



TECHNOLOGY

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It won't take over completely. Even AI needs a human to operate — Muhammad Abbas

\$7.5 billion

is the record amount FIFA earned from the 2022 World Cup

SPORTS

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Play for fun [Leo]... when you're having fun, you've no idea how much fun we have — Enzo

HISTORY & HERITAGE

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When I first saw them I found it difficult to believe that they were prehistoric — JH Marshall

FROM STALEMATE TO STALEMATE

Political brinkmanship over PTI's planned dissolution of Punjab Assembly has left the province's fate in high court hands. Whether the matter is resolved by Jan 11 or not, Punjab CM Elahi finds himself the sole beneficiary in the crisis for now

BY RIZWAN SHEHZAD

Punjab is in constitutional crisis at the moment. Though the Lahore High Court's recent order has provided an opportunity to all sides to review their political agendas, the on-going political turmoil seems to be far from over. Punjab's ruling parties, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid, wish to dissolve the assembly to force snap polls in the country. In response, the ruling alliance at the centre is simultaneously throwing a gauntlet to the rulers in Punjab to go ahead with its dissolution plan while carrying out all efforts to stop the assembly from being dissolved.

The ruling coalitions – both in Punjab and at centre – are currently busy wasting time and energies to force the other side into checkmate instead of coming together to deal with the economic crisis and to alleviate the plight of the 33 million people affected by the climate-induced rains and floods. Everyone seems to have forgotten the flood-affected people amid a harsh winter season as if all their problems would simply vanish on their own. Amid the political volatility coupled with delay in receiving monetary support from global lenders and friendly countries, terrorism is rearing its ugly head again. But things are sadly not going beyond political rhetoric, usual condemnations and the habit of blaming each other.

The country, especially Punjab, has been embroiled in political and constitutional crisis since November 26 when PTI chief Imran Khan announced at a public gathering that the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa assemblies would be dissolved in the coming days. Initially, the government side said that it would go to any limit to stop the dissolution from happening but then shifted gears and started challenging the PTI to go ahead with the plan, announcing that elections would be held in two provinces in case the party really went for it.

The PTI leadership too delayed the plan for the dissolution of the assemblies for weeks as PTI chief continued to meet with party members and lawmakers to finalise the plan. Fast forward to December 17, Imran, while sitting along with chief ministers of Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, announced that the assemblies would be dissolved on December 23 without elaborating why he delayed the decision for another week when the

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parties had reached the decision that assemblies would surely be dissolved.

When the opponents and people started questioning the unusual delay, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry was quick to incorporate that one week's time was sought for finalising the strategy for the verification of the resignations of PTI MNAs pending in the National Assembly since April this year. With the announcement of dissolving the assemblies and conveying that the party legislators were finally ready to appear before the Speaker National Assembly after a delay of eight months, the PTI leadership thought that soon it would achieve its target of forcing general elections in the country and its winning streak would help it win if not sweep the elections.

However, the ruling alliance in the centre, being the opposition in the Punjab assembly, threw a spanner in the works. On one hand, it submitted a no-confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervez Elahi to the speaker and the deputy speaker of Punjab Assembly and, on the other hand, Punjab Governor Baligur Rehman directed Elahi to take a vote of confidence from the assembly on December 21. PTI and PML-Q defied the order and defused the move through a ruling of Punjab Assembly speaker, who declared the governor's direction was against the assembly rules as well as the Constitution.

In return, the governor ruled the speaker's ruling unconstitutional and de-notified Punjab CM in the wee hours of Friday for failing to take a vote of confidence from the provincial assembly on December 21 on his order. The governor's de-notification order was swiftly challenged before the Lahore High Court, which restored Elahi as CM Punjab after taking an undertaking from him that he won't send a summary for the dissolution of the assem-

bly to the governor before the next date of hearing – January 11.

What can be said with certainty for now is that Punjab assembly can't be dissolved by January 11 and that its fate might remain with province's top court after that date if the matter is not settled by then. Usually, the courts keep an order in the field suspended while hearing the matter at hand and in this case, the delay would keep blocking PML-N, PTI and PML-Q's moves.

Interesting as it may sound, while the PTI wants to dissolve the assemblies, the PML-Q – despite being an ally and frequently vowing that it would dissolve assembly if Imran says so – wishes to stay in power. As such the latter is trying its best to convince PTI to back away from its plans of throwing away power in two provinces. Meanwhile, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and its allies are currently busy adding fuel to the fire by resorting to moves that could delay the whole process so that they don't have to go for polls before October 2023.

At the moment, the only beneficiary of the current political circus is PML-Q's Elahi faction, which is ruling the province with only 10 seats as its 10 votes have the power to make or break both the PML-N-led alliance and the PTI. Both sides had offered the CM slot to Elahi but the Elahi faction had jumped ship back in April when it suddenly joined hands with PTI despite agreeing with PML-N-led ruling alliance a night before that it would stay with it. Since then, the Elahi faction has been manoeuvring things not only extending its rule in the province but divulging on seat-adjustment formula with PTI for the next elections.

Currently, Elahi is in a position where he even dictates PTI chief Imran Khan. During his speech along with two chief ministers, when Imran lambasted the former military ruler Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa, it drew harsh reaction from Elahi as he denounced Imran's allegations against the ex-military czar; reminded him that Bajwa frequently helped him and threatened to give a rebuttal if anyone spoke a word against Bajwa again.

As surprising as it may seem, political observers have long been saying that Elahi was not in favour of dissolving assembly and that the speech provided him the opportunity to vent his anger at Imran. They say the court ruling halting the dissolution of the assembly has given an edge to Elahi as well as

an opportunity to all sides to come up with something that suits the interests of the people. But that doesn't seem to be a priority on any side.

They say that the people of Pakistan deserve the kind of government(s) that they can count on but the on-going tussle and the desire to rule the country between the political parties has been nothing but a political circus that is badly hurting the provinces, the country and its people. Not a day goes by when the political leadership doesn't find itself embroiled in unnecessary crisis, especially, when terrorism is disrupting the hard-earned peace, the country is on the verge of default, its kitty is empty, the rupee is losing its value, prices of petroleum products are on the rise and the people are crushed under inflation.

Elections are being portrayed as if they would solve all these problems in a blink of an eye but what if there is another hung parliament after

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fresh elections; who will then be blamed for the crises we are in and would continue to face in the coming years because of the political choice we make today. Without a doubt, the political show must go but not the political circus as the country can't bear the brunt of it anymore. The bigger question that begs to be answered is how long the political leadership will take to solve its problem by sitting across the table instead of just continuing wrangling to satisfy their egos.

In order to reduce the toxicity dominating the political discourse it is imperative for the political class to let go of their egos to the larger national interest; stop being hostage to petty political gains; and starting seeing the bigger picture. For political leadership, it's time to stand united and discard the mind-set that can't see beyond tactical gains in the larger interest of democracy and the country.

Cover: Ibrahim Yahya



THE ROBOT HAS THE PEN

The world is changing for writers as writing bots, software and tools easily available on the internet are writing content ranging from college essays to news stories. While academics continue to debate on whether it is killing students’ learning abilities and creativity or not, newsrooms are happy that robots cannot add the human touch

By YUSRA SALIM

Did your kid or younger sibling write that college essay that is making you so proud, or a bot did it? Nowadays, it is not just students who have many options to make their life easier by either using software that helps in writing assignments or the vast variety of material available online which can be used in various ways.

Professional writers such as playwrights, novelists and journalists can also get their work done by robots, and perhaps done even better. This is done through Artificial Intelligence (AI) or software available on the net to help write for whatever purpose you need to write, from college essays to news reports to novels.

Increasingly, students have become innovative and are using AI technology to quickly generate ideas, outline a draft, and craft essays with high-quality content that is well-argued and well-written. There are several AI programs marketed to students. A number of essay-generating applications were released in 2021 and many more this year.

AI that generates original text can be both empowering and disruptive for students and higher education at large. Will it hamper their learning



After I started working, I was introduced to several types of software where if I just enter a topic, fully developed essays can be done

abilities and creativity or not? Nowadays, students have so many options to But the question is that will this software help us or just make us even more dependent on technology. And by being so dependent on technology, are we losing our grip on creativity and just following the herd?

In the last four years, the Pakistani industry has seen a boom in freelance content writing and almost every university-going student has tried their luck writing content to earn some extra money to manage university fees or create disposable income. With these content writing opportunities, the young generation was also introduced to several software which are used to plagiarise and paraphrase the original content.

“I have been working for a content writing company for the last two years where we are given assignments to complete,” shares Iqra Khan. “These assignments are from students in the US or the UK, which we complete for them and we get paid well in comparison to what you can earn at this level in the Pakistani market.”

