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## 28,170

road accident deaths were recorded in a 2020 World Health Organisation report

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# CLIMATE JUSTICE LANDMARK OR EMPTY PROMISES?

BY HAMMAD SARFRAZ

**COP 27 concluded in either the biggest win for climate justice or the biggest missed chance. Experts unpack the significance of the commitment by rich nations to set up a loss and damage fund for Pakistan and rest of the developing world**

For better or for worse, the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt may be the most important iteration of the annual United Nations huddle since 2015 and Paris. Depending on how one sees it, COP 27 – the official abbreviation for the event with COP standing for Conference of the Parties – resulted in either the biggest win on climate since COP 15 and the Paris Agreement or represents the biggest missed chance.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan agreed at the end of the conference included a commitment by wealthy nations to provide financial reparations to developing countries that have faced the worst from ever-worsening climate change impacts. For the first time, negotiators from the Group of 77 and China (G77+China), led by Pakistan as the chair of the bloc, won an agreement to set up a 'loss and damage fund' to help these nations recover from the damage and economic losses wreaked from ongoing climate change impacts.

Observers and climate change activists have long pointed out that the money to help poorer nations adapt to the impacts of global warming is available. But amid the din of climate change rhetoric in the richest nations and the internal and external politics that kept meaningful progress elusive, the victims in the developing world have often found themselves invisible.

Against that backdrop, the loss and damage fund commitment has been rightfully seen as 'historic', ending nearly 30 years of waiting by countries that have had a minimal footprint on climate change but have faced disproportionately its devastating effects.

However, COP 27 did not result in any commitment to phase out fossil fuels, leading many leaders, activists and scientists to express disappointment. Coming at the end of a year that saw unprecedented carnage from climate change-related disasters, like the severe floods in Pakistan, it was widely hoped that a serious commitment on fossil fuels could be reached in Sharm el-Sheikh. But no such agreement was reached despite the warning by UN chief Antonio Guterres that "humanity faces a stark choice between working together or collective suicide in the battle against global warming."

**“By diverting funds from one source to the other, the West is conveniently shrugging off its responsibility, which should be lowering emissions to prevent climate change**

### Premature joy

Even the loss and damage fund comes with caveats that have prompted observers and experts to suggest caution. While providing some hope of recourse and assistance to nations at the forefront of climate change impacts, the agreement is neither legally binding nor is there any consensus on how such a fund, if it is ever set up, will work in practice.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, Dr Adil Najam, Dean Emeritus and Professor of International Relations and Earth and Environment at Boston University's Frederick S Pardee School of Global Studies, suggested it was too early as yet to celebrate the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan and the loss and damage fund. "I do think that the celebrations are somewhat premature, but that does not mean that the acceptance of the fund is insignificant," he said.

According to Dr Najam, a loss and damage fund has been a long-standing demand of the most vulnerable countries. "And its eventual acceptance – even if only in principle – is an important step forward," he elaborated. "However, one should be clear-eyed about this: at this point there is no fund, and there is no money in such a fund."

"What is there is the agreement to constitute a committee (the so-called 'transitional committee') that is supposed to come to a consensus on what such a fund might look like, how it might operate, where possible funds may come from, and how (and on whom) they may be used," Dr Najam added. He explained that this committee is then supposed to bring these recommendations to the next COP in 2023.

"That is a tall order. Given the history of such nego-

tiations – including the chronic habit of the polluting countries to make promises that they have no intention of keeping (such as the phantom \$100 Billion that was agreed to in Paris) it would be a triumph of hope over experience that the fund will materialise in reality any time soon," Dr Najam warned.

But having said all of that, he stressed that the fact that the principle has been agreed means that now vulnerable developing countries have a realistic lever to keep this issue and demand alive and to keep pushing on this issue. "That is the achievement. When you are poor and vulnerable, you have to learn to celebrate even tiny steps forward. Therefore, we should celebrate this too."

Sharing his views on topic, Dr Ashok Swain, a professor of Peace and Conflict Research at Sweden's Uppsala University, stressed that to talk about the loss and damage fund we need to look at how the discussion on the climate crisis moved from security to justice. "Previously, the world was more concerned about security or prevention, now that discussion has shifted to justice, which means countries that bear the brunt of the crisis deserve to receive some compensation for the losses," he said.

Dr Swain pointed that the Global South has not contributed to the climate crisis but is suffering the most. "It is a moral victory for the Global South but for all practical purposes, it doesn't mean much. We've been hearing about similar climate funds since 2009, but it has never come to that level it should have been by 2020," he shared.

According to him, much of the money that was promised for that fund, was being diverted by the West from regular development aid. "So, for this loss and damage fund, we don't know who will provide the money, how much, and how it will be provided."

"There can't be any legal action against countries that don't contribute. So, this is more of a moral victory for the South but in all practical purposes it doesn't mean much," he added. "I'm sorry to say that I'm not very hopeful about the Global North walking the talk in this case. The West will not provide the resources to the Global South to address their problems. We will have to live in a different world to be-

lieve that this will materialise."

Dr Swain also noted that it is a pity that even as the world is moving towards climate justice, it is moving away from preventing climate mishaps from happening. "Leaders in the North and South are doing this to walk away from their real responsibility which is to prevent such disasters and how to address climate change," he said. "If we don't abide by the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit that was agreed in Paris, nothing really matters. By diverting funds from one source to the other, the West is conveniently shrugging off its responsibility, which should be lowering emissions to prevent cli-

**“Without money, only accepting their responsibility, it should not have been announced. They should have allocated some funds, the UN should have extracted those funds from them**

mate change."

Like Dr Najam and Dr Swain, the former chairperson of Karachi University's Department of International Relations Dr Talat Wizarat was pessimistic about the loss and damage fund as well. "I'm not very hopeful because the United States and some of these countries that are polluting our planet more than anyone else, are very clever in wriggling out of such agreements," she said.

"For now, they have accepted under pressure that they are causing a significant amount of pollution, but they have not made any financial commitment for this 'voluntary' loss and damage fund," Dr Wizarat pointed out. "Without money, only accepting their responsibility, it should not have been announced. They should have allocated some funds, the UN should have extracted those funds from them, but the UN failed to do that and I don't think these countries are eager to dish out any funds," she stressed.

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# OF TWO-WHEELED DANGERS AND GUARDIAN ANGELS

**The safety of powered two wheelers is challenging and complex. Studies show an alarming increase in the number of motorcyclists killed on the roads because of risky behaviour and habits. Head injuries are the main cause of death and disability in motorcycle crashes. This careless attitude makes motorcyclists highly susceptible to accidents and poses a serious danger to other road users**

By **NABIL TAHIR**

Ahmed Alam's wedding day was two days away and he was excited to go and pick up his sherwani. The family car was busy in other errands for the upcoming festivities, so he booked a motorbike through a ride-hailing service. The motorcyclist who arrived wore a helmet, but Ahmed didn't have one.

The shop he wanted to pick his clothes from was about 2km or just seven minutes away, so he didn't bother with a helmet. When Ahmed left home on the motorbike, little did he know that he would only be able to cover one kilometre.

It was November 5, 2018, when the motorcycle that Ahmed rode, collided with a car while descending the Gulshan Chowranghi Fly-over in Karachi. Both riders fell off and in minutes, a dumping truck that had been following them, ran over the groom-to-be.

Unfortunately, this is just one of the thousands of road accidents happening in Pakistan annually. According to the data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), in 2020, there were 10,379 road accidents, of which 4,566 were fatal and 5813 non-fatal. These have caused 5068 deaths and 13,059 injuries. Experts suggest that these are around 40% of the total accidents in the country, as many are unreported.

The 2020 World Health Organisation (WHO) annual report shows the total number of road accident deaths in 2020 reached 28,170, which was 1.93% of the total deaths that year. Around 50% of these accidents involved a motorbike. Approximately, 1500 life years have been affected due to disability from road crash injuries per 100,000 people.

According to the Punjab Bureau of Statistics, 75% of the registered vehicles on the road are motorbikes. Because a biker relies on two wheels rather than four, balance and driving skills are essential. Since it is simpler for the motorcyclist to spot automobiles, he/she has a higher chance of being hit than a car driver. Even a minor collision that damages a car can paralyse or kill a motorcyclist. The head (26.8%) is the most common injury site, followed by the back/abdomen (24.2%).

There are several reasons for motorbike accidents, and the motorcyclist is not always at fault. Still, the error of other motorcyclists on the road can create trouble for and endanger others.

According to the data shared by Karachi Traffic Police, 116 motorbikers lost their lives in the first 10 months this year, while 165 people died in road traffic accidents. Out of this, 65% of accidents involved heavy vehicles. The data shows that 11 people died in accidents involving buses, 12 by water tankers, 14 by collision with dumper trucks and oil tankers, 20 by trailers and 37 by trucks.

Apparently, the lack of streetlights, road engineering, missing traffic signs, drivers' proficiency, non-functioning traffic signals, and non-observance of traffic rules are among the multiple reasons behind these accidents.

#### Missing safety gear

Safety gear is the first thing that will save your life or prevent injury. A motorcyclist must wear full-face and modular helmets, motorcycle jackets, pants, boots, and gloves. In Pakistan, a significant

number of fatal accidents happen because of not wearing safety gear. A study, Motorcycle Accidents in Punjab (MAP), shows that 52% people sometimes wear helmets, 10% never wear them, while 37% always wear them. Some 44% people do not wear helmets because they find them heavy, 33% because of hot weather, and 20% due to vision issues. Hence, 65.88% people without helmets were involved in fatal accidents.

Ahmed's brother Ahmer Alam shares that when Ahmed was leaving on the motorbike, their mother asked him to wear a helmet, but he declined saying that he was only going for a short distance and wanted to avoid the hassle of looking after it.

"I believe there should be a permanent law for wearing helmets," says Ahmer. "But whenever traffic police enforces helmets and imposes fines for not wearing them, everyone buys and wears them, no matter what. Once the enforcement becomes slack, most people stop using them without realising what it could lead to."

The MAP study also shows that motorcyclists are victims in 81% accidents, while in 19% accidents, it is pillion riders. Even when strict law is enforced, low-quality helmets are used as the government has not set a standard for the required quality and safety of the helmet. Low standard safety gear also increases the chance of fatal injuries.

