



COVER STORY

Page 1

Many Pakistani entrepreneurs may need a solid understanding of the industry — Haziq

87th

is Pakistan's rank among the world's 132 economies in Global Innovation Index 2022

CULTURE & SOCIETY

Page 3

I learnt this trade when I was a child. Business was good in those days — Umar Daraz

HISTORY & HERITAGE

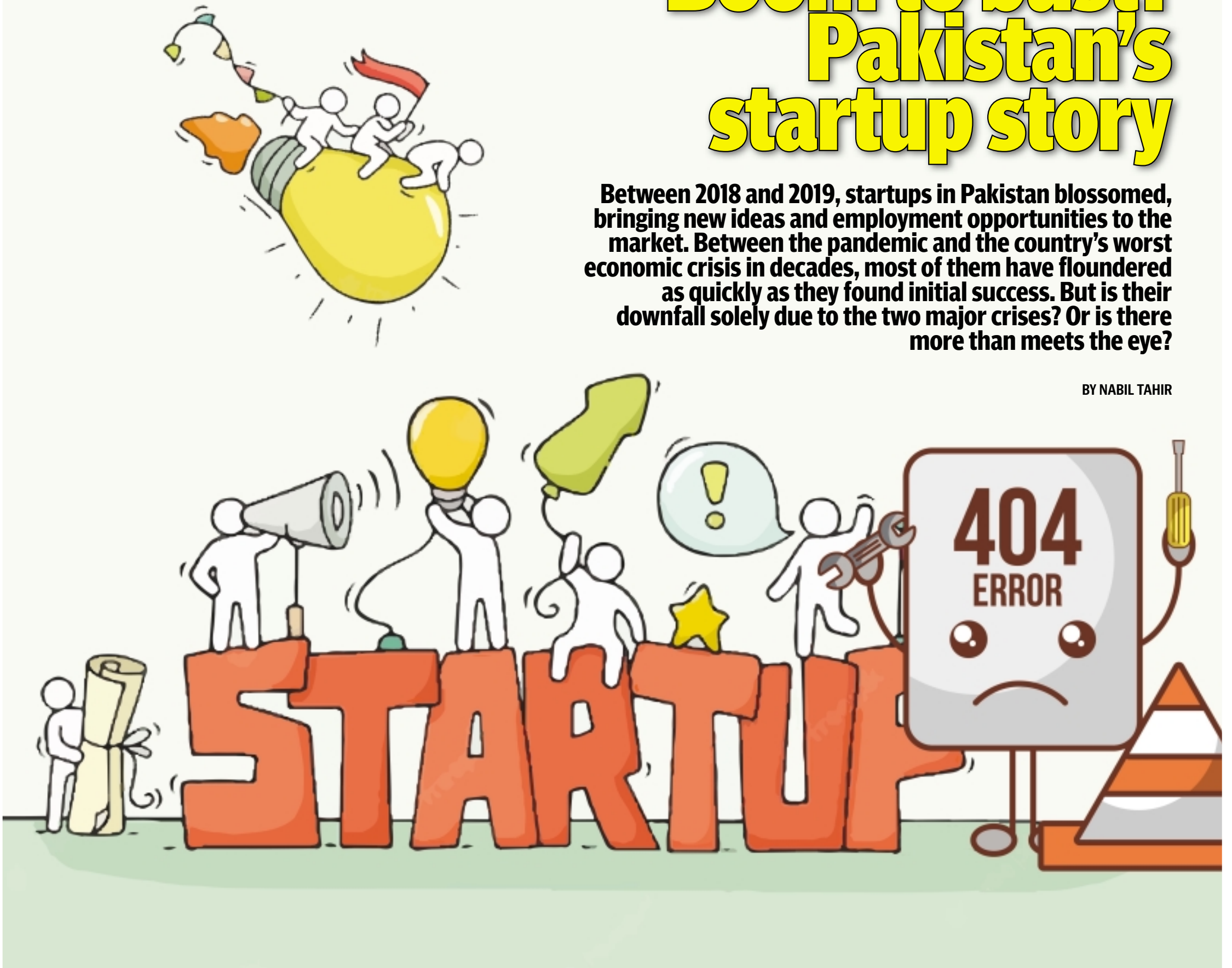
Page 8

Culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately aim at — TS Elliot

Boom to bust? Pakistan's startup story

Between 2018 and 2019, startups in Pakistan blossomed, bringing new ideas and employment opportunities to the market. Between the pandemic and the country's worst economic crisis in decades, most of them have floundered as quickly as they found initial success. But is their downfall solely due to the two major crises? Or is there more than meets the eye?

BY NABIL TAHIR



Starting a business is much more complicated than people think it is. Many young, fresh graduates or mid-career level professionals who opt for creating their small-scale companies and are called entrepreneurs. They see a demand or a problem to be solved in the market and develop their business model around it. Sometimes, they copy other successful business models or create new ideas. The initial cost of these companies is relatively high, and resources are minimal. The ones who get enough funding from ventures and make up a good team with solid business models survive, whereas the rest fail midway. The failures have a more significant chunk, which is 90 per cent.