Khan has a bachelor’s degree from a reputable university, but she couldn’t find a job in her relevant field, so she thought of trying her luck with other options.

“Despite studying for four years, I never knew about this software,” she explains. “But after I started working, I was introduced to several types of software where if I just enter a topic, fully developed essays can be done and there are several applications that help in paraphrasing and even cite proper references as well for research papers.”

Get into Google and type para-

phrasing tools, citing tools, and plagiarism checkers and ta...da ... dozens of software become available to students. But are these helpful for students or taking them away from the ability to enhance their skills?

Professional slash in writing

AI is taking over not just security or law and order, but just about any area one can think of, “It is becoming a part of everything and it will take over every sector,” says Muhammad Abbas, a software engineer. “But then again it will not completely take over human intervention because even to operate AI, a human is needed.”

Little human involvement

Explaining how human involvement is becoming lesser, Abbas discussed a variety of applications from being able to predict the weather to a mopping machine. Everything is technology based now, but still there is a need for a human to operate such machines. It is similar to writing software, but even if the software writes an essay for you, you do need to provide it with a topic or several links on similar topics to make a document out of it.

Since this branch of computer science known as AI creates techniques, algorithms, and software

grammatical or stylistic errors. By having AI generate short and long articles for their website, social media accounts, and/or blog, any business owner or marketing manager can earn money online.

The existence of professional writers is clearly threatened by AI writing, despite the fact that it is still in its infancy and is far from perfect. After all, why would anyone need to hire a real person to do the work if a computer can produce language that is identical to that of a human writer?

The new novel

Not only low-skilled positions like content creation are susceptible to automation by AI, but even highly skilled occupations like journalism and novel writing may one day become automated. In fact, a Japanese business has already created an AI system that is superior to humans at writing novels.

The new newsroom

A similar idea has been gaining popularity in Pakistani media houses, and in the recent years, we have seen conversions of newsrooms under one big umbrella. “The idea which is not very far from reality is formulating news stories from three to four news items and making a new story out of it,” explains Muhammad Asim Siddique, web editor of a private newspaper. “For example, if there is a press conference that three reporters from different channels and newspapers have covered and filed their stories, those stories can be put in the software to make a new fourth story for you.”

The debate over the idea that either journalism is dying or AI will take over writing continues, but reality is clearly visible that the human angle into the stories and physical presence has lessened in the last



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few years. “Most organisations don’t want to invest in sending out reporters when they can get live footage from TV and stories from wires,” says Siddique told. “There is even listening software that can translate stories and they only require a little subediting.”

The world is changing, everyone is moving towards automation, saving time, and using their abilities in other aspects. If we don’t keep pace with the fast moving world, we will be left behind which we already are in several aspects.

“I think that adapting to change and technology is the need of the hour and there is no harm in writing software if used wisely, as it is time saving and that time can be used for other constructive ideas,” says Siddique pointing out that one still can’t negate the idea that AI is cutting off many jobs in future and it is here to stay.

By 2025, according to current revenue forecasts, the global AI market will generate close to \$126 billion. Editing and proofreading can be done automatically with artificial intelligence.

Grammarly and other intelligent proofreading systems can detect overused and difficult terms, highlight spelling errors, and better comprehend context. The fact that AI will produce impartial content is an essential one. It produces all content on a range of themes and in a number of forms, all of which are fact-based. It can search further and more quickly than you can, thanks to the capacity of artificial intelligence to access an infinite number of online resources. That said, it’s important to choose the ideal keywords so that AI authors can successfully crawl the web.

Lack of creativity

From autocorrect to Grammarly, and from paraphrasing tools to essay writers, technology has been injected into our lives and we as users are addicted to it. “Why would I spend 3-4 hours reading books and searching the internet and writing my own term paper when all I have to do is use few software,” says Kashaf Saleem, a second-year bachelor’s student.

She explains how for research project assignments, she takes the help of online applications and software that her elder sister used at her university and later introduced to Kashaf.

“I use my free time to give tuitions to pay my fee but I do feel that my own abilities have been compromised because I don’t remember many spellings like I used to do earlier because autocorrect and

Grammarly does that for me,” she confesses.

No human touch

Although, it is handy and time-saving to use AI to write essays, there are certain drawbacks that one should be aware of. Unlike human authors, artificial intelligence typically lacks a distinctive literary style, sounds robotic and not like a writer would write a piece with a human touch.

“It might sound like someone else,” says Siddique explaining that on the overall, employing AI to write essays will save you the time and money compared to alternative writing techniques, but this is the future. “AI occasionally makes grammatical or spelling errors that are usually simple to correct, but you must proofread your essay carefully before handing it in or sharing it with others. Mostly students or even reporters don’t do that but that is not the best way to hand in your work as it may appear shoddy.”

The future

There are many software that journalists use in a newsroom or are adapting to it, but the human touch in the stories cannot be done away with and can only come from humans.

“Journalists should have no fear that their jobs will disappear, because software can only write hard-core news,” says Ali Tahir, who owns an online platform and also teaches mass communication at university level. “Human angle stories or stories that require visualisation from a personal perspective cannot be done by any software.”

Tahir believes that software generated news is well-written from punctuation, sentence formation, and grammar perspective and also cannot come under any kind of plagiarism claim. On the other hand, something heard or written by a human will be different than what a robotic or AI server has jotted down.

“Reporters now have to accept new technology and work smartly,” says Tahir. “They should let technology do research for them and make their work easy such as in press briefings, where there is no need for human angle stories. But with investigative and core journalism they should focus and develop their niche.”

Artificial intelligence (AI) is today an integral part of the new media ecosystem globally, but Pakistan is far behind the AI technology in use presently in developed countries. But even then, very soon we may see politicians and leaders share live video links to newsrooms for coverage. This way they will save on time, travel, and food and accommodation expenses.

“But even in such cases, press conferences will need to be covered physically where a reporter will go and question people so that the story does not look like a press release, but carries a certain individual perspective,” sums up Tahir.

Top Free AI Writing Assistants in 2022

- Writesonic
- Grammarly Business
- Jasper
- Rytr
- Anyword
- Simplified

IF THE BOSPORUS COULD TALK

A popular destination for Pakistanis, more so because of the culture made famous by its entertainment industry, there's also the uniqueness of it straddling Europe and Asia which adds the kick for the average desi at a reduced price point. Hallowed by history, the air is thick with centuries of civilisation. Quite simply, Istanbul is a gorgeous city

By MAHEEN A. RASHDI

The turquoise expanse of the Bosphorus is perhaps one of the most striking features of Istanbul's landscape. As you head towards the city centre leaving Ataturk airport behind, the water channel seems like an omnipresence, compelling passers-by to gaze upon its radiance.

Running across Istanbul, separating the East from the West, the Bosphorus is truly the point where the twain meet in a fantastic union.

Situated between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara, it is the narrowest navigational strait that connects the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea through its winding path across Istanbul. Crossed by countless travellers for centuries past, if it could but speak, it would have many tales to tell of victors as well as the vanquished.

For a history buff, Turkey is a dream destination. But for anyone with even a passing interest in history, it offers the mingled flavours of a rich past with abounding art and architecture as well as a progressive present, replete with avant-garde fashions and freeways.

First things first! Istanbul has an uneven terrain and visitors are advised to wear extremely comfortable, walking shoes. Built as a replica of Old Rome, this unique city intrigued Westerners since it was Constantinople and they flocked by sea or land to explore its treasure.

Today, it is still flocked by travellers a high average of whom are from Pakistan but more so because of the culture made famous by its entertainment industry. And then there's also the uniqueness of

where the coastline along the Horn is visible from the Ataturk Bridge.

If visiting for a limited number of days (which most of us do), it is best to have a definite plan of which parts of Istanbul are to be visited as that determines the ideal options for lodgings. A week is barely enough to cover all of Istanbul as each district has so many historical edifices to explore.

Within the city the neighbourhoods such as Tophane, Taksim and Cihangir (in the Beyoglu district, separated from Sultanahmet by the Golden Horn) also have some amazing sites to offer like a Venetian Palazzo and the Doge of Venice's mansion among others. The last time I visited I went to Ortakoy also and that too is highly recommended for visitors especially to see the sun set on Istanbul.

With limited days, if Sultanahmet is all you can cover, then too Istanbul is worth it. Just within that old city the entire past of Turkey, the Ottoman Empire and the remnants of Constantinople will all come alive.

Built on the first of the seven hills, Sultanahmet has five top of the list sites that every first time travel must see the Topkapi Serayi; the Blue Mosque; the Hagia Sophia; the Basilica Cistern and the Dolmabahce Palace.

Ever since the heist film Topkapi, the Museum/Palace has held a lure for many of us. And amongst the artefacts on display within the Topkapi Museum, the bejewelled dagger meant for Nadir Shah also has a special place with the additional information that this was the piece featured in the film.