Modifications done to motorbikes also lead to accidents. A new motorbike comes with two side mirrors and a carrier which young people usually remove. The study shows that 31.5% accidents happen because side mirrors are re-

moved and 17% because of back carriers being removed.

#### Speed kills

The current speed limit in most of the country's urban areas is 90km/h which is 60km/h higher, according to the recommended Safe System Road (SSR). The speed limit for rural roads and motorways is 110km/h-130km/h respectively, which is 40km/h higher than SSR recommendations. According to the Global Road Safety Facility report, if SSRs are enforced, fatal road crashes will reduce 17% in urban areas, while six and four per cent in rural areas and motorways.

The MAP study shows that 53.64% of motorcycle accidents

#### motorcycles

According to the MAP report, the cause of the accident in almost 33% of the cases was a mechanical fault. Some of the motorbikes did not have functional lights or indicators. Out of the total accidents in 2020, 31.77% were due to mechanical fault in motorcycles.

The vehicle-wise breakdown of accidents in the Karachi Traffic police report shows that 31 trucks were involved in most accidents, out of which 28 were fatal. Ten out of 13 bus accidents, 18 out of 23 trailer accidents, 12 out of 16 dumper truck accidents, and 11 out of 19 water tanker accidents were fatal, as were 12 out of 16 oil tanker accidents.

immature motorcyclists cannot judge the situation and often take wrong steps. For example, when they encounter a small mound of sand or gravel as they turn the corner and instantly dig their bike's front tyre in it. The combined impact of force and speed overturns the motorcycle.

The MAP report also shows that a quarter of motorcyclists involved in accidents in 2020 were unaware of traffic regulations. Apparently, 23% of them didn't have a driving licence, while most of those who had a licence were not aware of traffic rules. Ahmed Nawaz Cheema, the DIG-Traffic Karachi, agrees that all driving licences were not given through the stan-

an effort to make new regulations for road safety, Zeeshan Shahid, an entrepreneur who lost a friend in a motorbike accident has developed the Motto Vest, a patent automated reusable, light-weight, weather-resistant airbag vest for men and women of all ages, designed to protect the vital organs of the human body. With this, Zeeshan aims to save lives and to create an injury and disability-free Pakistan.

"We focus on quality, innovation, improvisation, affordability and consistency to help our customers feel confident and secure," he says. "In an accident, our airbags take a fraction of a second to save the life of the motorcyclist. The basic purpose is to reduce the impact of the accident, and instantaneously act as first aid."

After witnessing many motorbike accidents daily, and injuries and deaths due to zero precautionary measures, Zeeshan felt there was a need for safety jackets. "After talking to several stakeholders, we realised we were not the only ones looking for safety and security for motorcyclists," he shares.

The Motto Vest recently won an award at the Shell Tameer Awards 2022, held to encourage and support young entrepreneurs. It has also been the winner of Microsoft Imagine Cup 2021, Startup Early Competition 2021, selected for Misk Launchpad KSA 2021 and the winner of Technopreneurship Competition.

Zeeshan believes that if the Motto Vest is made accessible, it can help reduce fatal accidents. "Motorcyclists risk their lives just to deliver us food and goods on time," he says. "So it's our responsibility to support them and add value to their life as they remain 10 to 12 hours on the roads daily, just to facilitate us."

According to the 2019 WHO report, 53% accidents caused significant injuries that become lifetime disabilities. "Based on product testing results, the Motto Vest can decrease the chance of death and injuries by 8% in accidents," says Zeeshan. "And if we can achieve this, we will be able to save many lives."

#### Collective steps to be taken

It is imperative that the authorities and the public should make a collective effort to enforce motorcycle safety.

Since the head is the most vulnerable and a common injury site, helmets must be worn to prevent injuries. Regular maintenance of motorcycles should be done and a valid fitness certificate deemed roadworthy. Motorcyclists should turn corners slowly and pick up speed only when they are assured of unobstructed vision. Using front disk brakes to enable the life-saving hack of "trail braking" helps to use the front brakes before swapping it for throttle, and adds the much-needed balance by distributing the motorbike's weight forward.

Traffic rule awareness is a must, also so as not to endanger others. Surprise checking of driving licenses is important as are uniform, transparent and compulsory driving tests for obtaining a driving license. Over-speeding practices should be discouraged through speed breakers, speed cameras should be implemented, and motorcycle modifications that compromise on safety should be strictly prohibited.

\*name changed to protect identity



happened when the motorbike was speeding over 50km/h. Most likely, when a vehicle ahead of the idling motorcyclist suddenly turns at an intersection, the driver may fail to notice the biker, misjudge his speed or be fooled by a blind spot. Unable to stop, he collides with a car. The report shows that most were (31.77%) motorbike-car collisions.

Ahmer shares that an eye witness of his brother's accident saw the motorbike descend the bridge at high speed, and could not stop despite using both rear and front brakes.

Unfit and insecure

The motorbikes seen on the roads in Pakistan are usually not well maintained, and some gears or parts can malfunction any time. But as there is no rule or vehicle fitness regulation, motorcyclists pay little attention to maintaining their vehicles. When the motorbike chain suddenly breaks, an accident happens. Road accidents due to mechanical faults may not cause too many injuries, but as these occur without prior notice or alarm, the vehicles following behind cannot help but collide, which may result in death, as in Ahmed's case.

#### Inexperienced/underage motorcyclists

A lot of underage motorcyclists don't follow traffic rules. These speed-loving, inexperienced and

never went at high speed, but this time, he was with his class fellow, and even after 30 minutes, I didn't receive his text. I called him but there was no response initially. Then a man picked up and informed me that there had been an accident and Abdullah was being taken to hospital."

Abdullah's family had no idea they would lose their son like this. They now feel as though he would still have been alive if they hadn't bought him the motorbike. "It had only been a month since we got him the motorbike," says Safia. "We shouldn't have bought it for him. I request all parents not to get their children motorbikes before the legal age and without safety gear."

#### Innovative safety gear

While the government is making



# SCAM BY COMMITTEE: BEWARE WHO YOU TRUST ONLINE

Many people underestimate the risk sharing bank details and other personal information online poses. In just one recent shocking case, a woman pulled off a Rs420 million scam under pretext of collecting ‘committee’ online

By YUSRA SALIM

With the ever-increasing inflation and the country suffering from a very difficult financial situation, impact on the common people isn't an alien concept. Every now and then, we hear news of people committing suicide due to lack of financial resources. At the time when earning each penny is getting harder, just imagine if you lose that hard-earned money to a scam. What needs to be understood is how anyone gets away with such a fraud, and what the options are for people who lose their money.

In a country where cons and corruption of political figures are very common, we also see internet-based scams. Many people are still unaware that sharing any information online could result in them losing their money from their bank accounts. A case that has recently shocked people is that of a woman who in the name of “committee” pulled off a 420-million-rupee scam. Her name is Sidra Humaid. She runs two online businesses, one of food and another of crochet.

In 2013, Humaid started involving people in a committee—a regular gathering of women and men in which each member contributes money to a central pool, and lots are drawn to decide which member will get the entire sum—and many of her friends, friends of friends, neighbours, and later online friends started responding to her proposal to save money. Initially, the amount was as low as fifty rupees a month; the total amount to be received was 5,000 in some setups. Her idea became a hit, and she started a whole set up, going from one committee to 117 committees, working simultaneously.

Humaid, as one victim of her scam says, comes from a middle-class family. Her husband had a good job, but in the last few years, her lifestyle was greatly upgraded—from having expensive phones to high-end branded clothes and shoes. That concerned a few of her committee members who knew her personally, but they always thought that the reason for the change could have been her businesses doing working well or her husband earning a great deal of money. No one could have imagined that Humaid was stealing the committee money.

**What is a committee?**

A well-known practice in the sub-continent, a committee is a group of people willingly setting an amount to be collected each month and one member getting the whole amount. It is a synchronized system in which monthly turns are decided beforehand, sometimes according to a person's special request to be paid that month. A balloting takes place in which one person is picked. Because of the whole thing being based on trust, a committee is mostly comprised of family members, neighbours, and friends.

**Legal options of victims of committee scams**

As there is no legal contract or a law regarding a committee set-up, victims don't have many options. Financial frauds can be dealt with through proper channels though. Many of the victims knew Humaid personally and where she lived. After her public announcement, they started approaching her and even visited her house that she abandoned immediately after issuing an apology. Humaid has also registered a case in the court, saying that she would only handle the matter through court and

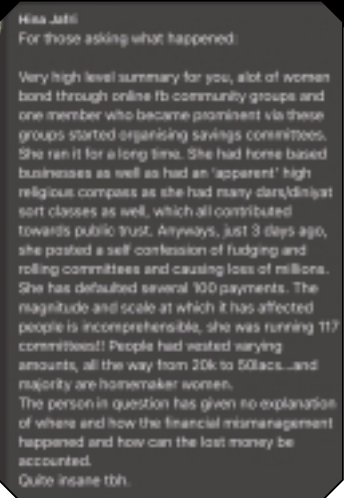
would not return any money to anyone outside court.

In her statement, Humaid said that in spite of her repeated verbal declarations that they were adjusting their accounts to make payments to everyone they were legally liable to pay, they were still facing threats and had people constantly visiting their home. They had to relocate for protection of their family. Furthermore, they had approached a court of law through their advocate, Kamran Alam, for their protection orders, which they shared in the statement. In her social media post,

of rupees, in the name of committees. The stories didn't contain big amounts at first, but last week, Humaid posted on her Facebook profile a public apology. That she had gone bankrupt and couldn't pay back the people from whom she had been receiving money in her various committees. As soon as the apology was posted, stories of big amounts started coming in. That is when people realized that the total amount was not just a few millions but a very huge sum.

**Online trust**

It was not that people blindly trusted



Humaid has asked her friends and loved ones to pray for her during this tough time. Her message to the ones she owes money to is that she is not running away but she would need time to pay. Right now, she doesn't have any timeline of when she would be able to pay, but she has assured, in her post, that she will pay everyone in a few years.

