apprenticeship training opportunities.

The city has approved 20 tax abatements since 2004, including for Chevron, Kroger, Memorial Hermann, Halliburton and UPS. For each project, companies promised to create jobs and generate community benefits in exchange for a negotiated amount of property tax relief — up to a maximum of 90% over ten years.

Under the slate of new rules, contractors with a recent history of violating the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's rules or committing wage theft will be barred from participating in tax abatement-related construction projects.

Council member Fred Flickinger pushed to limit such sanctions to OSHA violations in the Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico region. Mayor John Whitmire supported the limit, but it failed in an 8-8 vote.

Flinkinger was the sole vote against the overall tax abatement update.

"In a perfect world, we wouldn't give out tax abatements," council member Fred Flickinger said. "We've muddied the water with a lot of different wish lists from people who want stuff done."

During the city council's public comment session last week, Jennifer Hernandez, director of government affairs for the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades district council 10, said the city "should expect more than a promise of economic growth" in exchange for tax breaks.

"We should expect good jobs, fair wages, safe working conditions and benefits that help working families make ends meet," Hernandez said. "From labor's perspective, economic development should not come at the expense of the people who build our city or the taxpayers who help make these projects possible."

Fort Bend tax assessor federally indicted for allegedly using county funds to pay for her mother's caretaker

Fort Bend County Tax Assessor-Collector Carmen Turner was arrested on Thursday after she was indicted on federal charges of misusing public funds. Prosecutors said she employed two tax clerks who were tasked with caring for her 81-year-old mother.

Turner, a Democrat who was first elected to the office in 2020, faces federal charges of conspiracy, wire fraud and theft concerning programs receiving federal funds.

Representatives for Turner did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Federal prosecutors accused Turner of employing two individuals as tax clerks, tasking them "to care for [her] then 81-year-old mother ... who is wheelchair bound and living in an apartment in Houston, Texas," according to the federal indictment.

One of those caregivers, Shemerrylyn Fields, was also indicted for her alleged role in the scheme. As of Thursday afternoon, Fields did not have an attorney listed in her case records and could not be reached for comment. The other caregiver, who was not identified in the indictment, is cooperating with federal authorities, according to U.S. Attorney Aaron Reitz.

Turner is also accused of employing Victor Ewing, the father of her adult son, as a "department coordinator," tasked with, among other things, managing special projects and providing educational information and training.

At the same time Ewing was paid as a full-time employee of the county, prosecutors said he was working in Chicago's O'Hare International Airport as a materials specialist. Ewing, who also did not have an attorney listed in his case record, could not be reached for comment.

Prosecutors allege that the three defendants falsified timesheets as part of the scheme. The unnamed individual working with prosecutors said they were instructed to tell anyone who asked that they worked "on the 2nd floor at the Missouri City tax office location," according to the indictment. Though Reitz did not give an official figure, he said his office believes the scheme involved "tens, if not hundreds of thousands of dollars."

"Public office is a public trust," Reitz said in a press conference Thursday afternoon. "Government employees and elected officials are entrusted with resources that belong to the people they serve, and I'm committed to enforcing federal laws designed to protect those resources and the integrity of government institutions. And second, taxpayers have a right to know that their tax dollars are being used for their lawful intended purpose."

Turner and Fields were each arrested in the Houston area, and Fields was arrested in Chicago, according to Reitz. Each is expected to appear before U.S. magistrates in the coming days.

Turner, who will not be up for reelection until 2028, oversees $1.2 million in payroll and salaries, according to the approved budget for the 2027 fiscal year. Reitz added that the upcoming November election "plays no factor whatsoever in the decisions [of] either my office, FBI, DPS, or anybody."

Interim Fort Bend County Judge Daniel Wong, who is running for election as a Republican, called Turner's arrest "a stunning reminder of the cloud of corruption that has hung over Fort Bend County for too long."

"We must allow the federal authority and the judicial process to do their work," Wong said. "At the same time, we have [an] obligation to ensure that public funds are protected, that appropriate safeguards are in place and that essential services of county government continue without interruption."