The more noteworthy items belong to the section of Holy Relics

Following the serialising of the Turkish drama – Mera Sultan on our local TV, the Topkapi Palace has also gained more awareness and one is more familiar with court life which is what induced me to give the extra fare to visit the Harem attached to the Museum grounds.

It was fascinating to see and pass under the same archways through which the concubines of the Ottoman Sultans walked for their daily learning lessons in court (as seen on the show). That was where Alexandra aka Roxanne aka Hurum Khatun had reportedly fainted in the Sultan Sulayman's arms to gain his attention and from there on enslaving him to change the destinies of future Sultans.

One note may be made here that visitors are better advised to do prior research of all the places to be visited because information is scant and English is not one of the spoken languages. It is surprising that such a

popular destination for tourists and all sorts of other travellers, almost all signs and notices are only in Turkish.

Walking up from the Topkapi Palace one arrives at the Hippodrome a central complex which has the Hagia Sophia on one side and the Blue Mosque on the other.

The Hagia Sophia is a must visit. It encapsulates the wisdom of two of the world's most prominent religions Islam and Christianity and portrays how these can survive in harmony under one roof, or rather, dome.

Now a museum, The Hagia Sophia (pronounced Aya Sofia) is the second most popular site in Turkey. But it wasn't always this amalgam of religious beliefs. It first served as an Eastern Orthodox cathedral during the middle ages (6th century to the 15th century). For a while it was also converted to a Roman Catholic Church and eventually it was turned into a mosque by orders of the first Ottoman conqueror, Sultan Mehmed II. Upon this conversion, it was shorn of all the Christian relics bells, altar, iconostasis, sacrificial vessels and murals depicting Jesus, Mary and other Christian saints. In place of these, a mehrab, myanbar and four minarets were added to turn it into a mosque, which way it remained until 1931 when it was closed and eventually re-opened under Ataturk's governance as a museum depicting its dual past.

As a museum, it beautifully encapsulates its past with huge calligraphic art adorning the tiny domes, next

to the building can almost be touched with finger tips. And one wonders why can't the real world be this beautiful in its tolerance?

Situated a little apart from these three primary tourist attractions, is the Dolmabahce Palace which is located at the very edge of the European bank of the Bosphorus strait.

Crystal and gold define its interiors along with the world's largest Bohemian crystal chandelier which hangs in the ceremonial Hall a gift from Queen Victoria.

Dolmabahce palace became the official residence of later Ottoman Sultans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was also used as the presidential summer residence by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk who also spent his last years in residence at the Palace where he later died on November 10, 1938.

In fact, it may be said that the outrageously expensive construction of the Palace was perhaps the start of the financial ruin of Turkey when it was forced to declare a state bankruptcy.

The grandeur, the expanding horizons and might of the Ottomans could not withstand the court intrigues of the Royal women and the decadence of the later year Sultans who rendered the monarchy weak. The financial ruin was the last nail as Turkey began being gradually dismantled after World War 1.

If it hadn't been for Kemal Ataturk already the hero of Gallipoli at the time Turkey as a strong Asian/European nation would not have re-

that the Cistern has been used as the location in films and books Dan Brown's mystery, Inferno is an example the Basilica Cistern is a space to experience and feel.

As per internet information, 7000 slaves were involved in the construction of these ancient water works.

The Basilica Cistern continued to filter and distribute water over the centuries, even to the Topkapi Palace during the Ottoman rule and into the modern times.

While history never ends in Istanbul, there is much more that dots the landscape besides historic edifices.

As the sun sets, the large and small chai cafes come alive everywhere in the city, particularly in the entire area of Taksim Square where the cafes serving baklava and aromatic teas beckon to everyone with a heady aroma. In flavours like peach, apple, strawberry, etc (all tea is strictly black milk and tea together is like blasphemy for a Turk!) the teas are literally divine drinks of the gods! The baklava, in itself a rich sweet is served with huge dollops of creamy ice cream. Calorie counting can wait on this trip.

And then there are the chestnut sellers every few meters selling roasted chestnuts with masala standing next to the small, mussel vendors selling boiled mussels in half split shells with a garnish of lemon.

The quaint trams that run in several directions everywhere across the city, are another part of Istanbul's cityscape. But beware of pickpockets in these crowded vehicles especially during rush hour an advice from one who lost every possible card and cash on the last day before departure.

The only puzzling point was the language barrier. From the airport, which has minimal English directions too within cities, there's little to no grasp of English. Not even shopkeepers or restaurant/hotel staff who would be dealing with a constant stream of tourists can communicate properly.

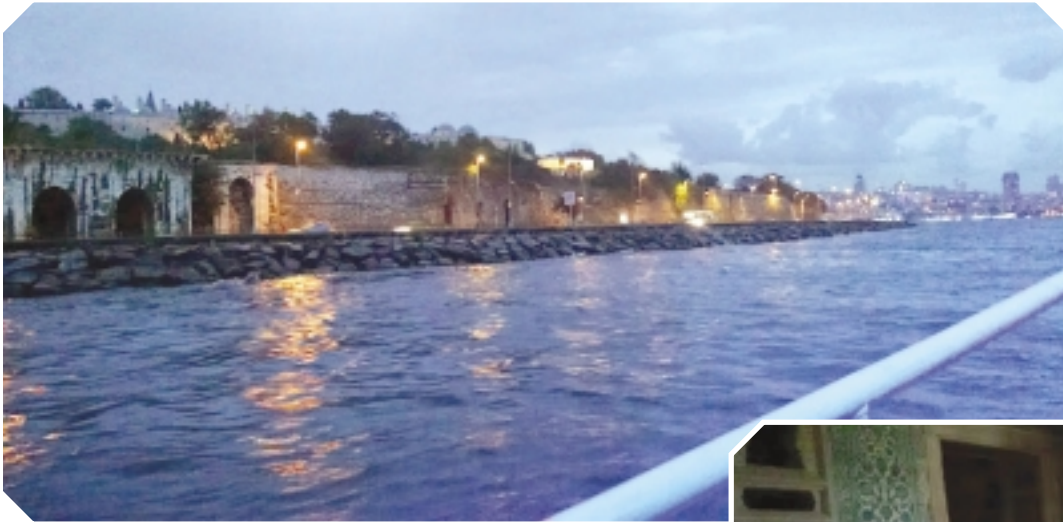
On the other hand, it should be commended that they are thriving as an international power without the use of the 'mighty' English language. A lesson to be learnt by us who make fun of anyone not versed in our once White Masters' tongue.

Turkey is perhaps one of the few places left in this world where being a 'Pakistani' still brings out warmth and friendliness from the locals and it's a great feeling. Though I am told that as popular as it gets with Pakistani tourists who do what they do wherever they go the love is gradually reducing.

We really can't be trusted with good fortune, can we?

The full version of this piece is available on tribune.com.pk

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it straddling Europe and Asia which adds the kick for the average desi at a reduced price point. To put it simply, Istanbul is a gorgeous city.

Founded on seven hills with the city walls surrounding them it was once called Nova Roma (new Rome). The hills are visible along the Golden Horn if you take a ride on the Bosphorus or if you are crossing over from old Istanbul to the modern side,

which contains the staff of Hazrat Musa (AS), the water bowl of Hazrat Ibrahim(AS), the sword of Hazrat Dawood (AS) and of course, the footprints of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) along with his mantle and swords of his sahabah. There are actually many, many such items and of course none of them can be photographed so one has to record them in memory.



to the murals of Jesus, Mary and the concepts of Holy Trinity.

A beautifully scripted Allah in Arabic in gigantic point size flanked on four sides by comparably large calligraphy of the names of the four Khalifas dominate the sides of the ceiling which is also surrounded by murals of winged angels. And then there is the Michelangelo style birth of Christ imagery which is as awesome.

If one shifts the gaze downward towards the myanbar, there is the altar standing almost as majestically.

The peace that emanates through

made.

He raised the initiative and defeated the Greek and the English while simultaneously getting rid of the Sultanate to change the remnants of the Ottoman from Sultanate to the Republic of Turkey.

Now, this unique country that straddles more than one continent, ocean and seas is possibly the most historic and strategically crucial centre of the world.

If you had time for just one more site to visit before you leave the city, I would strongly recommend the Basilica Cistern. Besides the fact



MESSI'S WORLD CUP A PROPHECY FULFILLED

With FC Barcelona, the little magician had won everything there was to win. But until last Sunday, a caveat over the best footballer there ever was. Football can now be at peace perhaps, after Messi captained Argentina to a third World Cup title in Qatar

By TAHA ANIS



As the wonderkids gathered around Barcelona's La Masia, the world's finest football academy, they were introduced to a quiet little 13-year-old with a growth deficiency. This, they were told, was their new clubmate from a land far away who was "very, very special", recalls La Masia graduate Marc Valiente. Another wonderkid, Cesc Fàbregas, remembers facing that quiet little kid in his first training session and being confident of taking the ball off him when they came one-on-one. Then that quiet little kid ran at Fàbregas with the ball and Fàbregas, who would go on to become one of the finest midfielders of his generation, immediately realised that this kid "was not normal".