In her apology, Humaid also mentioned that she had already started receiving threatening calls and messages from people trying to harm her or take legal action against her. “I am trying to calm them down, but I understand it's their money and they have the right to be angry, but I just want people to understand that I am in no position right now to pay, and all I want is some time to adjust my financial conditions so that I can make better decisions from now on and pay them off as soon as I can. I am reaching out to the world not because I want people to sympathize with me but because I am seeking ways of how to pay off my loans,” she said.

Humaid also suggested that members should continue the committees so that other people can keep getting money. She said that her family did not own any properties or assets that they could sell. “We live in a rented apartment, and even if I sell off my household items, I would not be able to pay any substantial amount. Therefore, I would request you all for any other solution, if you can help me in making any strategy to solve this issue.

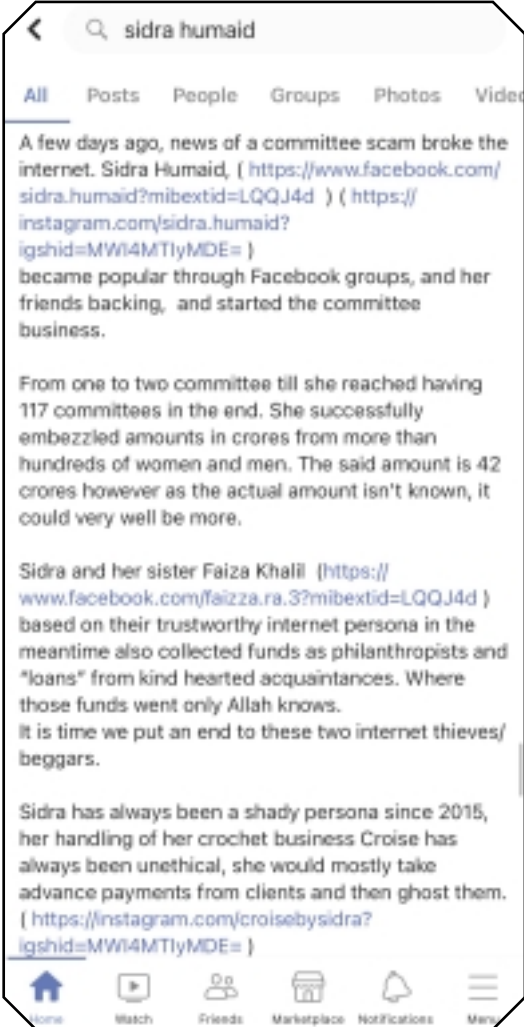
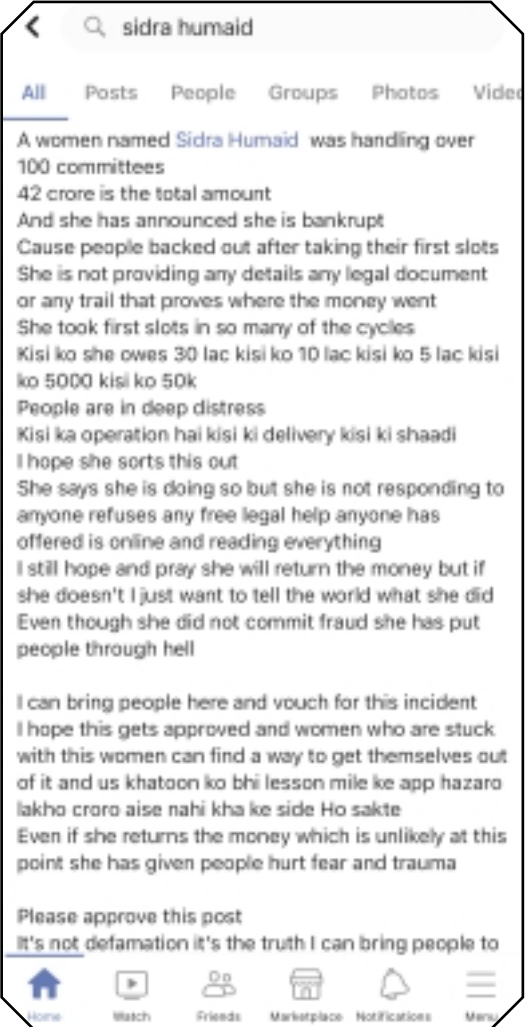
“No doubt, committee is a good genuine way of solving your financial issues, but I would like to warn everyone who is involved that this can lead to an amount mounting up, and you eventually get stuck in a vicious cycle. The committee amount that I was receiving was practically just being reinvested/utilized to pay off my other committees, and I never had the chance to use that money for any of my personal use. I am now in a position where I have a lot of debt on me against an amount of money that I never used for myself but rather used to pay off other committees.

“I understand that I have made a grave mistake, and I take full responsibility for it. I am not running away or hiding; you can always contact me on my number, and I am here till I pay the last rupee that I owe. However, I would need the support of my loved ones during these trying conditions. Through this public apology, I am not trying to find an easy way out; I am just accepting my mistake, and I am looking for solutions on how to get myself out of this.”

**Disowning Sidra**

Many influencers and bloggers who recommended Sidra Humaid on groups or had a personal good experience with her now feel used and saddened, and how, inadvertently, they played their part in a scam. “I have known her for six years; all my transactions with her were smooth, and that is why I recommended her to other people. But Sidra misused her power and bought expensive stuff and spent money on travelling,” influencer Mehak Ali said.

Many people posted on their profiles that they recommended Sidra Humaid's committee because they never had any issues in the earlier years, but how it had ended was something no one could have imagined.



she also attached a copy of the complaint.

Victims who have suffered immense losses do not have any option other than approaching a court. Umair Ahmed, one of her victims, says that Humaid has not denied that she owes them money but because of the huge size of the amount, she will not be able to pay them back. He adds that she has announced bankruptcy.

Humaid posted on social media: “I have started updating the list of people whom I need to pay and from whom I need to receive the amount. As there are a lot of members, we have, therefore, hired an accountant to do the reconciliation. Kindly allow us four-five days to get that sorted out. We have already started paying out members whose amounts were reconciled, and we will continue to make payments in the coming days. I have not run away anywhere, and my family and I are working on making the payments. Please note that everyone will be paid in the coming months. Please guys don't panic. Your money will be returned in the coming months.”

Many complaints were lodged for non-payment after that one week-old post.

**The beginning**

A few days ago, many women started posting on their social media profiles and different groups that a woman owed them thousands, in some cases, hundreds of thousands

Humaid with their money. She built trust over the years through friends and neighbours. Even some bloggers and influencers promoted her and recommended her to several groups. Also, it was not just women who were sending her money but also several men who got connected through different groups.

A committee works with a plan in which the surety to get a specific amount of money is given, money that could be used to buy things that are needed. For example, if someone is planning to buy a car or a family wedding is around the corner, the lump sum from committee savings is very helpful. It saves the hassle of getting a loan and paying it back with interest.

Sidra Humaid started doing committees years ago. Some of her relatives affected by her scams shared their agony that her committee payments were smooth and always on time when she started in 2013, but that could be because those amounts and members were fewer.

**What went wrong?**

Victims in their several posts and meetings said that initially when they started with Humaid it was all good. People were getting their payments on time and didn't have any complaints. With time, they trusted her more, and started investing more money in more committees. The main reason behind what happened is Humaid's extravagant spending that later converted into ill

intent. Humaid's crochet and food businesses could not earn millions, and over the years her lifestyle raised many red flags.

“Her lifestyle was a little short of the loaded elite, while she is a crochet maker and sells lasagna, and her husband is a freelancer at Upwork—not making millions in any way,” another victim said. Humaid's downfall started when she announced that one committee didn't have the required number of members; she was looking for ten members but six registered, so she created four ghost members. She used to take the first slot of each committee herself and allotted the top five committees to ghost accounts. That is how she would give a major amount to herself in the beginning. The problem started when she had to pay the real members. To resolve that issue, she started another committee, took starting slots again, and paid back the previous ones.

The cycle continued. Each time the amount of committee would be bigger to cover the last committee and pay the original members. “All that just kept adding to the number of committees, more and more ghost members, and more and more money going in her own pocket,” one of the victims said. To complete the initial deficit, for example, of ten thousand, she started a twenty thousand committee, and to cover twenty thousand, she went to fifty thousand. It went so far that eventually, there were 117 committees with the largest one

with 400,000 a month with a payout of four million rupees.

Many members are quoting the total amount to be as huge as 420 million rupees but Humaid denies that in her public posts. She has also posted about a few members who she claims have been paid completely, but discrepancies in terms of money and names have been reported on those as well.

Initially, people didn't speak up, thinking they were the only ones who were waiting for their money, but once two-three people posted stories, the news of the scam spread like wildfire. Victim after victim, story after story, it was sad, ugly, horrific. “People who lost their money are in a state of misery. Many people plan their lives according to a committee set up; weddings were planned, some had surgeries, and some had other important things lined up, but now we all have to wait,” shared Areeba Ali who has lost her money in Humaid's committees.

**The next step**

At first, victims are not just shocked but hopeless as well. The idea of trusting the internet has been terrible for them. They have to inform their families and figure out how to manage things that they planned to do with their committee money. Most of them just want to verbally pressurize Humaid and her family to pay them back; they don't want to take any legal action as that would require a lawyer, time, and effort. They also feel that nothing concrete would come out of it. There are also members who are waiting for someone else to sue her so that they could get their money at the end of the court case.

“Sidra never denied that she owes me money, but she is clear that she can't pay right now. I don't know what that means, and I can't figure out what to do,” said Azra Aftab. Humaid has started giving back people's money but it is just a drop in the ocean. Hundreds of people with substantially high amounts were part of bigger committee groups, and their money is still stuck.

**Sidra Humaid's response**

Despite several attempts, Sidra Humaid did not respond to the queries by the Express Tribune, but her public announcement clearly states what went wrong. “I have really messed up my committees, and now I am practically bankrupt and have no means to pay off my committees. I started off with small committees, and it worked well for me, but as it grew and I opened more committees to help my friends and loved ones with their difficulties, I found myself in trouble of paying more and more money each month. To solve the monthly payment issue, I had to start more committees, and that eventually resulted in a rolling loop that had no end. Now I have to pay so much money that I cannot even calculate.”