Turner's office and her position as county tax assessor-collector remain unchanged, according to Bobby Eberle, the communication director for Wong's office.

Last year, county-level investigators began looking into allegations that Turner had hired two women as caretakers using county funds, according to search warrants obtained by Houston Public Media. The Harris County District Attorney's office oversaw the investigation, but a spokesperson with their office declined to disclose the status of the investigation.

Fort Bend County District Attorney Brian Middleton recused himself from the case as he had previously represented Turner as a client when working in private practice.

"When we first received the complaint, we did a thorough investigation before we had to recuse the office," Wesley Wittig, a representative with the Fort Bend District Attorney's Office, said. "The search warrants that started the collection of evidence were requested by our investigators."

Turner was reelected in 2024 with less than a percentage difference — just 2,000 votes — over her Republican opponent, Jaison Joseph. In 2017, Turner was convicted of contempt of court for filing multiple bankruptcy cases within 180 days, defying a court order. She was sentenced to a year's probation as part of a plea deal, in which prosecutors dismissed other charges of bankruptcy fraud.

According to Fort Bend County court records, Turner faced nearly $700 in unpaid Fort Bend County Toll Road Authority fees in 2022. The case was dismissed in 2023 after she paid the fees. Turner also sued for $10,000 in 2024 on allegations of harassment and discrimination in a small claims case. The case was dismissed by a Fort Bend County judge in 2025.

Fort Bend County has faced an array of political and legal turmoil this year following the conviction of former county judge KP George on money laundering charges in June. Daniel Wong, the Republican nominee for county judge, is facing Democratic Commissioner Dexter McCoy in November while also fighting a separate lawsuit challenging his legal authority to remain in office.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries calls 'not to give a dime' to ICE at Houston stop

U.S. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and Houston-area U.S. Reps. Sylvia Garcia and Christian Menefee met with members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) on Monday to discuss how President Donald Trump's immigration policies are affecting Houston's workforce. Jeffries called for cutting off all funding to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Jeffries praised U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia for her work in pressing for comprehensive immigration reform, in the vehicle of the American Dream and Promise Act of 2026. The bill, of which Garcia is the lead sponsor, would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children, as well as immigrants with Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure statuses.

"That is just the beginning of what needs to happen in terms of getting this national nightmare that the people here in Houston and all across America have been experiencing and get to a much better place here in the United States of America, which will certainly include dramatic change as it relates to immigration enforcement and our continued commitment not to give a dime to Donald Trump's violent mass deportation machine," Jeffries said.

Jeffries said that ICE and the Department of Homeland Security should not count on getting any funding from Democrats in Congress without structural changes to the agency, including greater accountability.

"If you've got rogue ICE agents who think they'll never be held accountable," he said, "then we're going to continue to see the type of violence that has been unleashed and brutality on law-abiding immigrant communities and on American citizens as we horrifically saw with Alex Pretti and Renée Nicole Good."

Jeffries, as the leader of the Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives, is in a strong position to become the next Speaker of the House if his party wins a majority of seats in the chamber in the midterm elections. His visit to Texas came one day before Trump's Tuesday visit to the state — in the president's case, to hold rallies in Lubbock and Corpus Christi.

Garcia, who introduced Jeffries, stressed that aggressive immigration enforcement measures under Trump were hurting not only immigrants but the Houston economy.

"Make no mistake, this is an affordability issue," Garcia said. "When workers are afraid to show up for work, families lose paychecks. When customers are afraid to leave their homes, restaurants, and small businesses lose money. And when construction workers are afraid to go to a job site, homes will not get built."

ISGH North Zone Raises $110,000 for Waller Masjid; Showcases Healthcare Access Initiative

Dr. Muhammad Usman Khan hosts a successful fundraising dinner attended by ISGH President Emran Ghazi, General Secretary Muhammad Ali, Shura Council members and community leaders. The event also highlights the ISGH Healthcare Access Card Program, helping financially challenged families access affordable medical care through a network of participating healthcare providers.



































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