Four years later, when Ronaldinho introduced Kobe Bryant to this kid, he told the basketball legend that he will now be introducing him to the guy who will become the greatest player of all time. Not too long after that, two legends were talking before a friendly between giants Barcelona and Juventus. One, Samuel Eto'o, warned the other, Patrick Vieira, about this kid and told him that one day it would seem like every player who came before him was playing a different sport.

From very early on, it was painfully clear to everyone who watched him that this kid was a generational talent. And so little Lionel Messi — so introverted that Fàbregas said they initially thought he was a mute — grew up being told that he had a destiny to fulfil. Lionel Messi — the name. A prophecy foretold, the great coming upon us.

Messi would go on to be of club football's great team, winning everything there was to win with Barcelona. Ten league titles, seven Spanish cups, Champions League trophies, and six Ballon d'Ors. At Barcelona, Messi became the greatest club player there ever

was. And yet, for the Argentine there always remained unfinished business in that famous Albicelste shirt. While Messi had to carry the weight of his own greatness in Spain, for those back home in Argentina, he carried an even greater burden — he had certain shoes to fill. And boy were those shoes big. The comparisons were inevitable. The same diminutive frame — roughly five-and-a-half feet of splendid untamed mischief. Controlled by the same supreme scheming brain. The same country. The same club. The best left foot the world had seen since, well, him.

Messi was born in 1987, a year after what can only be described as Diego Armando Maradona's World Cup. He grew up with a steady diet of stories and legends of the larger-than-life figure. The comparisons had begun a long time ago and soon the demands followed. Go on, win us a World Cup all on your own like he did. After all, is it really too much to demand the Herculean from Hercules?

But with the Argentinian national team, unearthly football did not come as easily for Messi as it did with Barcelona. There always seemed an insurmountable communication gap between Messi and the others who wore the Sky Blue and White — a great divide, always slightly out of sync, wavelengths never truly matching, the telepathic connections formed with the likes of Xavi and Andrés Iniesta never quite recreated.

Messi faced his first World Cup heartache as a teenager in 2006, when Argentina were knocked out by Germany on penalties in the quarter-finals. Four years later, Messi was in the prime of his career at the age of 23 and already among the greatest footballers the world had ever seen. With Maradona as the coach and the best squad Argentina had had in ages, the stage was set.

The script was written but those damned Germans tend to not read the script. Some questionable selections and tactics led to a 4-0 demolition. What was meant to be a fairy tale ended up in humiliation and a precursor of what was to come for the next decade. The hurt would deepen four years later. With the 2014 final locked at 0-0, Germany manager Joachim Löw sent on Mario Götze from the bench. Before sending him on, Löw told Götze to go out there and show the world he was better than Messi. One volley with an outstretched left-foot later, Götze would win the final and cement his place in folklore.

For Messi, more heartache would follow, with two back-to-back Copa America final defeats.

The Argentinians turned on him, shouting in their fury that he cared more about Barcelona than he did for Argentina. The vitriol reached a crescendo when he missed the crucial last spot-kick in the second final. The pain too much, Messi would walk away. Four finals, zero wins, a destiny unfulfilled, a nation's hope lost somewhere in the rubble. "It was the thing I wanted the most, but I couldn't get it so I think it's over," a disconsolate Messi would explain when announcing his retirement.

And so there hung a caveat over the best footballer there ever was. The more magic he produced with Barcelona, the louder the critics pointed at





UP



“
At Barcelona, Messi became the greatest club player there ever was. And yet, for the Argentine there always remained unfinished business in that famous Albiceleste shirt

five editions, he had no goals and only one assist in a knockout game. By Messi standards, this was not right. In Messi fashion, this was about to be corrected. A typical finish, the ball passed into the bottom corner, against Australia meant that Messi did in 35 minutes what he had not managed to do in the previous four World Cups. This time around, things would be different.

Argentina’s modus operandi was clear, start strong, score two goals, and then sit back. It just about worked against Australia as they held on for a 2-1 win. It nearly backfired against the Netherlands when two late Dutch goals meant that the game had to go to a penalty shootout. It worked wonders against last edition’s finalist Croatia, who were kept at arm’s length.

And it seemed to be working like a charm in the final for 79 minutes until



Mbappé happened. Two goals in two minutes, an unerring penalty, and the most iconic volley of a football since another Frenchman by the name of Zinedine Zidane swung his left foot against Leverkusen in 2001, and France were back in it. A devastating one-two from an astonishing player and what had seemed like a simple Argentina win sprang into life and blossomed into the greatest game of football ever played.

The extra-time was a wonderfully open affair and it seemed fitting that perhaps the most aesthetically pleasing attacker in the history of the game would cap his crowning glory with the ugliest goal he has ever scored (see: football is a funny old game). And still Mbappé — fast-twitch muscle upon fast-twitch muscle, steel springs where others merely have flesh and bone — would not be denied. The first hat-trick in a World Cup final since 1966, completed two minutes from time, meant that if nothing else, he would finish as the tournament’s top scorer.

Mbappé had said before the World Cup that South American football was not as advanced as European football. That stuck in South America’s craw, and they had a point to prove. Now, after 11 final meetings between Europe and South America, the score reads 8-3 in favour of the South Americans. For all their Messidependencia, this may be the best support cast Messi has ever had. No player, no matter how good, can ever win a football match all on his own. And one by one Messi’s teammates stepped up to the plate.

When Messi retired, dejected and heartbroken in 2016, a 15-year-old boy from San Martín tweeted to Messi, telling him that it was the Argentinian fans who had let Messi down rather than the other way around, urging him to think about staying even though they did not deserve him. “Play for fun, because when you’re having fun, you have no idea how much fun you’re making us. Thank you and forgive us,” tweeted the young boy. Little would that boy have known that six years later, he would have the pleasure of watching Messi have fun alongside him or that he, Enzo Fernández, would win the young player of the tournament award.

Argentinian goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez, who missed the birth of his child a year before during their Copa America campaign, had said before the tournament that he wants to die for Messi. He didn’t have to die for his captain, but he certainly had to grow for him. As Randal Kolo Muani bore down on his goal with seconds to go, Martínez grew and grew, until the French striker saw nothing but darkness and Martínez. The goalkeeper sprawled himself, appearing bigger than Qatar itself, and produced if not the greatest save in footballing history then certainly its most meaningful. After that there was only ever going to be one winner in the penalty shootout — not Messi, not Mbappé, not France captain Hugo Lloris, but Emiliano Martínez, that unparalleled master of mind-games and shithousery.

Then there was Ángel Di María, maybe the best egoless football player on the planet, yet again performing delivering on the big stage. Di María had won the U20 World Cup alongside Messi in 2005 and here they both were, 17 long years later, scoring in the World Cup final and lifting the real thing together.

There was Julián Álvarez, who had once asked Messi for a picture as a young kid and was now lifting the trophy alongside him as his partner-in-crime up front. There was Rodrigo De Paul, dubbed Messi’s bodyguard, who hid a note in Messi’s room before the Saudi Arabia game promising his captain that Argentina will win the World Cup come December 18. There was Alexis MacAllister, whose father played alongside Maradona, and who continuously argues with his father about who the superior player is. There was Tagliafico, who said if you don’t suffer, it doesn’t count. There was even Sergio Agüero, the retired legend who shared a room with Messi before the final — just like they always had for nearly two decades during international duty. There was Scaloni, Messi’s teammate in the 2006 World Cup and his manager in 2022.

But most importantly, there was Lionel Messi, fulfilling a prophecy foretold all those years ago. Hercules has finally completed his labours. Football is at peace.

Taha Anis is a freelance writer and journalist. All facts and information are the sole responsibility of the writer.

Photos: Agencies

powerful one — serving to remove the pressure from Messi’s shoulders. When he took over, he insisted that Argentina must learn to play without Messi, partly due to the uncertainty surrounding Messi’s international career and partly to reduce Argentina’s Messidependencia.

But if you have to depend on a player then Messi isn’t a bad player to depend on. When the Copa America was controversially shifted from Argentina to bitter rivals Brazil due to Covid issues, Messi — a great believer in destiny — told his teammates before the final against the hosts that “coincidences don’t exist”. In



his shortcomings with the national team. To be the greatest ever, went the argument, you have to perform at the greatest stage. Messi would take back his retirement in time to drag Argentina to the 2018 World Cup. There they would run into a Kylian Mbappé inspired France — pace and power so irrepressible that no team could live with them. Yet another defeat, yet another heartache.