# Climate justice landmark or empty promises?

COVER \ DESIGN BY : IBRAHIM YAHYA

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### Reparations and practicalities

Even if rich nations were willing, Dr Wizarat questioned the sustainability of a loss and damage fund. “The funds will never be sufficient for the damage being caused by climate change,” she said. “They will not be able to dish out billions of dollars after every disaster. Financially, they will not be able to cope with the pace at which natural disasters are unfolding.”

Retired senior Pakistani diplomat and a former high-ranking UN official Shafqat Kakakhel agreed with Dr Wizarat’s opinion. “It is highly unlikely that developed countries will accept funding arrangements that will be sufficient in responding to the needs of developing countries hit hard by climate induced extreme events and other negative effects of climate change,” he said. “For example, the total losses and damage inflicted by this year’s floods that have ravaged Pakistan are estimated at a being over US\$30 billion. Which funding window will make this colossal amount available to us to undo the consequences of the floods?”

Kakakhel added that the effectiveness of the proposed loss and damage fund will very much depend on the operational requirements to be adopted by COP 28 hosted by UAE next year. “Developing countries represented in the Transitional Committee entrusted with making recommendations on the operationalisation such as the sources and quantum of funds and the rules and regulations for approval of funds have to fight hard to ensure their interests,” he said. “For instance, the international community has established an Adaptation Fund but developed countries have not generously contributed to it. Although agreed inter-governmentally, the rules for securing money from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) are so complex and cumbersome that the GCF Board cannot approve projects requiring substantial amounts of money.”

“That is why one of the demands of developing countries in respect of loss and damage funding arrangements was that the rules for disbursement of funds should be simple and user-friendly for the victims of climate related loss and damage,” he explained.

### ‘Graveyard of broken promises’

Discussing the COP platform, Dr Najam told *The Express Tribune* that he did not expect much to happen between this year’s huddle and the next climate change conference. “I apologise for sounding like a cynic, but I have been studying climate negotiations closely for three decades. Why should I expect more to happen between COP 28 and COP 27 than happened between 26 and 27, or 25 and 26, or 24 and 25,” he said.

“Climate COPs have been a graveyard of broken promises, false slogans, and shattered hopes,” the Boston-based professor shared, adding that they have lost most of their utility beyond being “a jamboree, a mela, a global gathering to renew vows.” According to him, while such gatherings have some value in raising attention, they have abjectly failed in triggering meaningful action or in mobilising meaningful resources. “I hope and pray that I am wrong in this and the next COP will be different; but, frankly, I am not holding my breath.”

Dr Swain, asked his opinion on whether he expected any changes before the next COP summit in Dubai, shared Dr Najam’s pessimism. “I reiterate that the climate justice discussion is absolutely right, but how practical is it? That’s what is important. I mean do we really expect the West to pay for whatever environmental damages will take place in the Global South due to climate change? I doubt it very seriously. It’s absolutely impractical to have such expectations and does not serve any purpose. It will remain a pipe dream,” he said.

That said, Dr Swain urged developing countries to put more pressure on the Global North. “They need to coalesce and mount pressure on the North to cut down their emissions rather than seeking paltry financial assistance to deal with the consequences of climate change,” he stressed. He pointed out that the rise of populist leaders in Europe and other parts of the world has resulted in this trend of walking away from cutting emissions. “That’s what the Global South should be focused on – bringing the big polluters back to their commitment to reduce emissions.”

At the same time, the Global South, which bears the brunt of climate change, needs to take concrete measures to prepare, said Dr Swain. “While countries in the Global North have a plan to deal with climate



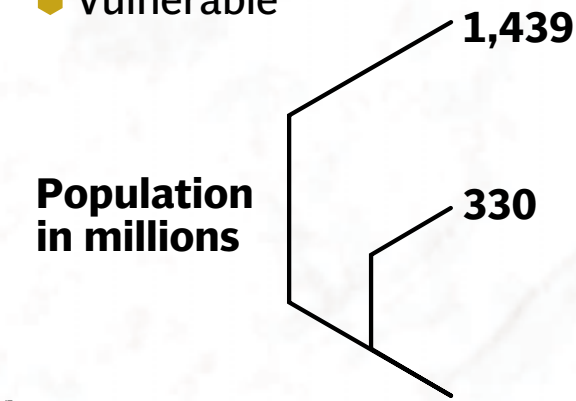
“ The establishment of loss & damage fund at the UN climate summit is the first pivotal step toward the goal of climate justice

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

## Exposure to climate change

Degree of exposure ranges from insulated to vulnerable

- Insulated
- Precarious
- Vulnerable



### NORTH AMERICA



### EUROPE

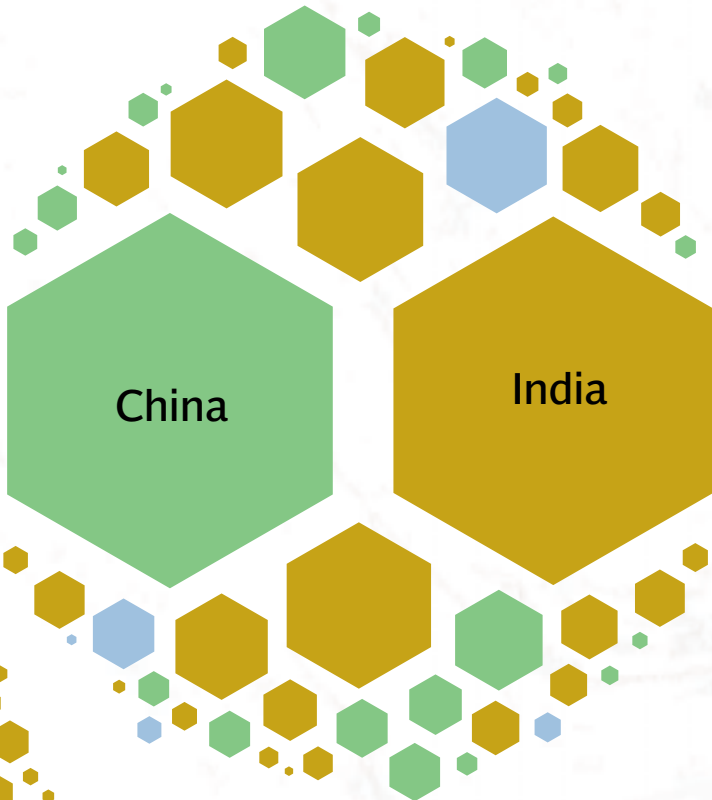


### LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN



### AFRICA

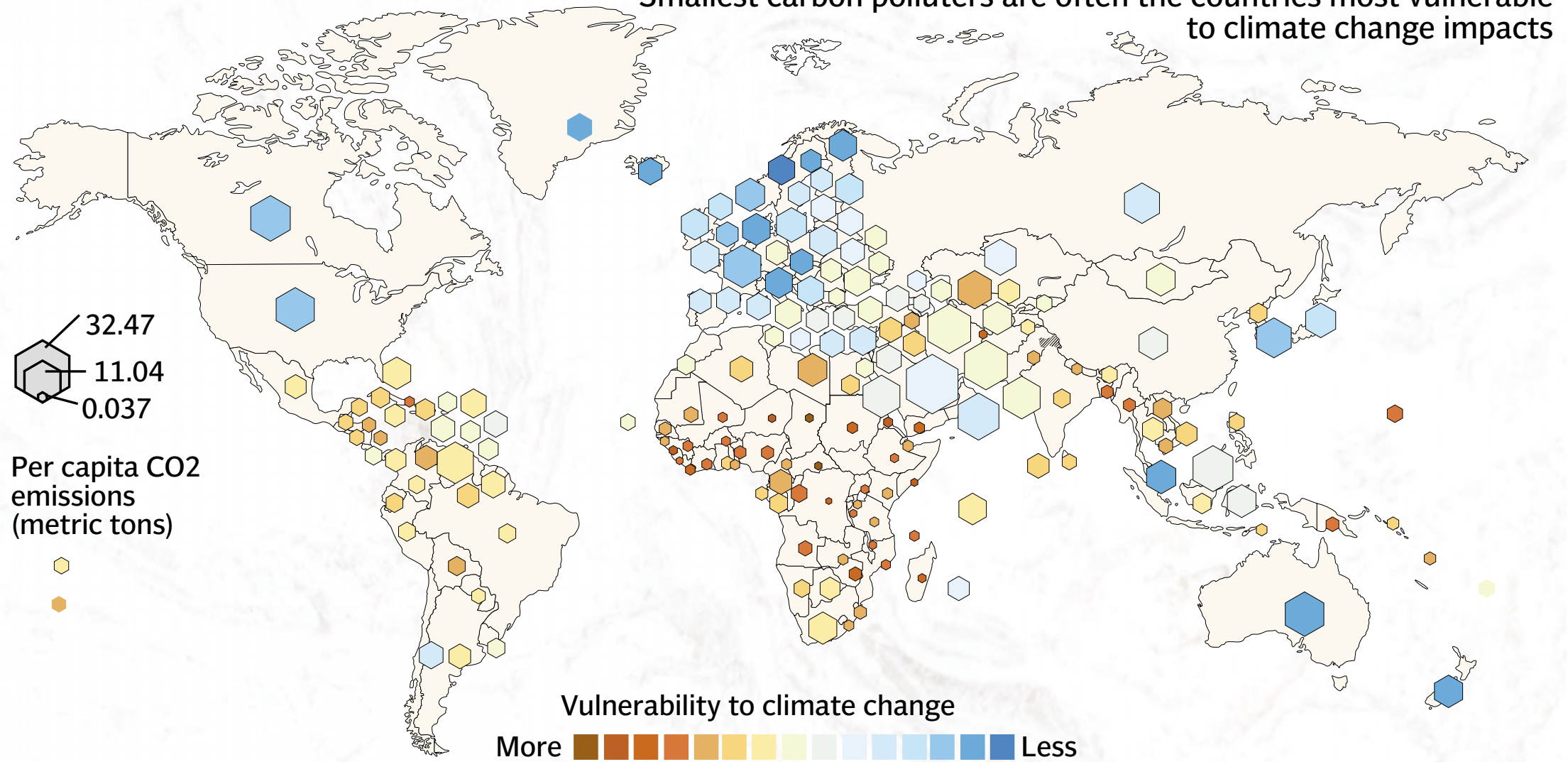
### ASIA



### OCEANIA

# The inequalities of climate change

Smallest carbon polluters are often the countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts



“Humanity faces a stark choice between working together or collective suicide in the battle against global warming

UN chief Antonio Guterres

change, they are adapting, the South is always taken by surprise and unprepared.”