Entrepreneurship is a great way to build your future, but it requires specific planning, resources, facilities, and a belief to keep going. But Pakistan may need more of these areas, which is why 90 per cent of the startups fail. According to a figure, around 300 startups are launched every year, but only 10 per cent of them sustain. In Pakistan, the startup market grew before COVID struck, but then the investments dried up. This resulted in a closure of a startup en route to becoming a unicorn in the country.

Now, as 2023 has started and the world, especially Pakistan, is going through financial difficulties, what does our country hold for the future of startups? To know about the reasons for the failures and the future of startups, The Express Tribune talked experts from one of the leading incubators of Pakistan — the National Incubation Centre — and a startup that was launched at the time four big competitors were in the market — Krave Mart.

The period of 2018-2019 is known to be the best for startups in Pakistan. The success ratio was high, and many good ideas came up. The startup industry was growing in all areas. Ideas were coming up, the number of ventures and angels were increasing, and incubators were helping small-scale startups sustain. All of this went awry when COVID struck the world. There was a global recession due to the pandemic; dozens of startups and other companies hit rock bottom.

“Having no knowledge of the area you are about to step into and then relying on a small size of research can end up in failure. Especially in Pakistan, where the market is full of challenges for newcomers

But was COVID the only reason for the downfall of the startup market in Pakistan? Is this the only reason that Pakistani startups were or are still failing? Well, no. This is just one of many, and there are multiple issues that explain why startups make mistakes and end up failing.

Lack of knowledge

Many of the well-written proposals with brilliant ideas never proceed to a higher stage and fail in the beginning. This is because they people behind them need to educate themselves on all areas and aspects of running a startup. Many entrepreneurs in Pakistan need more knowledge and skills to start and run a successful business. They may need to understand market research, business planning, financial management and other critical business tools and processes. This can make it difficult for them to make informed decisions and navigate the complex startup process.

Haziq Ahmed, the Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Qcommerce startup Krave Mart, explained that the startups in Pakistan don't do much research on the market they are entering. “You must do thorough research before putting the first brick of your startup. Having no knowledge of the area you are about to step into and then relying on a small size of research can end up in failure. Especially in Pakistan, where the market is full of challenges for newcomers, you need to talk to every person that is related to your startup or who you will be dealing with in the future so that you know what is about to come and prepare yourself accordingly. If you cannot see the future of the steps you are taking, then failure waits ahead,” he said.

“Additionally, many entrepreneurs in Pakistan may need a solid understanding of the industry they are entering, making it difficult to identify opportunities and develop effective strategies. This can lead to a lack of focus and direction, resulting in the startup's failure.”

Giving an example of Swvl and other international startups that entered the Pakistani market with a lack of research, Haziq said that the lack of understanding of the legal and regulatory environment could also pose a significant challenge for startups in Pakistan. “Entrepreneurs may not be aware of the laws and regulations that apply to their business, which can lead to costly mistakes and penalties. Additionally, the players and mafia in the market won't let you easily operate. So you have to be prepared. This was one of the reasons why Swvl had to shut down its operation in Pakistan,” he added.

Project Director at National Incubation Center Parvez Abbasi explained the mistake that fresh startups make: “The failure ratio of startups in Pakistan compared to international startups is relatively high. It simply comes down to the nature of startups here that makes them drop below. About 90 per cent of all startups in the country tend to fail or not make it past a definite stage. Usually, it is because of the lack of technical and marketing knowledge, which explains the amount of failure present. In addition to individual blunders, most startups fail to generate the required capital to sustain themselves, thus not making it very far,” said Abbasi.

Innovation vs experience

Another critical factor contributing to the failure of startups in Pakistan is the need for more innovation and market differentiation. Many startups in Pakistan tend to copy existing business models and ideas from other countries rather than developing unique and innovative products or services that can stand out in the market. This makes it difficult for them to compete with established players and attract customers.

One of the main reasons for the lack of innovation in Pakistan is the need for more research and development (R&D) activities. Many startups in Pakistan

need more resources and facilities to conduct R&D activities, which can be critical for developing new products and services and staying ahead of the competition.

Additionally, the lack of education and training in innovation and entrepreneurship contributes to Pakistan's need for more innovation. Many entrepreneurs in Pakistan need more knowledge and skills to develop and implement innovative business models and ideas.

Haziq, who entered the market when there were already four players, said that although they had a similar business model to the other four players who were already established in the market, Haziq knew where he had the edge over others due to having an experience in logistics, and so kept focus on that.

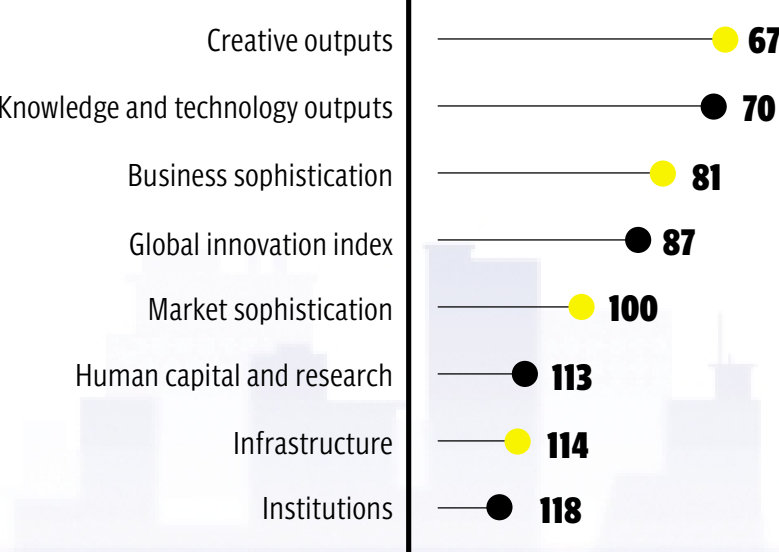
“Entrepreneurs may not be aware of the laws and regulations that apply to their business, which can lead to costly mistakes and penalties. Additionally, the players and mafia in the market won't let you easily operate. So you have to be prepared. This was one of the reasons why Swvl had to shut down its operation in Pakistan