It wasn’t just Messi though, it

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Scaloni came in with a mantra: the sun will rise tomorrow. A simple message but a powerful one — serving to remove the pressure from Messi’s shoulders

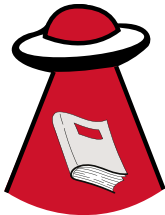
seemed that the Sky Blue and White itself was cursed. So cursed in fact, that Argentinian left-back Nicolás Tagliafico admitted no one wanted the manager’s job before rookie Lionel Scaloni took the role. Scaloni came in with a mantra: the sun will rise tomorrow. A simple message but a

that tournament, Messi produced a Copa America performance for the ages as Argentina won their first major title in decades. The Argentine finished the tournament with the most goals, the most assists, the most chances created and the most successful dribbles. Messidependencia isn’t a bad ailment to have.

And then along came the big one, the one they said Messi must win. Argentina came into the World Cup on a 36-match unbeaten run. All they had to do was defeat Saudi Arabia in the opening game and they would equal Italy’s record of longest unbeaten international streak in history. Football is a funny old game. Argentina 1 Saudi Arabia 2. Suddenly every game became a must-win. Fail and it would all be irrevocably lost. The sun would rise again tomorrow but it would rise to find Messi’s World Cup dream forever shattered.

After the Saudi Arabia defeat, Messi sent a message to the supporters: have faith, we won’t let you down. Mexico and Poland were handled with relative ease to take Argentina into the knockouts when a shock group exit was on the cards. The biggest, or perhaps the only remaining, criticism of Messi had been his poor World Cup performances. In





THE MARTIAN CIPHER

By FARRUKH KAMRANI

[Notes for an In-Camera Briefing to the US Senate Subcommittee on Space and Science]
This brief message, which former NASA administrator George Low named ‘The Martian Cipher’, was intercepted in 1969. It took the space agency almost 50 years to decode it.

This deciphering is arguably one of the greatest intellectual feats in human history, something even more challenging than the cracking of the Enigma code and even more significant than the deciphering of the Indus Script – the latter discovery also not made public for some political reasons.

This message was allegedly transmitted to Mars from some invisible UFO in the orbit of the Earth on Thursday, September 4, 1969 at 11:34 am UTC.

This piece of communication reveals the shocking presence of a Martian outpost on or close to the Earth – an outpost observing the people of this planet, maybe even for a century.

It shows that at least a section of the intelligentsia from that blood-red planet is familiar not only with the cultures and history of the human race but also with its intellectual and artistic endeavors.

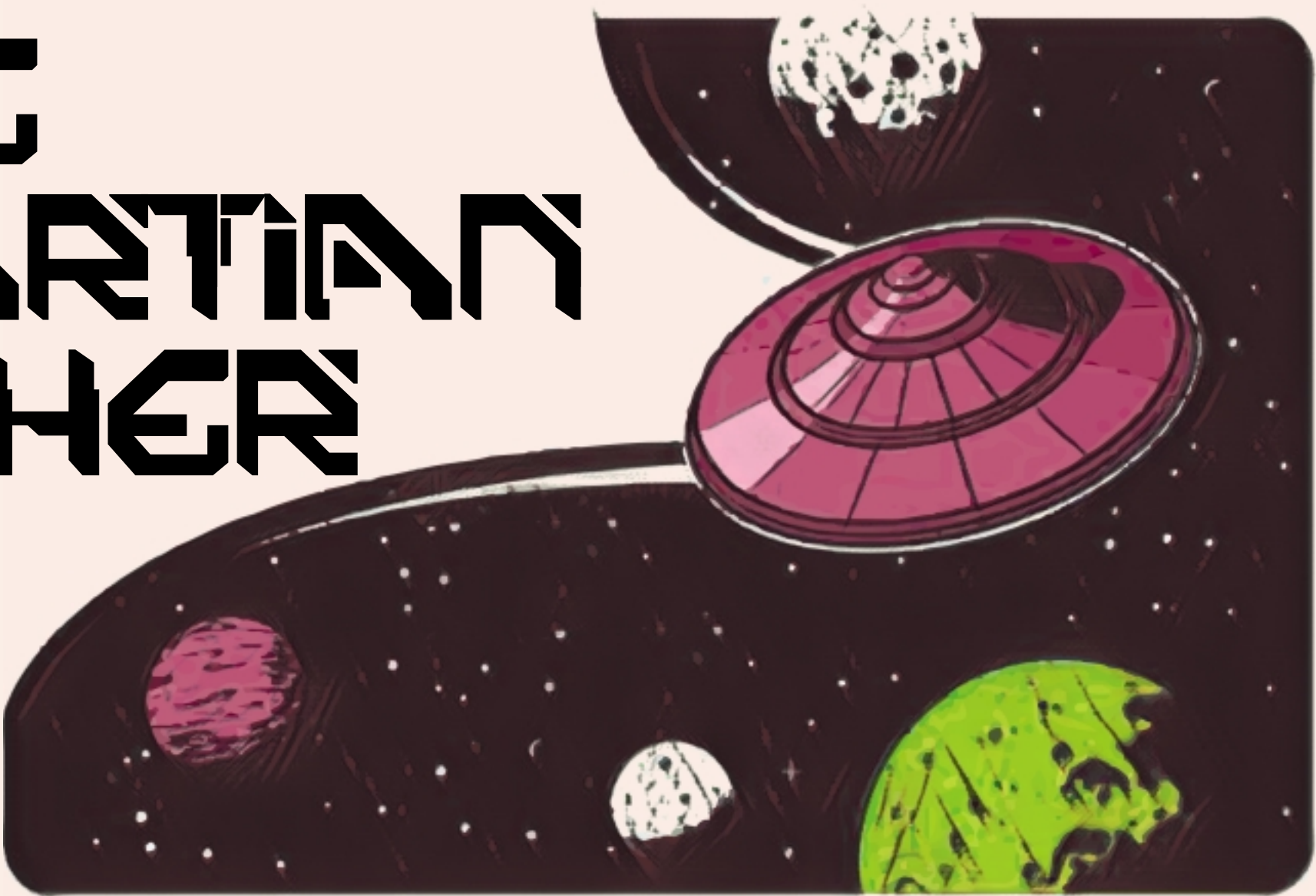
It appears that while the Martians may turn up their noses at our scientific knowledge, they are positively in awe of our arts – a fact as evidenced by their use of allusions from world literature.

It seems that the Martians, possibly due to their single-minded focus on technology, ignored a need for artistic expression for a long time and now they have finally found solace in our artistic creations.

However, what baffles many scientists is the fact that NASA has not intercepted another such message since 1969. This leads some experts to suggest that the Martians deliberately ‘leaked’ the text to ‘show off’ their knowledge about human civilization.

The aliens probably also wanted to communicate to us how they view their proverbial ‘next door neighbor’ as the entire message describes the human race, in a rather pretentious and quasi-poetic manner, they argue.

Some of our scientists, however, believe that this message may be aimed at misguiding humans by creating a false ‘softer image’ for an otherwise brutal alien force, the danger of whose



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sudden invasion of the Earth – they warn – may be looming large.

A few of our scientists also advise us against setting great store by this cipher.

They highlight the possibility of an elaborate scientific hoax conceived by some key officials in the Brezhnev administration with a view to keep our best minds busy in the futile exercise of unraveling a meaningless riddle.

Margaret Galland Kivelson, a distinguished planetary scientist formerly associated with NASA, even claims that the Russians possibly ‘concocted this story’ to ‘exact a revenge’ on the US after it defeated the Soviets in the space race by landing on the Moon on July 20, 1969.

Interestingly, Professor Irwin Weil, a teacher of Slavic languages and literature at Illinois’s Northwestern University, highlights a number of similarities between the text and an unpublished poem of Lev Kopelev, a Soviet writer, whose citizenship was revoked in 1980.

Stephen Jay Greenblatt, a literary critic with whom the cipher was also shared, insists that the text is ‘definitely not’ penned by a man of science, ‘who tends to stick to facts rather than

making sweeping generalizations’. Greenblatt regards it as the creation of a ‘second-class romantic writer’.

A majority of our scientists, however, reject the scientific hoax theory for a number of reasons including the fact that no Soviet satellite was present at the location from where the message originated on September 4, 1969 at 11:34 am UTC.

These scientists are using this text to develop a profile of the people of the neighboring planet.

The Martians are apparently not only far superior to humans in their technology but are also far bigger and heavier than us physically, if we go by the text which is presented below.