Stressing that prevention is the key in the climate crisis, Dr Swain advised framing climate security issues as national security concerns. “Unless climate security remains the number one national security issue, it won’t be prioritised by the political leaders,” he said. “In the Global South we are not even hearing about climate change during election campaigns. If such an important issue does not make it to the election debate in European countries, then how do you think leaders will make the hard calls to address this global crisis?”

**To celebrate or not to celebrate**

Within Pakistan, many have seen the inclusion of the loss and development fund commitment in the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan as something to celebrate. Partly due to this year’s devastating floods that illustrated in stark detail the dangers of climate change and partly due Pakistan’s role as leader of the G77+China bloc that won the agreement, the development has been hailed as a major victory for the country.

“The establishment of loss & damage fund at the UN climate summit is the first pivotal step toward the goal of climate justice,” Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in a Twitter post following its announcement. “It is up to the transitional committee to build on the historic development,” he added while applauding Climate Minister Sherry Rehman. In a tweet a month earlier, PM Shehbaz had stressed, “What happened in Pakistan will not stay in Pakistan,” while appealing for urgent action to help the country tackle the devastation wrought by monsoon rains.

Addressing the concluding plenary of COP 27, Sherry Rehman called

the loss and damage fund “the down payment in our joined futures and investment in our coming generations.” She insisted that the fund’s establishment was not about dispensing charity but rather ‘an investment in our joint future’. Foreign Minister and the head of her party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari too hailed the fund agreement as a ‘major win’ for Pakistan and the rest of the developing world.

Elaborating on the celebration, Ambassador Kakakhel said the agreement was significant for Pakistan because such arrangements had been demanded by small island states since the negotiations on climate change began in 1991 and later supported by the least developed countries and all developing countries at COP 26. “It’s also significant because Pakistan itself is highly vulnerable to the loss and damage effects of climate change. And, of course, it is significant as a global compact fulfilling the imperative of climate justice.”

Dr Najam, however, warned that that it would be a mistake for Pakistan to count on any promised fund while arguing that the country also needed to introspect and act on its own climate rhetoric. “If Pakistan’s slogan abroad was that ‘What happens in Pakistan will not stay in Pakistan’ then our slogan at home must be ‘What happens in Pakistan can be made more bearable by what Pakistan does in Pakistan,’” he said.

Agreeing that Pakistan must continue to ask for climate justice internationally because the contributions of most Pakistanis to causing this crisis are minuscule, the Boston-based professor said that the country’s calls for climate justice abroad would have very little moral legitimacy if we were also not working towards climate justice at home. “Yes, most Pakistanis have had very little to do with causing the climate crisis, but the rich in Pakistan have emissions very similar, sometimes worse, than those of the rich elsewhere,” he pointed out.

## Climate change: the impact on humanity

Extreme events, heat waves and catastrophic floods are among the consequences of global warming



EXTREME WEATHER

FOOD AND WATER

OTHER IMPACTS

DISEASE

**Severe heat**  
1.7b more people exposed, and 420m people subjected to heat waves, with global warming of 1.5 °C to 2 °C

**Deadly heat**  
Hundreds of millions of city dwellers in sub-Saharan Africa and South/Southeast Asia affected by atleast 30 days of “deadly heat” per yera by 2080

**Flood displacement**  
2.7m people displaced annually in the future

**Flooding**  
At 1.5°C warming, 100-200% increase in population affected by floods for Colombia, Brazil and Argentina, 300% for Ecuador, 400% for Peru

**Water scarcity due to severe droughts**  
At 2°C Warming, Over 400m more people living in urban areas exposed

**Vector-borne diseases**  
Half the world’s population at risk of dengue, yellow fever and Zika virus by 2050

**Internal migration**  
Six-fold increase between 2020 and 2050

**Water stress**  
At 2.7 °C warning: 122m people affected in Mesoamerica 28m in Brazil 31m in rest of South America

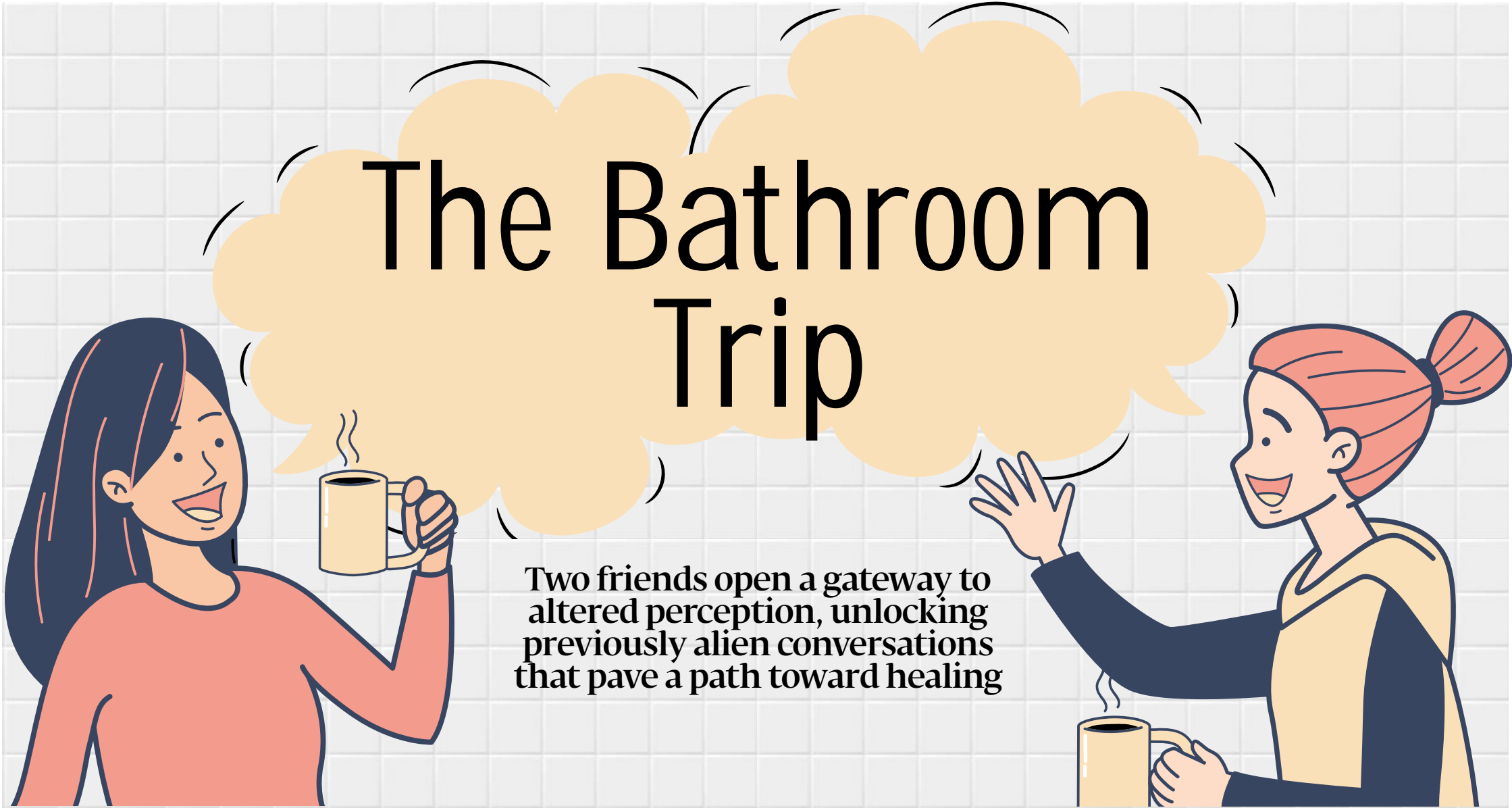
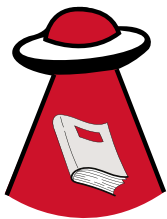
**Hunger**  
Between 8 and 80m more people at risk by 2050

**Crop production**  
4-10% drop globally in last 30 years

**Marine fisheries**  
40-70% drop in catch potential for tropical regions under high emissions

**Humanitarian assistance**  
Around 166m people in Africa and Central America Needed aid (2015-2019) due to climate-related food emergencies

**Wild fish populations**  
4.1% drop in maximum sustainable yield between 1930 and 2010, some regions at 15-35% losses



By SAJEER SHAIKH

The late hours of a November night were pregnant with anticipation. An invitation to a perception-altering gateway awaited Maryam and Esha, with Esha's hesitation towards it being the only hurdle in the way.

"I promise you, nothing bad will happen," said Maryam confidently, with a glimmer in her eye.

'How legitimate is this...uh, ritual?' asked Esha, her scepticism bubbling on her countenance.

"It's just for fun!" exclaimed Maryam. "Look, you make this tea with the ingredients from this recipe I found, wait for the tea to steep for about fifteen minutes, and then begins the uh...adventure. We can even contact spirits, and -"

'WHAT makes you think I want spirits lurking around in my room?' asked an annoyed Esha. 'And where did you find this sketchy recipe?'

"There's this influencer I follow - she's super into this stuff. But she promised it changed her whole outlook on life. What do you even have to lose, Esha?"

'My sanity, for one - something you don't seem too concerned about, Maryam.'

Maryam rolled her eyes. She could not let Esha know that she had already tried the recipe beforehand, and it had worked. The setting had been different, though.

When packing for a trip up north, Maryam had chucked the perfectly legal ingredients in her backpack, to make a concoction for which laws seemed to be hazy on. What ensued next, upon the consumption of this fascinating cocktail, was between her and the mountains.

She knew she could not replicate the journey she had been on, but a part of her wanted to try. Chasing that high, she decided that the best place to do this would be somewhere safe and with someone who was the embodiment of a safe space as well - her best friend, Esha.