“Many Qcommerce startups focus on gaining more and more orders, which their warehouses cannot accommodate. The claim is that delivering the order in 10 minutes is not easy, and you have to focus on the more active areas. The others focused on making more than 2,000 orders per day from each store without considering the limitation of the store. We kept in mind the limitation and focused on delivering 200 to 250 orders. Not just this we kept on relocating our store according to the need. The size and the location matter a lot,” he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



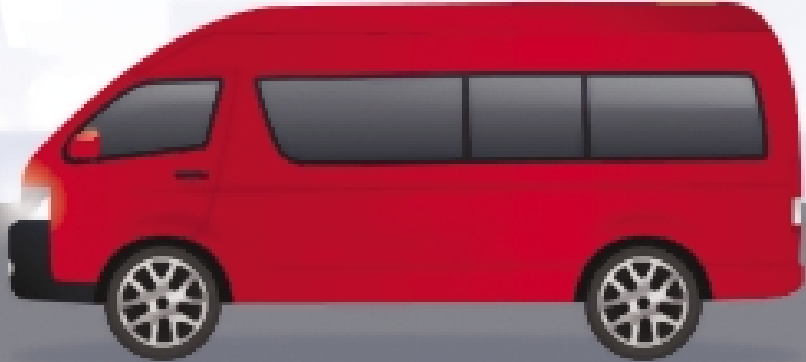
THE SEVEN GII PILLAR RANKS FOR PAKISTAN



Note: The highest possible ranking in each pillar is 1

RANKINGS FOR PAKISTAN [2020-2022]

GIIYR	GII	Innovation inputs	Innovation outputs
2020	107	118	88
2021	99	117	77
2022	87	111	69



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Many startups that rely on the margins that the companies have for them and the delivery fees face challenges in sustaining. These margins are tiny at the beginning and swell as the company grows and sells good volumes to convince manufacturers to give them better margins. According to a source in the FMCG industry, the margins from Unilever for retail stores can go as high as 15 to 18 per cent, but more than that is not possible.

“We not only focused on the margins, but now, as we are growing, we are focusing on Krave Mart-labelled products that will have a higher margin, and we will be able to sustain financially. The discounts we offer are aimed at cultivating strong returning customers, as they will come and buy a discounted item and more products with that,” he said.

He further added that the quality of service also matters. At Krave Mart, all the items are checked when delivered to the warehouse and again before going out for delivery to the customer. Even then, if there is some issue, they offer refunds and replacements considering the history of the customer.

Abbasi said that every startup has real people at the helm and every individual belonging to the startup is different. “The gross impact on the outlook of businesses could vary. Similar ideas can still produce different outcomes. However, it can become repetitive, meaning there’s no disruption in innovation. Sadly, collaboration is looked down upon here, and you’re always someone else’s competitor rather than a companion. Thankfully, organisations such as the NIC are there for small startups, and they cater to the ones who are lagging,” he added.

To overcome this challenge, it is essential to increase access to education and training pro-

grammes for entrepreneurs, provide resources and support for startups to help them conduct R&D activities, and create a more conducive cultural mindset that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship.

Another area for improvement is the need for more access to experienced mentors and advisors who can provide guidance and support. Lack of them can make it difficult for startups to overcome obstacles and make critical business decisions.

The need for incubation and acceleration programmes is also a reason. While incubation centres and accelerators exist in Pakistan, they are few and far between, and most of them are based in major cities like Karachi and Lahore, leaving the rest of the country with little to no support.

Incubation and acceleration programmes are critical for providing startups with the resources and support they need to grow and succeed. These programmes



General acceptability is minimal as few are willing to support businesses from the ground up. Secondly, in terms of finance, there are no established options available for startups. The government makes it hard for businesses, let alone startups, to operate conveniently

grammes for entrepreneurs, provide resources and support for startups to help them conduct R&D activities, and create a more conducive cultural mindset that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship.

Dearth of resources and facilities
Another major issue contributing to the failure of startups in Pakistan is the need for proper infrastructure. Many areas of Pakistan need more basic facilities such as reliable electricity, fast Internet connectivity and suitable office spaces, which are essential for the smooth functioning of any business. This makes it difficult for startups to operate and compete with companies in more developed regions.

Abbasi, while explaining the available resources, said that the overall aptitude of the Pakistani public is a big hurdle for startups. “The general acceptability is minimal as few are willing to support businesses from the ground up. Secondly, in terms of finance, there are no established options

give startups access to funding, mentorship, education, and networking opportunities, which are essential for a successful business.