We are also providing annotations to



It seems that the Martians, possibly due to their single-minded focus on technology, ignored a need for artistic expression for a long time and now they have finally found solace in our artistic creations

give a context to the Senate subcommittee members not well-versed in planetary science and eastern history and literature.

Original Text of the Cipher

“A denizen of the solar suburb[1], man is a bipedal animal roughly half the size of a Martian. Its average weight is equal to the weight of our ten-year-old child.

“However, his size and proportions are deceptive.

“In his thoughts and feelings, he sometimes grows taller than our Olympus Mons[2] but the fickle animal also has the capacity to stoop to a level much lower than the Hellas Planitia [3].

“His mind is like the gigantic court of Afrasiyab[4] where both Attar[5] and De Sade dance, often unbeknown to one another.

“He can simultaneously yearn for immortality and eternal death; suffering and salvation; heaven and hell. He often tries to simultaneously explore both the valleys of darkness and the realms of light.

“The one who kills a child for fun and the one who sacrifices his life for a child lives inside him at the same time. The one who eats the rotting remains of his classmate to satisfy his

envy [6] and the one who carves his own flesh to satisfy the hunger of a starving wolf [7]live inside him side by side.

“Inside him live both Christ and Caligula; Moses and Pharaoh; Ram and Rawan[8].

“His heart is sometimes smaller than half a penny but at times entire galaxies disappear into its vastness.

“Man – a prodigy of paradoxes, a confluence of contradictions – is unfathomable.”

Reference

[1] The Earth, which the Martian regard as backward

[2] The largest and highest known mountain of the Mars as well as the Solar System, Olympus Mons is three times higher than the Earth’s Mount Everest

[3] The largest visible impact crater in the Solar System. A giant depression with a floor over seven kilometres below the Martian surface

[4] The antagonist of Urdu’s longest epic Tilism-e-Hoshrub

[5] Fariduddin Attar, a thirteenth century mystic poet from Persia

[6] Apparently a reference to Issei Sagawa, a Japanese psychopath

[7] Apparently a reference to Hatim Tai, who in Persian dastaan Haft Sayr gives a piece of his flesh to a starving wolf so that the animal may spare the life of a mother doe

[8] Respectively, the protagonist and the antagonist of Indian epic Ramayana

(DISCLAIMER: This is a work of fiction. Any names or characters, businesses or places, events or incidents, are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.)

Design: Mohsin Alam

T Magazine’s picks



Try this:
Soft Swirl



Winter just got dippy, creamy and topped with crumbly brownies and Oreo shavings, as Soft Swirl, the newest ice cream chain takes the country by storm. Hailing from Islamabad, otherwise known for heated politics, the ice cream comes in reasonably priced but next-level chocolate and vanilla dairy milk soft-serves. Find an Instagrammable Soft Swirl parlour near you in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Mardan and Wah and indulge in a variety of Instaworthy floats, mounds, shakes and the most popular twisters where your favourite chocolates blend with this heavenly ice cream.



Listen this week:
Kill Bill



This isn’t the only track in SZA’s highly-anticipated, new album SOS that finds her unleashing anger over a failed relationship. Hitting the US charts on number 3, the song is about heartbreak, rage and revenge, coming right out of what SZA describes as her ‘villain era’. She wrote the lo-fi, electric bass-thumping banger about toxic exes, and the song title references Quentin Tarrantino’s Kill Bill (2003), starring Uma Thurman, as a former assassin who seeks revenge after her jealous ex-lover Bill attempts to murder her on her wedding day.



Watch this week:
Middle8



Canadian YouTuber Frank Furtado’s stories and thoughts about today’s music with motion graphics. Middle 8 offers a series of video essays about music of various genres, ranging from pop music to indie music. Furtado is an award-winning writer and broadcaster, and has been producing digital content for 15 years. His consistent style of analyses combines both songwriting and theory. So if you want to know what happened to Linkin Park, why Green Day’s most personal track became a meme or why Brockhampton broke up, this is your channel.



Follow this week:
Noble Blood



If you love Game of Thrones-style power struggles, gruesome murders, murderers, tyrants and tragedies, then Noble Blood is the podcast for you. Not all episodes are gruesome, each episode brimming with education features a new royal. One of the most powerful episodes features Marie Antoinette’s imprisonment. With a cinematic quality to her narration, host Dana Schwartz seems to delight in the description of decapitated heads, but her blatant anti-male rhetoric and heavily biased feminist perspective on history can get a tad irritating, as does her mispronunciation.



STONE IN PERPETUAL MOTION

A dancer carved from grey limestone represents one of the most significant finds of Harappan sculpture. Missing its limbs like the Venus de Milo, the intricate details in what is left of it evoke mystery and excite the imagination

By ARSHAD AWAN

New findings add intrigue to the impeccably crafted Indus Valley stone figurines found in excavations in Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. Why were these stripped of their ornaments and what happened to their limbs?

Even though just a few statuettes have been found from the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, yet these statuettes are of exceptionally high quality. One of the greatest and most significant pieces of Harappan sculpture, the grey limestone torso of a dancer from Harappa is an admirable and a fascinating work of art.

Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni, an archaeologist who supervised the excavation of the Indus valley at Harappa in 1921 and 1922, discovered a stone torso of a male dance figure that had been fractured. Curiously, this statuette does not appear in Sahni's preliminary reports on the work carried out there, despite being an important example of Indus Valley art.

The Indian archaeologist and Sanskrit scholar, Pandit Madho Sarup Vats who served as the director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India from 1950 to 1954, is renowned for his participation and supervision of the Mohenjo Daro excavations beginning in 1924. He noted that



In its sculpture, as in many other aspects, the distinctly Indian character of the Harappan culture, virtually undisturbed by contemporary Iran or Sumer, is evident

chaecological Survey of India from 1902 to 1928, supervised saw the excavations of Harappa and Mohenjo Daro. While introducing the grey stone torso in his book (Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Valley Civilisation, I, 45-46) he comments as follows: "And now we come to two small statuettes which are more surprising even than the masterly engraving of the bull ... When I first saw them I found it difficult to believe that they were prehistoric; they seemed to so completely upset all established ideas about early art. Modelling such as this was unknown in the ancient world up to the Hellenistic age of Greece ... Now there was no stone obtainable at Harappa or anywhere near it. Whatever stone was needed there had to be brought great distances ... Then, as to technique. In both statuettes, it will be observed, there are socket holes in the neck and shoulders for the attachment of head and arms,



Wheeler deemed the date of creation of this painting to be 'controversial', but he agreed with Marshall that there is an intriguing historical connection between it and the historical 'Dancing Shiva'

the artefact was discovered on Mound F in an Intermediate I stratum, which is the Great Granary area associated with Building IV on the central-aisle side of Harappa, around 150 metres north of where the red jasper torso was discovered. According to Vats, everything in this section of the site, may be securely attributed to the Mature Harappan.

This torso is 9.9 cm tall but the head, arms and legs are missing. Similar to the red jasper torso, there are openings for the arms and head, but the legs have been severed. As a dancer, his right leg is firmly planted, while his left leg is elevated in motion. The attractively twisted torso gives the impression of motion. There are holes at the back of the neck, which most likely served to secure hair, and also indicate that the face was almost directly facing the ground.

On closer inspection, the grey stone torso of the dancer lacks the authenticity of the red jasper torso, but it is still a believable depiction of a dancing figure. It should be considered as the pinnacle of Harappan art as it possesses life and motion. With the exception of the bronze dancing girl, it is more vibrant than anything from Mohenjo Daro.

Sir John Hubert Marshall, an English archaeologist who was the director-general of the Ar-

which were made in separate pieces; in both, moreover, the nipples of the breasts were made independently and fixed with cement. So far as I know, this technique is without parallel among sculptors of the historic period, whether of the Indo-Hellenistic or any other school. On the other hand it is also unexampled at Mohenjo Daro ... It is the figure of a dancer standing on his right leg, with the body from the waist upwards bent well round to the left, both arms thrown out in the same direction, and the left leg raised high in front ... Although its contours are soft and effeminate, the figure is that of a male, and it seems likely that it was ithyphallic, since the membrum virile was made in a separate piece. I infer, too, from the abnormal thickness of the neck, that the dancer was three-headed or at any rate three-faced, and I conjecture that he may represent the youthful S(h)iva Nataraja."

Marshall's reconstruction of the pose may not be too far off the mark, despite the lack of evidence for the position of the arms. Wheeler deemed the date of creation of this painting to be "controversial", but he agreed with Marshall that there is an intriguing historical connection between it and the historical "Dancing Shiva" the youthful Shiva Nataraja.