"Look," Maryam said, slightly exasperated. "I won't pressurise you into doing this. It won't work that way. All I can do is ensure you that we're safe, and that it will be worth your while. Besides, the recipe gives you ways to exit the trip."

'Trip?' came the panicked response. 'Define trip?'

"It's supposed to be an out-of-body, trippy experience of sorts."

'Maryam, are you literally asking me to do drugs with my parents five footsteps away?'

"No, no. Not drugs. Natural ingredients. I promise, it's nothing shady."

As Esha contemplated what the right thing to do would be, she quietly examined Maryam. Maryam was known to be chaotic. She could be impulsive and irrational, and more often than not, she made decisions she later regretted. That's what made Esha believe this could, perhaps, work. There was no regret in Maryam's eyes. Only excitement. That conversation had piqued Esha's interest.

What had Maryam seen?

'If this is going to work, you're going to have to be honest with me every step of the way,' said Esha hesitantly. 'Walk me

through the process.'

As Maryam explained what they'd need to make what essentially sounded like a perfectly harmless herbal tea, Esha began to relax.

She liked tea. Tea sounded safe. Her friend, though, sounded a tad bit unhinged as she walked her through certain drawings that she referred to as 'sigils', and Esha wondered if Maryam was using this as a distraction. Regardless, it's not like Esha could have articulated that. As chaotic as Maryam was, she was a self-contained implosion. She made messes, but she cleaned them up herself.

'We're not doing this in my room, though,' said Esha, as Maryam finished explaining the whole nine yards of preparation. 'I don't want us getting out of control and breaking something. Or



## She knew she could not replicate the journey she had been on, but a part of her wanted to try. Chasing that high, she decided that the best place to do this would be somewhere safe

making a mess, either. We can do this in my bathroom.'

"We will quite literally pass away from the heat," retorted Maryam, irritated at all the conditions Esha was laying down.

'It's the middle of winter,' replied Esha, half-amused, half-irked. 'You're wearing a shawl, and we don't even have the fan on right now.'

Maryam glanced at her phone. It was already past one in the morning. Time was slipping away, and she wanted to get in a few hours of sleep after the trip. She caved, rushing to the kitchen to whip up two cups of tea.

She brought the steaming cups to the bathroom and handed one to Esha as both the girls settled on the bathroom floor. Esha was already slouching down and leaning back comfortably on her rug which was shaped like a dog. She peered into the cups and was disappointed at its meagre contents.

'Is...this it?' asked a confused Esha. 'I was expecting more.'

"Well, this is safe. I want to start small and see where it goes."

'See where it goes? What do you mea-'

"Cheers!"

And with that, Maryam had quickly gulped down her tea, wincing as the hot liquid burned her throat on its way down. She loved to be dramatic, but even flair comes at a cost.

Esha shook her head and carefully sipped her tea. She could feel the weight of nagging worry bubbling over, and she took a few deep breaths to calm herself down.

"Do you want to watch some videos?" asked Maryam.

Esha looked at her with a puzzled expression.

"We're just going to watch videos on our phones?" she asked. "That's what we do every time you come over. Why did you hype this up?"

Maryam smiled. "Why don't you wait, and

watch videos with me?"

Esha watched as Maryam opened YouTube on her phone, and pulled up videos of white people getting sloshed while playing drinking games. Esha wondered if she should protest, but decided to go along with whatever Maryam said for now. Afterall, the whole process being uneventful was a much better outcome than her not knowing what would happen next. The hint of worry that she had been feeling earlier slowly left her as the video began to calm her down.

About fifteen minutes in, Esha was giggling, regardless of what video they watched. Maryam looked at her, and it provoked Esha further, with her bursting into snorts of laughter. Maryam joined in, and the more they looked at each other, the more they laughed. Soon their eyes

were tearing up from mirth.

'Why am I so happy?' a euphoric Esha asked, through short bursts of laughter.

"Look at the stupid panda," Maryam said in return, pointing to the phone screen. "It just keeps falling."

A loud eruption of laughter ensued, and as the two young girls struggled to catch their breath. Esha leaned back on the rug again, with Maryam leaning back against a bathroom wall.

'I wish I was a panda,' said Esha.

'Yeah, why is that?' asked Maryam.

'Man, if I were a panda, I wouldn't have to worry about the future, you know? Grades, tests, submitting my university applications - I'm so over it.'

"And, if you're a panda in the zoo, you're taken care of, fed, and people come and look at you, thinking you're cute."

'Yeah, true - but then you're away from your family. I don't want to be away from my family.'

"I'd give anything to be away from mine."

'I don't know, we have very different relationships with our families. But - do you ever stop, and think about your parents getting old?'

Maryam, the oldest of her siblings and who had shared a tumultuous relationship with her parents, did thought about this plenty of times. Despite being married, she lived with her family on weekdays. Her younger siblings had left the country to study - something she still felt bitter about. Her parents had never given her that option, and she had never forgiven them for it.

There were a lot of things she had not forgiven her parents for, but as she watched them age - growing sadder, more fatigued with age, less concerned with what she did, and more forgetful - she found herself in a strange limbo between resentment and empathy.

"I think about it. I mean, I see it every day that I'm there."

'I would be devastated if anything happened to my parents.'

"I would too, but it's more complicated than that."

'What do you mean?'

Maryam sighed. She had often thought about discussing this with Esha but she didn't know why she had always hesitated and held back in the past.

"It's not always been easy with them, you know? They made a lot of decisions for me that held me back. They basically treated me as an experiment when I was growing up. When I was younger I would even wish..."

Maryam trailed off and stared into her empty cup.

"You know what bothers me?" she continued. "Shah Rukh Khan aging. I can't live in a world where he doesn't exist anymore."

Esha laughed. "Let's play some SRK music, ok?" asked Esha, grabbing her phone to open Spotify. As she pressed play on Mitwa, she let out a soft, "Woah."

'What?' inquired Maryam.

'My phone is...uh, I don't know. It's...coming alive? Like, it's breathing?'

Maryam looked at her own phone. Surely enough, the alphabets, numbers, and artwork danced in place ever-so-slightly, in quick shimmies.

"That's normal, don't worry," said Maryam.

'I'm not worried, I feel pretty calm actually,' replied Esha, with dilated eyes that seemed ready to find solace as she snuggled further down onto her rug. The shaggy fur seemed to be even more comforting right now.

"You know what bothers me about Shah Rukh Khan eventually kicking it?" said an animated Maryam. "The fact that he will never know how much I love him."

'How much we love him,' corrected Esha.

"Right, how much we love him. He'll never know that we've loved him since we were children. That we grew up on so many of his teachings, even if they made no sense."

'Yeah, he's done some problematic stuff.'

"Yeah, and we've been forgiving, have we not? And now, I'm watching him age, in this post-fame era of him simultaneously being a legend while putting out mediocre content, and I can't talk to him about it. He'll never know what he meant to me growing up. He'll never know that I imbibed his idea of love and made it a stencil against which I drew all my relationships. He'll never know how much the problematic stuff hurt. And, he'll never know that I love him to bits regardless, and I'd be shattered if anything happened to him."

Esha and Maryam quietly



## There were a lot of things she had not forgiven her parents for, but as she watched them age she found herself in a strange limbo between resentment and empathy

looked at each other for a few minutes. Both girls knew they were no longer talking about the Bollywood legend anymore. The air was heavy with heat, despite the fact that both the young women had goosebumps on their arms.

'You know,' began Esha, breaking the silence, 'I think, on some level, he knows. When you're someone who has that kind of power, you're aware of your influence, no? And you're probably aware of when you hurt someone, or make them feel unheard - telepathically, perhaps?'

Maryam looked at Esha, slightly frazzled.

"I obviously went off on a tangent, Esha."

'Let me finish, Maryam.'

An uneasiness settled in. Maryam and Esha had never spoken like this before. Esha always knew that Maryam shared an uncomfortable relationship with her parents, but she had never said anything to her about it before. She figured that if Maryam ever wanted to talk about it, she would do so herself. What she had not anticipated, in all her wildest worries about this 'trip' was having a difficult conversation.

"I, uh, yeah - I get what you're saying," said Maryam.

'If you could,' prodded Esha further, 'what would you say to him?'

Sighing deeply, Maryam grabbed her phone and began typing furiously. Esha, thinking she had offended her friend, leaned back and watched.

Five minutes passed. Spotify shuffled between different Shah Rukh Khan tracks.

Fifteen minutes passed. The Om Shanti Om soundtrack began in the background.

A grand total of twenty minutes later - as Rahat Fateh Ali Khan melodiously sang Jag Soona Soona Lagay, Maryam broke her silence.

"I wrote what I'd say to him. Can I read it out loud?"

Esha nodded.

"Hey, Shah Rukh. You don't know me - you could, but you don't - but I wanted to write this to you nonetheless. I think you're pretty great overall. Growing up, you were my North Star. I got my humor from you. I learned how to love - albeit problematically - from you. So much of what you taught me harmed me, but I loved you anyway. Even when things seemed one-sided - when other fans would get to meet you and take pictures with you where you were hugging them - I continued to love you."

"It always seemed like you had love to give to everyone but me. I adored you, but your characters always seemed to tell me I wasn't good enough. Like Anjali, in Kuch Kuch Hota Hai, you know? Like I had to cellularly change who I was to get affection."

"I love you, but I resent you as well."

"You were the cause of a lot of pain. I can't get into it, because this is not how I want to get into it; in a letter, that you will never read. I want us to talk, face-to-face, with you putting aside the fact that, in this equation, you're Shah Rukh Khan. I want us to converse as friends. I want you to apologise. I want you to know that your apology is too little too late."

"None of this takes away from the fact that if anything were to happen to you, it would break me. But it's too late, too awkward, too uncomfortable for me to tell you this. I wish you already knew. I wish you felt the same way."

"I love you, and sometimes, I'm angry that I do. But that's a conversation I will have with myself. I want us to talk, man. I'm begging you - time is running out. We need to talk. We need to hash this out so that I can hug you and tell you that all I've wanted my whole life is for you to love me back - for you to say it - and for you to understand that everything I do, despite the voices in my head that keep convincing me of my independence, I do it for you. I beg you -"

Maryam stopped abruptly, as vehement sobs escaped from deep inside her. Esha lurched forward, wrapping her arms around her chaotic, impulsive, irrational friend, empathy replacing all bouts of annoyance or concern.