NIC is one of the largest government-owned incubators. Abbasi shared that the NIC enables startups and creates an environment through networking, coaching, and mentorship to help develop a sense of awareness and acceptability for innovation in the startup landscape of Pakistan. To date, the NIC has helped enable more than 700 founders to fulfill their dreams and, in hindsight, contribute to the flourishing startup ecosystem in Pakistan.

Haziq, however, has a different opinion. For him, most incubators and accelerators are focused on the freelance market. “They are increasing the IT export of the country, which is also a good thing to do. But the type of startups we are talking about are the ones that turn into companies, and for them, there is a lack of opportunities,” he said.

“One of the main reasons for



Many startups in Pakistan tend to copy existing business models and ideas from other countries rather than developing unique and innovative products or services that can stand out in the market

the lack of incubation and acceleration programmes in Pakistan is the lack of government support and funding. Many government-funded incubation and acceleration programmes are limited in scope and reach. The lack of private sector investment in incubation and acceleration programmes also contributes to the problem. Many private sector organisations are hesitant to invest in incubation and acceleration programmes due to the perceived high risk and lack of return on investment,” said Haziq, whose startup has recently joined the Y Combinator at Silicon Valley and has gained support in upscaling the business.

The need for more awareness and understanding of the value of incubation and acceleration pro-

tors and secure funding.

For example, Airlift. It started its operations as a ride-hailing service with a vast gap in the Pakistani market but faced financial challenges due to COVID. They then shifted their business model from ride-hailing to Q-commerce. During this period, they secured \$85 billion in funding, which was the highest in the history of Pakistani startups. After gaining further success, the announcement was made that the startup had managed to raise another successful round of \$350 million. This took the startup to a \$1 billion valuation. But in reality, these were all tall claims made to the investors, and the startup could not generate enough revenue to work without the funding, and eventually, they had to shut

ground hard despite being one of Pakistan’s most promising startups. “They raised \$85 million in funding only to blow it all. The company came out with a statement saying the shutdown was due to the global recession and recent downturns in the market. On the other hand, venture capitalists and indecent cash flow could also have been the problem,” he explained.

The lack of proper exit strategies also contributes to the failure of startups in Pakistan. Many entrepreneurs focus on the initial stages of starting a business but need to plan for the future, which makes it difficult for them to exit the market and move on to new projects.

Skilled workforce shortage

The need for a more skilled workforce is one of the major hindrances to the growth of startups in Pakistan. Many startups need help finding and retaining talented employees, making it challenging to build and scale a business.

Abbasi explains that a team that needs more diversity is headed toward difficulty. “One dimensional teams, like a group of engineers running a business, will lack marketing expertise. Likewise, the same would happen the other way around. Variety is critical in the management setup because, after a particular scale, it might not be possible for the founders to run their businesses alone. They will need to call upon seasoned professionals from different fields. Of course, institutions like the NIC can handhold startups and help them with aspects of HR, marketing, and even training their interns to retain them,” he said.

Meanwhile, Haziq believes that a professional can be hired. When Krave Mart was to launch, they already had players in the market

regulatory obstacles, such as bureaucratic red tape and a need for clear regulations around business operations. These barriers can make it difficult for startups to navigate the legal and regulatory landscape.

Moreover, the lack of a proper legal framework and intellectual property rights also poses a significant problem for startups in Pakistan. The current laws are not adequate enough to protect the rights of entrepreneurs and their innovations, which can lead to exploitation and discourage innovation.

For Haziq, the ease of doing business in Pakistan is more than in other countries. He explains by giving an example of a company planning to launch in Pakistan. “The number of legal documents and approvals required in Pakistan is far less than in other countries. So it is easy to operate in Pakistan as far as the regulations are concerned. But yes, there are many more barriers created by the competitors and mafia which need to be controlled to give a safe and secure environment for the startups to operate,” he said.

Future for startups

The future for startups in Pakistan looks promising, as the country has a large and growing population of young, educated people who are increasingly turning to entrepreneurship as a career path. Additionally, the government is taking steps to support the startup ecosystem by establishing technology parks and incubators and providing funding and other resources to help startups get off the ground.

However, challenges still need to be addressed, such as limited access to funding, a need for experienced mentors, and a need for improved infrastructure and regulations. Despite these challenges, the future for startups in Pakistan is expected to be positive as long as the government supports the ecosystem and entrepreneurs take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

Abbasi also believes that startups are on the rise globally, and startups’ stability is rising again. “Due to Pakistan being a new space for startups, the recent uprisings and success are evident because of all the opportunities in this brand-new area. As a result of being in an underdeveloped ecosystem, opportunities are not scarce. There are many challenges in a country where government and private businesses need to align like Pakistan. However, along with these challenges, multiple opportunities arise for business owners to bridge.”

“For these unique ideas to flourish, the general public must participate at a larger scale. For example, a startup company working on organic plastic faces challenges due to the import of required raw materials, the lack of equipment in the country, and the low amount of facilities, which results in the company only working in labs rather than making it commercial.”

In conclusion, the startup ecosystem in Pakistan faces several challenges that can lead to failure. To overcome these challenges and increase the chances of success for startups in Pakistan, developing a more supportive ecosystem that includes access to funding, mentorship, and a skilled workforce is essential. Additionally, the government must work to address regulatory barriers, create a more conducive environment for business growth, and increase the number of incubation and acceleration programmes.