Nataraja is a depiction of the Hindu god Shiva, known as the supreme cosmic dancer. His dance is known as the Tandava. The pose and artwork are described in a number of Hindu texts, including the Tevaram, Thiruvagasam in Tamil, and Anshumadbhed Agama and Ut-tarakamika Agama in Sanskrit and Grantha texts. The dance moorti [statue] is a well-known sculptural symbol in India and is commonly used as a symbol of Indian culture, in particular as one of the finest examples of Hindu art.

In this fascinating male dancing figure in which the head has

so, initially featured inlaid nipples, shoulder discs, and a head attached separately. The sculpture's technique differs from previously discovered red jasper male torsos from the same site.

The dancer exhibits subtle facets and striations lacking from the smoothly rounded torso outlines. It is doubtful that the same person created them.

Archaeologically, the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the two items are not entirely satisfying due to the absence of competent observation during the excavations. But it may look to other places for comparable evidence. Mohenjo Daro, the southernmost capital of the Harappan Empire, produced several stone sculptures in plausible archaeological contexts, the most famous of which is the Bearded Man. Here is an art tradition that is more hieratic, and more formal than the naturalism of the Harappan torso, but the use of inlay and metal must be noted. The trefoils on the robe, the bare right arm and the sockets for a metal (probably

and inlaid eyes are again plainly evident. This ornamentation of stone carving with inlay and metalwork is common in prehistoric Western Asia but not in early historic Indian sculpture. It, therefore, leans toward accepting the two Harappan statues as genuine examples of prehistoric Indian art from the first or second millennium BC.

The additional data supports this position. From Mohenjo Daro emerges a magnificent bronze figure of a girl, the Dancing Girl of Mohenjo Daro, whose body and limbs are modelled with similar sensitivity as Harappa sculptures. This bronze was discovered in an unremarkable archaeological context. Recent comparative research has demonstrated that it represents, in all details of hair-dressing and adornment, a sophisticated version of a female type known in numerous roughly schematised pottery figurines from prehistoric sites in Balochistan, where trade contacts with the Harappan civilisation are evident.

In addition to the naturalistic animal representations so brilliantly exemplified in the art of the seal, engravers are well represented. The available evidence suggests that around 2000 BCE, Punjab produced a naturalistic human sculpture that even anticipates certain later Indian modes.

In its sculpture, as in many other aspects, the distinctly Indian character of the Harappan culture, virtually undisturbed by contemporary Iran or Sumer, is evident. It is important to note a peculiar occurrence in the discovery of the two Harappan statuettes. The passageways of similar two-roomed cottages that made up the 'coolie-lines' of the day were located adjacent

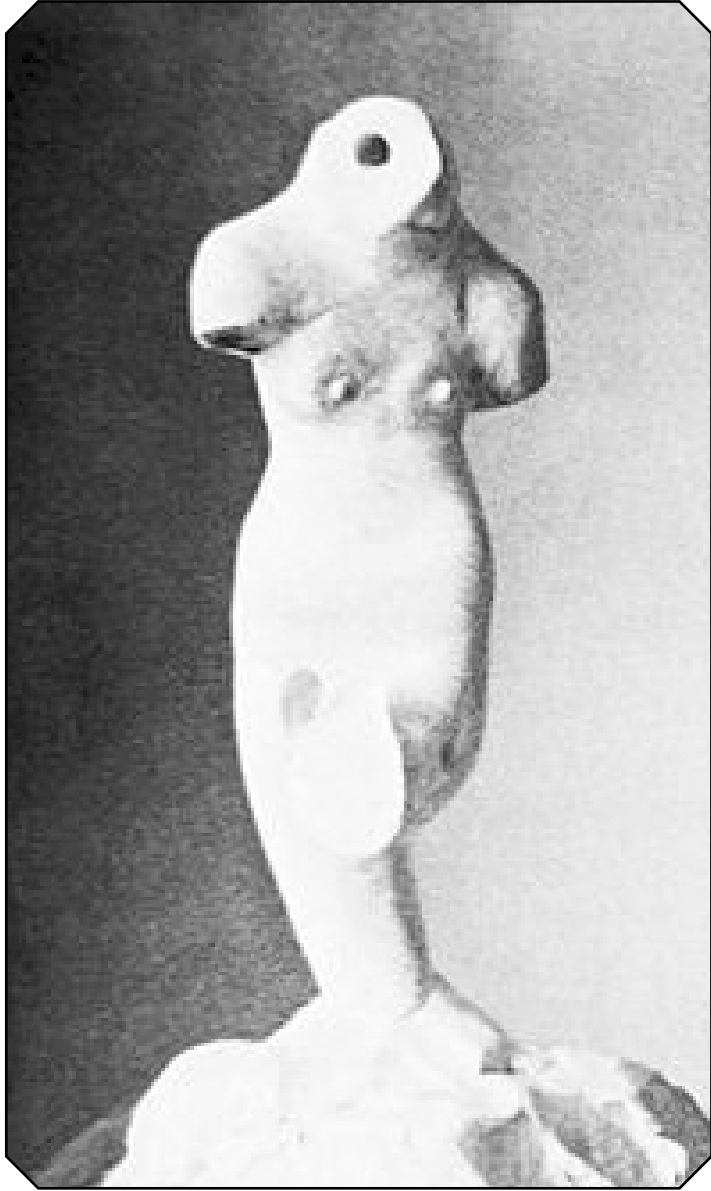
to large grain stores and indications of organised flour manufacturing in the city's poorest section. A large trove of gold and gems was also discovered in the courtyard of one of the workers' cottages in this neighbourhood. This appears to be loot from a burglary in the city's wealthier neighbourhoods, or else how can the statuettes stripped of their metal ornaments, broken and discarded, be explained?

Even if the archaeology of early historic India is in its infancy, the archaeological technique can rescue at least one set of minor works of art from the domain of ludicrous speculations.

Colonel D. H. Gordon, a well-known soldier and a working archaeologist for many years in colonial India, collected, excavated and was published widely especially The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture, 1960. His work has demonstrated that except for a prehistoric series belonging to or contemporaneous with the Harappan culture, the majority of human figurines of baked clay prevalent in Northern India and of such varying artistic merit, can be dated to the third century BC to the first two or three centuries AD. Also the extravagant claims for an Aryan origin for some figurines are wholly unfounded.

This new dating is based on the archaeological evidence of stratified sites such as Taxila. Once the major types in the stylistic series have been established, dating should proceed along logical lines.

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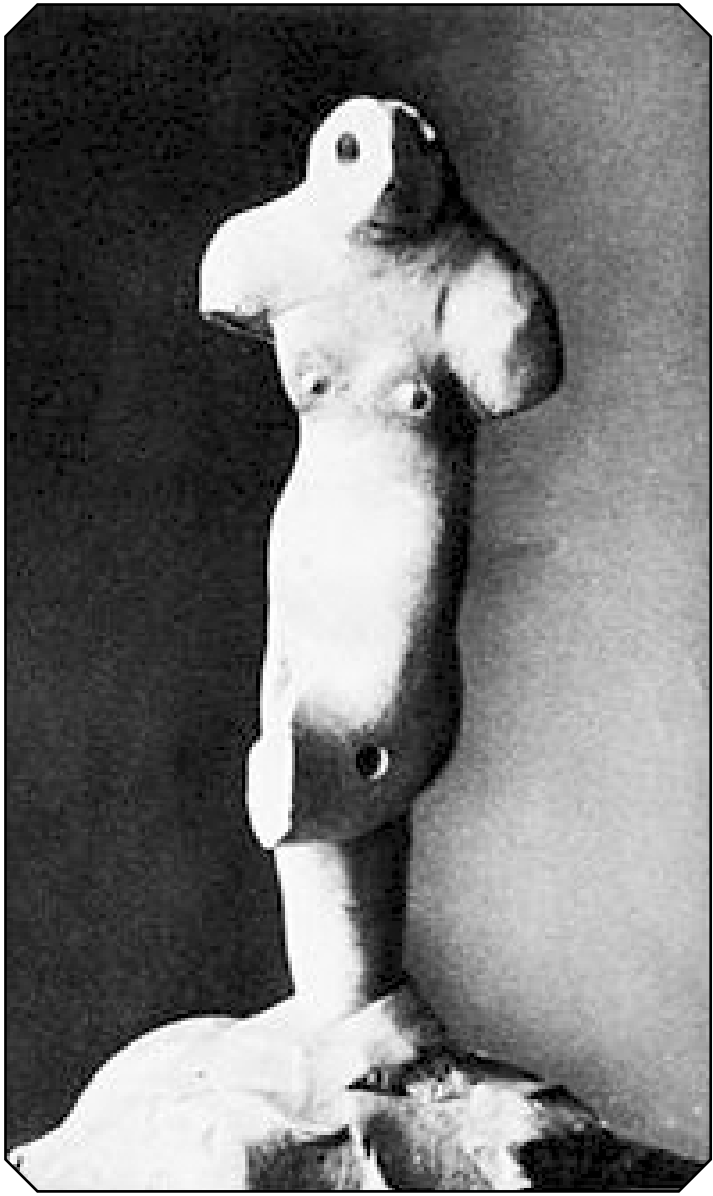


Curiously, this statuette does not appear in Sahni's preliminary reports on the work carried out there despite being an important example of Indus Valley art

been independently affixed with metal pegs, the arms and legs created as multiple pieces tied together, and the nipples are inlaid with some form of plaster. Additionally, the sandstone tor-

gold) collar can be seen at the base of the hair on each side behind the ears.