'He loves you too, Maryam - I promise you,' consoled Esha. 'They love you.'

"Wouldn't kill them to say it," said Maryam, pulling back - snot covering her face - as she let out a slight laugh.

The two girls looked at each other, feeling safe in one another's arms, and the bathroom walls around them seem to be breathing in sync with their own synchronised heartbeats.

'This...was...enlightening,' said Esha. 'But I feel like I'm on a rollercoaster ride. Do you?'

"It's the tea - it'll wear off in a bit," responded Maryam. "Ten, fifteen minutes - tops."

'Do you want to watch some Shah Rukh Khan stuff?' inquired Esha.

Maryam grinned.

"I think I'm ready to put the Shah Rukh Khan matter to rest for now. In the best possible way. I feel lighter. Thanks, Esha."

'Hey, anything for a fellow SRK fan. What do you want to do?'

"We've got ten minutes before we'll be ready to crash. What do you suggest?"

'You know,' said Esha, 'We could talk about Sallu bhai. No analogies, just concerns. I mean, what is his deal? How is he still relevant in 2022?'

"I KNOW!" came Maryam's enthusiastic response.

As the two girls dove into a discussion about Salman Khan, the cold November night began making its way to morning. Shah Rukh Khan's Dard-e-Disco played ambiently as the warm rays of dawn broke up the bathroom trip, inviting Esha and Maryam to make their way to bed. As they did so, they felt the presence of a mutual acknowledgment of the fact that they had opened a gateway to possible, terrifyingly powerful healing, lingering behind them in the bathroom air.



# BEAUTY BEHIND BARBED WIRES

In Rumours of Spring, photojournalist and communications consultant Farah Bashir describes a young girl’s life in IIOJK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, who despite curfews, lockdowns, conflict, trauma, turmoil, disappearances, injuries, random home searches by troops, and accusations of being a terrorist, steals little bits of life however she can

By RIZWANA NAQVI

Often called Paradise on Earth, the Kashmir valley is known for its beauty. But since long, its beauty is marred by death and destruction, and fear among the residents prevents them from enjoying the scenic beauty of the place. The problems started in 1947 as India and Pakistan gained independence. As 77 per cent of the population of the Princely state of Kashmir in British India was Muslim, it was anticipated that it would accede to Pakistan, but that did not happen. Since then Kashmir has been a disputed territory with both India and Pakistan controlling parts of the valley.

To counter the separatist movements in the valley, the Indian government maintains a strong military presence there, especially since the end of the 1980s, when, disillusioned with lack of progress through the democratic process, militant organisations began to pop up in the region trying to resist Indian control. The insurgency gained momentum in the second half of 1989 as the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) intensified attacks on Indian spies and political collaborators.

Living in times of such strife is not easy; it’s more difficult for young adolescents who feel the tension but

their young minds are not strong enough to understand and accept all that is happening around them.

Farah Bashir, a former photojournalist with Reuters and now working as communications consultant, lived through the turmoil of insurgency in Kashmir in the 1980s and 90s. Her first book Rumours of Spring is an account of a childhood spent in a siege-like situation. The book details everyday fears and problems faced by the people living in town-down Srinagar, where curfews and crack-downs were a norm, and people were forced to live with the sound of guns, the sight of military convoys and soldiers everywhere, and the fear of death looming around, and how they made adjustments to cope with the situation.

Farah Bashir narrates how, with the troops and militants battling across the city, violence became the new normal, and how as a young schoolgirl she found ordinary tasks such as studying for exams, walking to the bus stop, falling asleep, punctuated with anxiety and fear. At the same time, she talks about the times when she felt resilient amidst the increasing trauma and turmoil of the passing years, and engaged in activities such as secretly dancing to pop songs on banned radio stations or writing her first love letter, etc.

The story starts with the death of Bashir’s paternal grandmother in 1994, and moves back and forth between 1994 and 1989. The funeral has to wait till the next day because of the night curfew — her father’s thoughts are about the problem of arranging curfew passes for the mourners and “What if they shoot someone?” as he decides to postpone the funeral till the next day. However, despite restrictions and curfew, relatives and friends arrive to offer their condolences.

As she sits by her grandmother’s body, unable to pray as she doesn’t want to say her final goodbye to her beloved grandmother, memories of the days spent in love, in fear, and in anticipation begin to fill her mind. She thinks of the times when life was normal, when they could easily go out without the fear of being stopped at the check-posts or having to rush before the night curfew. She recalls the Eid of 1989 when she happily went out with her sister for her first visit to the salon but on return gets to know that she was presumed dead by her family due to the rumour about the death of a 12-year-old girl, after which she “decided to never participate in the festivities again. ... I began associating inexplicable melancholy with Eid.”

She also recalls the times when you could move around your house without the fear of wood creaking under one’s steps. Now, even going to the toilet at night would evoke fear as the creaking stairs could lead to an army interrogation and perhaps even shooting a stray bullet. She recalls when a 74-year-old asthmatic neighbour flung open her bedroom window, with “the wooden planks jostling against each other and made some noise”, to catch a breath of fresh air but instead caught a stray bullet.

There’s an interesting account of her aunt stealthily saluting the night patrol, and admitting with guilt, “I thought next time there is a search operation or a shootout in the neighbourhood, the troops would show some mercy. Maybe they’d remember that someone from this house saluted them.” The aunt’s house had been burnt down when after a gun battle between militants and paramilitary forces, the troops had set fire to the site of the encounter. As the fire spread in the congested neighbourhood, the aunt’s house was gutted.

The author narrates how everything changed post 1989. The insurgency and militancy which resulted in the increased presence of Indian Army in the valley made Kashmir

one of the most militarised zones of the world. All these factors affected the day-to-day lives of the people of Kashmir and changed their lives. The author recalls how her grandmother used to hum wanwun, a Kashmiri song mostly sung at weddings, while she spun yarn skeins but stopped humming, saying, “wanwun belongs to the funeral of young men now, rather than weddings.” Her father who would normally sit relaxed against a large cushion, smoking his cigarette at leisure, while reading his newspapers, “began crouching as if always in a hurry and almost ready to get up.” Bashir herself, who after her sister’s wedding, had begun sketching — she would only sketch the backs of men and women as her grandmother objected to drawing faces — though continued making sketches, her pages “were taken over by drawings of guns, spoils of barbed wires and helmets of soldiers” and when she didn’t sketch “I pulled my hair out, sometimes stealthily, sometimes openly, without caring much about being scolded or inviting glances from everyone, especially Bobeh.”

Bashir creates poignant pictures with her words. The reader is transported to the location, and can feel the suffocation, the trauma, and the tension of living under the constant watch of the army. There’s a touching account of herself and her pregnant sister being stranded at a grocery shop and worrying about their parents, especially her father who was held up elsewhere due to a shootout, and mother who went looking for him. The words so powerfully sketch the fear Bashir and her sister experienced. At the same time, it brings out the humanity in the grocer who did not pull down the shutters of his shop completely despite the risk to his shop and staff.

When Bashir notices her young nephew being petrified of sounds, she wonders “if the fear had anything to do with the chaos and trauma that he must have absorbed in Hina’s belly on the day of the shootout near the grocer’s shop.” The child was born one and a half month after the incident at the grocer’s shop.

The sight of her cousin coming forward to lift the coffin of her grandmother to be carried out for burial, brings back memories of the funeral procession of Mirwaiz Maulvi Mohammed Farooq, the chief cleric

and political leader who had been shot dead in his house, as described by the same cousin who was “one of the survivors of the carnage that the funeral had been turned into.” The details of the carnage during the funeral procession explains the horror that people lived in. “The firing didn’t stop. The people were being killed and injured. Maulvi Sa’ab’s coffin shifted from the pallbearers in the front to the pallbearers behind them. ... It was tough to not stumble on the fallen, dead bodies before us. ... I don’t know how we managed to take Maulvi sa’ab amidst all that.”

Incidents in the state’s history, such as the siege of Hazratbal shrine in 1993, are interwoven with personal narrative. The siege that lasted around 40 days led to panic and despair among the people. Unsure of the outcome and uncertainty, “I lost the resolve to do well in my exams. What was the point? People were struggling to stay alive. How did my distinction matter? ... Our lives were controlled from somewhere else and the dreams that we dreamt were always at the mercy of someone else, someone occupying us, ruling us.”

She remembers her friends who had to leave quietly for security reasons, like many other rich families who had businesses outside the valley. “The militants did have some affluent families on their list of large sums of donation.” The kidnapping of Rubaiya Saeed, the daughter of the then Indian Home Minister Muf-ti Mohammad Sayeed, by Kashmiri separatist militants in Srinagar, was enough to spark fear and drive many to leave the valley. Rubaiya’s release was secured after the release of some jailed members of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) as per the kidnappers’ demand.

An incident where children played a prank on one of the child’s brothers by kidnapping him evokes memories of the games that they used

to play before 1989 and which had “disappeared from the streets, from our courtyards.” Instead of playing chuppan chuppai, hide and seek or lakad-lakad, “it was common to see children enact scenes of an encounter between the troops and the militants, or be busy making toy guns out of wooden planks and discarded wires.” Her sister’s words are worth noting: “what distinguishes them [children born in ‘post-Tehreek’ era] from the ones born before the active resistance movement is the lack of fear! That, and this envious ability to laugh at the fear in its face.”

A lot changed due to curfews, and the uncertainty it brought; a lot of adjustments had to be made, which were not always welcome. For instance, her mother who took pride in her elaborate recipes had to change her cooking style, to use less oil and more water to make each dish last longer. “Like so many aspects of our lives, mother’s kitchen too seemed unfamiliar. The way food tasted changed. ... I detested the new kind of watery curries.”

Sharing her experience of the conflict in Kashmir in the 1990s when bunkers, frisking, colluding with statist forces, and search and cordon operations were a new norm, the author describes what it means to live under military occupation, how it can lead to phobias and unhealthy habits, affect mental and physical wellness, and a general decrease in the quality of life.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Rumours of Spring is a book that one should read if they want to understand the everyday lives of the people of Kashmir under army control.