One of the main reasons for the lack of incubation and acceleration programmes in Pakistan is the lack of government support and funding. Many government-funded incubation and acceleration programmes are limited in scope and reach

their operations.

Abbasi said that the venture market in Pakistan is tranquil. “There aren’t too many players, nor have the game’s rules been set yet. The funding business is not very large when referring to startups. Unfortunately, the market size of venture capital is not very big; investors don’t find plausible interest in the opportunity to fund startups,” said Abbasi.

He added that Airlift hit the

they had to compete with. “We didn’t have time to test or train people, and we needed to be experienced professionals. The founders came from different experiences but to do the job, we had to have the experienced professional we hired. It is because of the team that we are progressing toward our goal.

Regulatory barriers

Startups in Pakistan face several

THE DYING TRADE OF MATTRESS MAKING



Our lifestyles have changed with rapid globalisation and growth. As society races ahead, it leaves behind people struggling in niche trades and traditions that are dying fast especially in our urban centres. The gadday wallahs or the cotton mattress makers have survived this far because of some loyal customers, but their future is uncertain

By YUSRA SALIM

Driving through the main Gizri area and Burns Road or the busy, narrow streets in the older areas of Karachi, one can spot a shop or two where artisans known as gadday-wallay [mattress makers] make custom-designed pillows, cushions, comforters and mattresses [gadday] using cotton wool. They also fluff out cotton wool in your used pillows, mattresses and quilts to refresh them and make them plumper. In this way, you can use the same ones for years and years.

Most of these cotton wool tradesman run family businesses or are carrying forward trades inherited from their fathers. As the use of machine-washable, synthetic fibre becomes more common these days for bedding, these vendors are slowly vanishing.

Sixty-year-old, Umar Daraz has been running his cotton wool bedding shop in Nazimabad no.1, since the last 30 years. He had never thought that a day would come in his life when he would have to look for other options to earn a living, because presently,

ing a hand-held machine which was like a big needle piercing in and out of cotton to make it soft and usable,” recalls Daraz, showing how the electric machine presses and softens cotton for use.

“But now electric machines are used to soften and shape cotton.”

The cotton that is fluffed out is spread to fit the size of the fabric and sewn up with stitches at equal gaps, so it remains evenly divided throughout the length and breadth of the mattress or quilt. Spreading cotton through the machine hardly takes 10 minutes, and a mattress is prepared in 1-2 hours.

“Customers tell us the size they require and also choose the design and fabric of the mattress or quilt which we fill up with cotton wool accordingly and sew it up making borders and a plainer inner side,” explains Daraz. He adds that customers ask for different amounts of cotton wool to be filled in their quilts or mattresses and it is weighed in kilograms.

Mattresses and comforters that Daraz made a few decades ago

for mattresses, while comforters only need four kilograms of cotton as these are bigger and cotton is evenly spread in these. For mattresses, compressed cotton is used to give the mattress a proper shape.

Khan says that refilling and new covers of comforters cost around Rs700-800 if new cotton is not added to the filling, which can go up to Rs1500 depending on how many kilograms of cotton are used.

The price of cotton is Rs300-400 per kg but varies with qual-



There was a time when cotton was fluffed out by hands or by using a hand-held machine which was like a big needle piercing in and out of cotton to make it soft and usable

ity, while original cotton which is extracted from cotton farms is Rs800 rupees per kilogram.

“Pure cotton is available for



10x10 cotton wool bedding shop in Soldier Bazaar, Karachi, learned the trade from his uncle as a child when he was just 10 years old. He is disappointed on how things have shaped up in last one decade. “The low-priced used or export-leftover comforters with synthetic filling being sold in the market are giving us competition and taking our customers away,” says Haider, who has also started selling carpets and table cloths in his shop to expand his business. “Customers who would get their comforter and mattresses made from us in Rs1000 can now get three of those comforters for that price.”

Muhammad Abbas, a loyal customer gets his grandmother’s mattress and comforter renewed every year from Daraz’s shop.

“My grandmother who migrated from Allahabad, India, likes to use a wooden bed or takht with a cotton mattress on it for sitting, lying down and sleeping,” he says. “This tradition is simply a must for her.”

Abbas says she is the only one in the family who has this requirement and she never uses any other bed or couch even to sit on. So there is a possibility that when she passes on, he won’t be visiting Daraz anymore. But until then, every year, he takes the

comforter and mattress to the shop where the cover is renewed, the cotton wool fluffed or more cotton wool added for softness.

Other than the older generation, Daraz’s customers belong to the lower-middle classes who either do not have access or affordability to buy expensive blankets and foam mattresses. Sometimes they don’t even have beds and sleep on the floor using a cotton wool filled mattress and quilts [in winter].

“I earn just enough to manage my house,” says Noman Khan who along with his wife and three children uses cotton wool mattresses to sleep on the floor. “I got these mattresses from my mother and I only spend a few hundred rupees every 3-4 years to get new covers and they become perfect to be reused.”

The quality and durability of cotton wool mattresses and comforters depends on the use, but these are bulky and heavy to store, and need to be fluffed out after some use. Cotton wool mattresses are known to be better for the back and are completely sustainable.

Flipping and rotating mattress-

every few years, it is not sustainable and environment friendly.