In a wonderful piece of stela sculpture from the same site, a bull, metal ears, horns,





ARRIVAL OF FEATHERED GUESTS FROM SIBERIA

Last year 650,000 migratory birds came to coastal areas of Pakistan

By **AFTAB KHAN**

Migratory birds from the world's coldest region have started flocking into the coastal areas of Pakistan, including the water bodies of Sindh, especially Sea View, Hawke's Bay and Russian Beach. Every year, these feathered guests fly thousands of miles from Central Siberian tundra to spend three months in the coastal areas of Pakistan.

According to birdwatchers, these migratory birds leave Siberia in autumn in search of food and warm weather and enter Pakistan via the Central Asian state of Kazakhstan. They follow an instinctively set flyway during this regular seasonal movement which is one of the great wonders of the natural world.

Flyways are defined as flight pathways taken by migratory

birds while moving between their overwintering quarters and breeding grounds. Pakistan is included in the list of countries that are covered by the Central Asian Flyway. The flyway in Pakistan is also known as Green Routes or Indus Flyway Zone.

The migratory birds of Pakistan include ducks, cranes, geese, flamingos, swans, flacons, and waders. Their favorite food and wild plants are found in abundance in the freshwater lakes of Sindh and along the coastline.

A flock of migratory birds flying in a particular formation is a mesmerizing sight to behold and you don't have to be a bird-watcher to appreciate this stunning phenomenon of the natural world.

According to the bird census of 2021-22, more than 650,000 mi-



gratory birds stayed in the coastal areas and water bodies of Sindh, said Mumtaz Soomro, Administrator of the Sindh Wildlife Department, while speaking to The

Express Tribune. "We are expecting more birds this season," he said. "We have formed teams at the district level to protect these feathered guests from predators."

George Sadiq, Program Officer at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), said that these migratory birds are very sensitive. "Usually,

they prefer to fly to alternative countries instead of settling on dirt or polluted water," he told The Express Tribune. He advised the people visiting the wetland habitats of migratory birds to take extra care of cleanliness because these feathered guests are a blessing from the nature.

The migratory birds stay in Pakistan from December to February. Besides Karachi, Keenjhar and Haleji lakes, Sukkhar barrage, Russian Beach, Hawke's Bay, Hub Dam, Sufi Anwar Shah Park and the coastal areas are also among the habitats of these birds.

According to George, during their stay in Pakistan these visitors also clean the environment and play a key role in controlling the population of insects, which are an essential part of their diet.

TWO MEN SENTENCED TO ONE-YEAR IN JAIL FOR WILDLIFE SMUGGLING

Mithi court also imposes Rs2.2m fine on the men accused of smuggling four fawns

By **SAMEER MANDHRO**

A lower court in Mithi on Tuesday handed two men one-year jail term and a fine of Rs2.2 million for attempted smuggling of four fawns.

During a raid on November 3, the Sindh Wildlife Department (SWD) found four fawns from two men identified as Abdullah Samejo and Maqbool Rahimoon. They were arrested and sent to a local police station and booked under charges of smuggling the wild animals.

"The fawns were caught in the wild and were being transported to Karachi," SWD's Deputy Director for Mirpurkhas region Mir Aijaz Talpur told The Express Tribune "The animals were just a few days old."

Talpur said that his team tried to save the lives of fawns, but "unfortunately they did not survive."

The fawns were caught most probably from Daheli, a taluka of Tharparkar district.

On Tuesday, Additional Sessions Judge I Mithi awarded one-year sentence and a fine of Rs2.2 million to both the accused.

"Not a single man has ever received such a sentence before," Talpur said. "It is the first time in Pakistan that wildlife smugglers have been sentenced and heavily fined," he added.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, SWD's Provincial Conservator Javed Ahmed Mahar said: "It is all because of the new law passed recently by the Sindh Assembly."

In July 2020, the provincial assembly passed the Sindh Wildlife Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management Bill 2020, which aims to enhance protection of wildlife in the province. It replaced a weaker law, hardly providing any protection to wild animals, for the first time since 1972.

"The new law is strict for wildlife smugglers," Mahar said. "It is the first time that smugglers and whoever harms wildlife is being punished."

Last month, five offenders paid SWD Rs2.3 million for illegally hunting seven Chinkara deer in the same district.

The officials said that as per the law hunting deer is banned across Sindh. The offenders, Ali Ahmed, Salam Bari, Abdul Ghani, Mohammad Saleem and Mohammad Hasan, were caught red-handed by villagers in Ranglio in July.

During the trial at a court in Mithi, the offenders plead guilty to the crime and submitted to pay the compounding amount under Section 27 of the new law.

"This is second remarkable decision in just two months that offenders are being punished," Mahar said. "It will certainly discourage wildlife smuggling," he added.

TROPHY HUNTING OF IBEX AND URIAL IN SINDH BEGINS IN DECEMBER

Hunting allowed in four game reserves of Wildlife Department

By **OUR CORRESPONDENT**

Trophy hunting Ibex and Urial will begin in December and continue until March in the "game reserves" of Sindh, the Provincial Wildlife Department announced on Tuesday.

The permits issued for trophy hunting will be valid for seven days, but hunting will not be allowed in the Kirthar National Park and Sindh Wildlife Sanctuaries. Similarly, hunting of female Ibexes and Urinals and their fawns will be strictly prohibited.

Official statistics put the number of Sindh Ibexes across the province at 16,599 and the number of Urinals at around 3,165.

Trophy hunting is allowed in four "game reserves" of the Wildlife Department, which are located in Thana Bula Khan taluka of the mountainous Kohistan region in Jamshoro district. These game reserves are Eri, Sumbak, Surjan and Hothiano.

Hunting will not be allowed in the Kirthar National Park and around 33 sanctuaries of the Wildlife Department.

Mumtaz Soomro of the Sindh Wildlife



Department told The Express Tribune that Urinals with 35 inches long horns and Ibexes with 22 inches long horns have been offered for trophy hunting. "Long-horned Ibexes and Urinals are old and have lived their average life," he added. "The average lifespan of an Ibex and Urial is around 15 years."

According to Soomro, 80% of money earned from trophy hunting permits fees is spent on the health, education and other needs of the community responsible for the protection of the game reserves, while the rest goes to the provincial kitty.

He said that trophy hunting discourages illegal poaching as it motivates the communities to protect the animals.

There are 15,539 Ibexes and 2,529 Urinals in the Kirthar National Park, while the number of Ibexes and Urinals in the game reserves is 1,060 Ibex and 536, respectively.

Soomro said that this season 15 Ibexes and 5 Urinals are up for trophy hunting for foreign hunters against a fee of \$5,600 and \$14,000 per trophy, respectively. Five Ibex trophies will be up for hunting for Pakistani citizens against a minimum fee of Rs.300,000.

FISHERMEN CATCH AND RELEASE 12FT SAILFISH

The sailfish is known as ghora machi or horse fish because of its leaps and bounds in the open sea

By **OUR CORRESPONDENT**

A team of fishermen from Ibrahim Hyderi caught a huge sailfish in their net while fishing off the coast of Karachi on Wednesday.

"Considering it a rare fish in our waters, we released it," said Muhammad Siddiq Gadani. He allowed the 12-foot long fish to go only after a photo shoot.

Gadani's team mates said they had cast the net as usual, but when they started hauling it in, they knew that something big was coming up.

It was a tough fight bringing the 12ft giant of a fish out of the net. Its sharp nose can easily slash through the flesh while the fin, tailored by the nature like a sail, has spikes too.

Once the fish was tired, the crew took its photographs and released it back into the sea.

The sailfish is known as ghora machi or horse fish because of its



leaps and bounds in the open sea. Gadani said so far he has not seen sailfish of this size brought to the Ibrahim Hyderi Fishing Jetty.

According to WWF Technical Ad-

visor Moazzam Khan, sailfish is not an endangered species. Last year 2,200 tons of sailfish was caught off the Pakistani coastline, mostly for export. Sailfish meat is not popular

in Pakistan. He says that the meat of this fish is not eaten with much enthusiasm in Pakistan. After hunting, this fish is being smuggled to Iran.