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## T Magazine’s picks



Binge this week:  
**FIFA Uncovered**



This four-part documentary film delves into the organisation’s origins and tracks some of its greatest crimes and misdeeds. FIFA Uncovered is thorough, and leaves no stone unturned as dozens of experts shed light on the complex history of the organisation, and the ways in which it was corrupted by money. Thoughtful and well-researched, but drags just a wee bit to sum up what football fans already know about FIFA’s corruption. Hardcore soccer fans will enjoy FIFA Uncovered but for the casual viewer, it might be too much of the same thing.



Listen this week:  
**Tumhara Pyar**



Retro vibes in the first lead-single from Bohemia’s Seventh Studio Album I am I.C.O.N (In Control Of Nothing). The catchy and melodious hook for this rap song has been taken from the late Bappi Lahiri’s timeless song Pyaar Chahiye Mujhe from Bollywood film Manokamna (1980). Music by the Canada-based music producer Deep Jandu who takes the track written by Bohemia to the next level. It has very watchable video too for which Bohemia used his family and some close friends, who seem to be enjoying the song as much as you will.



Watch this week:  
**The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special**



The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special Writer and director James Gunn has wrapped in a fun, festive plot for the space adventurers with Chris Pratt, Dave Bautista, Karen Gillan, Pom Klementieff, Vin Diesel, Bradley Cooper, Sean Gunn and Michael Rooker. Powered by many of Gunn’s signature traits such as comic riffing stretched to absurd lengths, cool music and bursts of ludicrous violence framed by genuinely touching emotion, The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special is a perfect fit for this bite-size format as you settle down for some light, family-friendly, superpowered weekend viewing.



Follow this week:  
**Hagerty**



This channel celebrates the joy of driving, the wonder of mechanical components, and the bond drivers share with their machines. The Hagerty team brings old engines to life. Check out stop-motion and time-lapse videos that represent tens of thousands of photos and hundreds of man-hours in an attempt to restore an internal combustion engine of a small-block Chevy V-8 engine out of a 1966 Chevelle, or the 1275-cc A-series engine out of a 1965 Austin Mini Cooper S. Vroooooom... if cars are your thing, this is your stop.



# HUNGRY, HOMELESS AND COLD

**Still without proper shelter, adequate food and medical support, millions of people in Sindh who lost their crops, homes and belongings in the catastrophic flood, now confront winter. While the provincial health minister sings a different tune, many believe that either the international and national donations were insufficient or the crisis was mismanaged**

By RAHMAT TUNIO

Saduri is cooking rice on a mud stove in a settlement of about sixty makeshift tents made by propping blankets, rallis, and charpoys together. Since the floods in August, this has been their home.

On the side of the Indus Highway as it passes through Naseerabad Tehsil of Qamber-Shahdadkot District. The 50-year-old tells her two children that food would be ready soon. Her husband also impatiently waits for the food to be served as it is the one meal Saduri's family will get for the day.

When her children cry because of hunger, Saduri finds it difficult to hold back her tears, because it reminds her of her home in the village before the catastrophic floods destroyed everything they had. Saduri's family and many others have now been in this situation for four months. Leaving her house damaged by monsoon rains and floods, they came to live in these difficult conditions beside the highway.

Some 737,000 houses were destroyed in the floods in Sindh, out of which one million houses were partially damaged, and about 2.9 million people became homeless. According to the Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, the loss in Sindh during the flood amounts to \$16 billion.

Not only Saduri's entire house, valuables, and personal belongings were washed away, she also lost her two younger children. They had high fever, while no food or medical treatment was available. Now she fears that in the winter cold, her other two children might become ill.

Saduri presses her palms to her eyes to stop her tears as she recalls how the merciless rain wouldn't stop and then the floodwater came and destroyed everything. Along the Indus Highway under the open sky, hundreds of people live in the same settlement as Saduri, as their villages are still flooded.

She stopped talking and stared into space. "As winter is here and we have no warm clothes," she says, "I am scared to go through the pain of seeing my children dying of illness again."

All the houses in the village have been destroyed and the crops

chawal [sweet rice]? We live in very difficult conditions, and I'm doing some odd daily-wage jobs to be able to have some money for survival."

Now the winter season has added to their woes. Since the government has not provided tents to all the displaced families, the majority has made their own makeshift shelters, with little or no protection against the winter cold.

and NGOs are inadequate. Also there is a shortage of medicines in government hospitals.

Saduri's husband, Mukhtiar Buriro, is a diabetic who has waited for four months now to return to the village as soon as the flood water recedes. In this time, his situation has deteriorated so much that the doctors of the medical relief camp have advised him to go to



Earlier the government of Sindh had announced that complete assistance will be provided to the flood victims, along with rationing of essential items. This has been consistently followed by announcements and speeches about their successful rehabilitation. But in reality, the situation in the flood-hit areas is quite different.

According to the flood victims, they receive a ration package only once a month, which does not last more than two days. "How can our family of seven people share one blanket provided to us?" asks Khoso. "The nights are getting pretty cold and the elderly and children need more warmth. We are disappointed and shouting for help but in vain."

Mohammad Ismail Chandio, 45, is worried about his small children falling ill in the cold weather. "A lot of children in the camp are sick because they have no warm clothes or cover," he says. "Only two blankets were provided to us which are being shared by 10 people. Earlier, 10kg flour, 2kg sugar and rice were

Larkana hospital.

But Buriro says that in a situation where there is no certainty about two meals a day, they can hardly afford medical treatment. "Initially, the government helped with food rations but gradually we have become neglected and forgotten."

In Sindh, the Awami Workers Party and Women Democratic Front have distributed rations and set up more than 50 medical camps in various districts. "You can't provide food rations and medicine to just a few thousand people when there has been such a large-scale destruction," says Bakhshal Thallo, the secretary-general of the Awami Workers Party. "So far, we have managed to provide treatment to about 30,000 people. The majority of flood victims are still being forced to live in tents on the roads in the winter season, while the federal and provincial governments remain non-serious about their rehabilitation. On the other hand, not enough areas have been surveyed because some are still



a New York-based American reproductive health organisation, there are over 600,000 pregnant women in the flood-hit areas of Pakistan. Out of which 130,000 in Pakistan are in dire need of healthcare and treatment. Daily, 2000 women give birth in these unsafe conditions.

"There are 47,000 women in the relief camps in Sindh," says Azra Pechuho, the provincial health minister, quoting numbers that differ from the council's research. She does not say how many flood-affected pregnant women are living in self-help huts on the roads and paths of Lanai city of Relief Camp, Larkana.

Eight-month pregnant Afroze Khatoon Lashari, 44, lives in a relief camp in Naseerabad tehsil, Qambar-Shahdadkot district. She has two unwell infants. "I had a premature baby who is sick and weak because he is terribly malnourished," she says. "When we go to the hospital, they just give pills for the small baby instead of a syrup. X-ray facility is also not available."

Shaukat Tunio, an official of the People's Primary Healthcare Initiative, a partnership programme of the Government of Sindh, in tehsil Naseerabad, says that every day around 150 pregnant women come for medicine.

"For maternity issues, we refer them to Larkana hospital," he says. "Only basic medicines are provided here." But most of the flood-affected pregnant women of Naseerabad disagree with Tunio.

Abida Channa, leader of the Women's Democratic Front, is engaged in providing medicines and rations to flood-affected pregnant women. She says that Pechuho's numbers are incorrect and that the number of flood-affected pregnant women is much higher.

"Every day we go to different camps and see a large number of women who are pregnant and not at all well, as they do not have any official medical help. They have anaemia, shortness of breath and weakness, among other ailments."

Zulekhan Lashari, 48, feels pain and suffocation, has breathing problems and blood pressure issues but there is no medicine available

and she cannot afford treatment.

Fauzia is in the eighth month of her pregnancy and has been told by a visiting doctor that she has anaemia. "I haven't got any treatment yet because when I go to the government hospital, it is too crowded. So I just return home without seeing the doctor because I get fatigued quickly."

Dr Shahida Magsi, a professor at Sheikh Zayed Women's Hospital, Larkana, says that the floods have badly affected health facilities in small and big cities of Sindh, due to which we have a lot of congestion in this hospital. Health facilities in Ratodero, Dokri, and other cities are being restored after which the pressure here will be reduced.

Prior to the flood, it would take 30 minutes to reach the hospital but after the flood, it takes two to three hours to reach the hospital from surrounding villages. Because of the increased commute time, patients suffer even more and some pregnant women have arrived at the hospital with their uteri ruptured.

Four months have passed by since the floods and monsoon rains, but despite huge foreign funds and the entire country donating generously for flood affectees, the situation is the more or less the same in all the flood-affected districts of Sindh. They are homeless, and need food, shelter and rehabilitation, which is no way near completion.

Last week, the Awami Workers Party Sindh were planning a long March from Khairpur Nathan Shah to Larkana for the rehabilitation of flood victims from December 7 to December 11.

Meanwhile, seemingly oblivious of the sad situation of flood victims which is a stark reminder of the PPP slogan roti kapra aur makaan, cultural events are being fervently celebrated in urban Sindh, and press announcements and speeches by the authorities tell a different story.

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washed away. The water is still there so we cannot go back. We have forgotten what happiness is."

Arbab Khoso, 55, is a farmer from Goth Allah Dino Airi, in Warah city, located about 45 km west of Larkana. He also lives in the tent settlement.

Khoso says that for the last three months, the government supplied rations of grocery staples every few weeks. "How are we supposed to use the rice and sugar that are mixed together," he asks. "Are we supposed to survive on meethay

given to us on every tenth day. Now we receive a monthly ration and it is difficult to survive on such little food. Although the flood water has receded from our village, we don't have enough money to go back home."

On the one hand, the flood victims are worried about rationed provisions and on the other hand, they fear contracting water-borne disease.

They suffer from various diseases, but the medical camps set up by political and social organisations

underwater. The flood victims who had taken shelter in the cities are being forcibly evicted, so now there is no option but to stay on the roadside."

Thallo believes that environmental destruction and oppression of common people is a part of global capitalists. "It shows the incompetence of our government, and the corruption of bureaucrats," he lashes out in anger. "People are not their priority, collecting capital is."

Children have been badly affected by the flood-induced health



Photos: Rahmat Tunio