“Cotton wool quilts are heavy but keep the cold out well,” says seventy-year-old Mehrunnisa, who has been using the cotton wool bedding since her childhood. “The new synthetic stuff is not so good at keeping cold out and after a few years, it becomes useless, while cotton wool items can be reused for years.”

“We have a few orders now from people also come for 6x6.5 ft mattresses because doctor s recommends sleeping on a cotton mattress on the floor.

“I was 20 years old when I had a protruded spinal disc,” says Fiza*. I tried everything pain management, but nothing helped until three years ago, when a surgeon recommended yoga and sleeping on a cotton mattress on the floor. My expensive ortho-care spring mattress was not much use because the compressed foam used in it puts pressure on the back while cotton wool adjusts to your back.

Many like Haider and Daraz find themselves struggling to make a living in this niche occupation that they previously did



his business is in shambles.

“I learnt this work from my father and have been looking after the shop since I was a kid,” says Daraz. “In those days, the business was good. As winter approached, people would get their comforters or quilts renewed. Cotton wool in old pillows that had become lumpy and uncomfortable was fluffed out and the pillows were plumped up. Even mattresses that would thin out after a few years of use could be refreshed.”

Daraz is struggling to make his ends meet with his small income. He also has to manage shop expenses and pay fixed salaries to his two employees who help to use the big electric machine to fluff out the cotton which is filled in mattresses, pillows and comforters.

“There was a time when cotton was fluffed out by hands or by us-

used to be made according to the size of the bed and usually required 50-60 kg of cotton. The industry that uses cotton wool filling is limited now as shops have mostly shut down due to a low demand from customers as foam mattresses have taken over the market.

“We have some loyal customers who have been coming to us for decades now,” says Daraz. “They still prefer cotton wool filling inside pure cotton fabric instead of furry blankets, foam mattresses or synthetic fibre-filled comforters available everywhere. Most of our customers are senior people who are hanging on to their pure traditions. I often wonder what will happen to our business, once these people are no more.”

The cost of cotton mattress and comforter varies on the weight the customer requires. Mostly five kilograms of cotton is used

customers who specifically ask for it,” says Daraz. “Otherwise, mixed cotton is reliable and widely used in the market.”

Amir Haider who runs a small



es once a month or periodically not only helps to air them out, but also compresses it evenly as the mattresses can become uncomfortable with use over the years. Mattresses, pillows and quilts should be left in the sun for a day to air out and kill any bacteria present, utilising the anti-microbial qualities of the sun.

While bedding that uses synthetic fibre filling is light, easy to store in lesser space and does not require refilling and renewing

well in and have known all their lives.

While globalisation and growth has brought massive changes in our lifestyles rapidly, old trades, habits and traditions are dying fast, especially in our urban centres. Though the market has reduced significantly for these artisans, it is still surviving because of customers who prefer to sleep on these sustainable cotton mattresses. But there are not enough customers anymore to stop Daraz from worrying about his uncertain future.



Conspicuously absent: Pakistan hockey's fall from glory

Story by: IJAZ CHAUDHRY

Design by: Mohsin Alam

As the 2023 World Cup takes place in India, Pakistan has once again failed to qualify, a tragedy made worse considering the country's role in establishing the tournament. Could the sport be revived in Pakistan? What could a possible solution entail?

Many estimates put hockey as the second most widely played field sport after football. Less than a month after the FIFA World Cup concluded, the 15th edition of the Men's FIH Hockey World Cup started this Friday in India, which also hosted the tournament's last edition. The venues are once again in the Eastern state of Odisha and two cities play host: Bhubaneswar and its Kalinga stadium, and Rourkela with its newly constructed Birsamunda stadium.

The opening ceremony held on Wednesday was a star-studded affair. Bollywood stars Ranveer Singh and Disha Patani, and the globally popular K-Pop band BLACKSWAN headlined a packed 40,000-capacity Barabati stadium in Cuttack, Odisha.

As 16 countries eye one of the sport's top global honours, this year's World Cup highlights a tragedy for Pakistan. The record four-times hockey champions are conspicuously absent; a fact made worse considering the very idea of the world cup was conceived by Pakistan.

World Cup genesis

At the 1968 Olympics, Pakistan regained the hockey gold. In those days, the Olympics were strictly an amateur event and professional sportspersons were completely barred. Hence, the sponsorship we see today at the Olympics was lacking. This made it a very costly affair for the host country. On the sidelines of the 1968 Olympics, there were suggestions about dropping some of the team sports.

Pakistan's great sports visionary, the late Air Marshal Nur Khan, then president of Pakistan Hockey Federation, advised the International Hockey Federation (FIH): "hockey has to have a World Cup to increase people's interest in the game. One quadrennial global tournament at the Olympics is not sufficient." The FIH accepted Pakistan's proposal. Pakistan also donated the magnificent World Cup trophy made up of gold, silver, ivory and teakwood, making Pakistan's absence at the tournament all the more depressing.

A look at Pakistan's show at all the World Cups clearly indicates that the decline has been continuous, from king to paupers. Of the first eight editions (till 1994) Pakistan won four times and finished second twice. Since 1994, however, they have failed to qualify for the semifinal. In 2014 and now again in 2023, Pakistan failed to even qualify for the World Cup.

The envy of the hockey world

From its debut in international hockey in 1948, what Pakistan achieved from that year up till 1985 was the envy of the hockey world. In that period, Pakistan was never out of the first four, be it at the Olympics or the World Cup – the best record for any country in the sport at that period.

When Pakistan Hockey won its first Olympic gold in 1960, hockey was officially declared Pakistan's national sport. In nine editions of the Olympics, Pakistan Hockey walked away with three gold and three silver medals, along with one bronze and two fourth place finishes. In five World Cups, Pakistan won gold thrice, along with one silver and a fourth place. In addition to that, Pakistan Hockey boasted a stellar record at the Asian Games as well, with six gold medals and one silver.

From kings to paupers

Things started to change for the worse in the second half of the 1980s with some sign of recover in the first half of the decade that followed. The decline began with the 1986 Asian Games. Pakistan, the winners of the last four editions, lost the final to South Korea, who were yet to appear in either the World Cup or the Olympics. Worse was to follow in a couple of weeks. The 1986 World Cup saw the two-time defending champions finishing 11th out of 12 teams. At the 1988 Olympics, they were fifth, failing to qualify for the semis for the first time.

These early signs of decline appeared to be an aberration as in the first half of the 1990s, Pakistan regained some of the lost glory. A second-place finish in the 1990 World Cup along with regaining the gold at the Asian Games suggested things weren't as bad as they had seemed. Pakistan won bronze at the Olympics in 1992 and then in 1994, won the World Cup title for the fourth time.

But the regained glory was short-lived and from 1996 to 2006, Pakistan Hockey could not win a single global medal. Internal bickering and player power played havoc on the eve of the 1996 Olympics. The players revolted, demanding the removal of the team management. Preparation suffered and Pakistan finished sixth, the worst ever finish at the Olympics till then. The momentum gained in 1994 was completely lost. In 10 years that followed, far from winning gold at either the Olympics or the World Cup, Pakistan couldn't make it to the victory stand even once at both events.

The decline affected Pakistan at the regional level as well as the team failed to win the Asian Games or the Asia Cup. Still, they remained part of the big league as Pakistan figured in the FIH's annual Champions Trophy (replaced by the FIH Pro League in 2019), apart from the 2000 edition, and also finished among the top six at the Olympics and World Cup.

From bad to worse

Further decline continued from 2007 to 2012 as Pakistan achieved its worst ever positions in many major title tournaments: sixth place finishes in the 2007 Asia Cup and 2010 Commonwealth Games, 8th in the 2008 Olympics and 12th place in the 2010 Hockey World Cup. As it cemented its place outside of the top six, the only achievement Pakistan Hockey could claim was victory at the 2010 Asian Games.

But things were about to become far worse with a series of unimaginable disasters for Pakistan Hockey. In 2014, Pakistan failed to qualify for the Men's Hockey World Cup for the first time. Two years later, at the 2016 Olympics, Pakistan Hockey failed to qualify as well, again for the first time.

Following the disaster of 2016, then prime minister Nawaz Sharif, in his capacity as the patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Hockey Federation, dismissed then PHF president Akhtar Rasool even though he was a close associate. Rasool's replacement as the PHF president appeared to be yet another political appointee - Brigadier (ret'd) Khalid Sajjad Khokhar, a close relative of Ahsan Iqbal, a federal minister in Nawaz's cabinet.

When Pakistan failed to qualify for the next Olympics in 2021, Khokhar was not replaced, even though his tenure saw some of the worst failures for the country on the global hockey scene. The team's World Ranking fell to 18th from 10th when Khokhar took over. Although the PHF bragged about its great success when Pakistan made it to the 2018 World Cup, the qualification was entirely down to the FIH decision to increase the number of participating teams from 12 to 16. At the 2018 tournament, Pakistan once again finished 12th, repeating its worst-ever finish and scored just two goals resulting in negative 10 goal difference, both representing its worst tallies.

In November 2017, Pakistan Hockey lost 1-9 to Australia, its worst ever defeat in international hockey. It came seventh at the 2018 Commonwealth Games and fourth place at the 2018 Asian Games, its worst-ever positions at both events. In addition to not qualifying for the 2021 Olympics, Pakistan finished 11th at the 2021 Junior World Cup as well, its worst ever position at that tournament too. In 2022, Pakistan failed to qualify for the Youth Olympics for the first time, a failure worse than the sixth place finish in the 2018 qualifiers where the team suffered a 1-12 defeat against Malaysia.

Now, Pakistan could not even qualify for the 2023 World Cup currently underway, despite it being a 16-team event.



“An Olympian of the 1980s shared that “When I was first selected for the Pakistan camp, as many as nine departments offered me a permanent job; I was yet to play for Pakistan's national senior team”



PAKISTAN'S MEDAL TALLY

Event			
Olympic Games	3	3	2
World Cup	4	2	0
Asian Games	8	3	3
Asia Cup	3	3	3
Champions Trophy	3	7	6
Asian Champions Trophy	3	2	0
Commonwealth Games	0	1	1

MOST-CAPPED PLAYERS

Waseem Ahmed



Career
1996-2013
Matches
410
Goals
10

Sohail Abbas



Career
1996-2013
Matches
311
Goals
348

Shakeel Abbasi



Career
2003-2014
Matches
209
Goals
103

Shahbaz Ahmed



Career
1988-2003
Matches
304
Goals
101

Muhammad Imran



Career
2004-2015
Matches
289
Goals
106

Rehan Butt



Career
2000-2015
Matches
274
Goals
110



TOP GOAL SCORERS

Sohail Abbas



Career
1998-2012
Matches
311
Goals
348

Hassan Sardar



Career
1979-1987
Matches
148
Goals
150

Hanif Khan



Career
1976-1985
Matches
177
Goals
127

Tahir Zaman



Career
1987-1998
Matches
242
Goals
134

Kamran Ashraf



Career
1993-2002
Matches
166
Goals
129

Rehan Butt



Career
2002-2012
Matches
274
Goals
110

Explaining the glory days

There are many factors that led Pakistan hockey to the heights it reached, the role of the country's armed forces being one of them. Like so many other sports, hockey was introduced by the British in this part of the world and in the early days, it was mainly played by the British servicemen. Hence, it became popular with locals in cantonments such as Rawalpindi, Bannu, etc. Pakistani servicemen carried the legacy of the British soldiers and hockey remained a popular sport with Pakistan's armed forces. Until the mid-60s, Pakistan's national team always included several army men. Six army men were members of the 1960 team which won country's first Olympic gold.

Clubs too, back then, used to be a huge reservoir of talent. In big as well as small cities, there used to be a number of clubs mostly run by dedicated people on a voluntary basis. The players gave regular small donations just to meet the expenses of the ball, maintenance of the ground, etc. Most schools in the country played a lot of hockey too, with regular teams. In Lahore, there were separate tournaments for government and private schools with a lot of participation. The college hockey scene, likewise, was very busy and competitive. Most of the colleges had sports seats for different disciplines including hockey. The intercollege tournaments across the length and breadth of the country saw keen participation.

In quite a few cities, there used to be traditional rivalry between two or three local colleges. For instance, in Lahore, the matches between Government College and Islamia College drew crowds of thousands, limited not only to students but also the wider hockey-loving public. Playing in such an atmosphere helped the young players develop temperament for big matches right from the early days. Universities like Karachi's NED Engineering University and Peshawar's Engineering University had seats for hockey players, like colleges. Again, the inter-university championships were keenly contested events and a showcase of emerging talent.

With so much hockey activity at every level, the regional sides had plenty to choose from. In the National Championships and other all-Pakistan tournaments, the divisional sides from all over Pakistan competed along with the departmental sides. The sides from Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta, etc. mostly offered stiff competition to top domestic sides like PIA and Customs; sometimes even defeating them. Teams from some other regions such as Bahawalpur, Hazara, Hyderabad, and Gujranwala were also no pushovers.

Government institutions such as the PIA, Customs, and Banks, all had active hockey teams and recruited players as permanent employees mostly in the officers' cadre. An Olympian of the 1980s shared that "when I was first selected for the Pakistan camp, as many as nine departments offered me a permanent job; I was yet to play for Pakistan's national senior team." PIA and Customs won the national championships more than any other side. Hockey was more or less part of the job profiles of the head of these two institutions.

Lastly, hockey enjoyed a lot of coverage in the media during the glory days. The star players were household names and adored like cricket stars of today. Pakistan hockey team's successes in the international arena greatly contributed to game's popularity.

The current scenario

Most of the schools which have come into existence over last three decades lack proper grounds. Then the tuition culture in the evening means most of the kids don't have time for evening sports. Advent of computer and mobile has also contributed as boys spend evenings on video games, etc. Kids naturally go after glamour.

The decrease in the coverage of hockey and the lack of national team's success have also contributed towards students' decreased interest in the national game. Cable TV is seen in almost every house in Pakistan. The boys not only see cricket but also other sports. Football's universal popularity has also attracted the Pakistani youth. Matches of top European leagues are regularly televised. The children are not only seen playing soccer in parks but many have favourite teams in European leagues like Barcelona, Manchester United, etc. One often sees boys wearing shirts of their favourite soccer players.

As hockey no longer offers attractive financial prospects for the player, the parents also don't encourage their children. Moreover, the hockey stick, which used to cost very little, is quite expensive these days. Playing on synthetic turf requires special shoes, again a costly item. As a result, you can't expect boys who didn't play hockey at school to take interest in the game when they reach college or university.

While clubs were keeping hockey alive till the recent past, that scene too is no longer what it was. In Lahore, only six or seven 'genuine' clubs are active, though the Lahore district hockey association would claim there are more than 20. While the district inter-club hockey tournament would also show as many clubs participating as claimed by the district hockey association, the fact of the matter is that the 'fake' clubs raise teams solely for the championships. The office bearers in district hockey associations are only interested in clinging to their posts mainly through votes of these fake clubs.

Meanwhile, hockey teams in most of the departments have ceased to exist and the few that have hockey teams, don't offer permanent jobs. Even top international Pakistani stars of today are contract employees.

While cricket enjoys prominence, there is very little coverage of Pakistan's international hockey matches. It pales in comparison to even European club football and there is hardly any domestic hockey on the TV. But in the first place, there is very little meaningful domestic hockey activity in Pakistan.

Contrast this with increased professionalism, and government and private sponsorship in other countries. Pakistan's decline is not the only reason for other countries' ascendancy. While hockey was a 'priority sport' in Pakistan right from 1947, In Europe and Oceania for a long time, hockey didn't enjoy much patronage either from the government or the private sector.

In 1967, Australia, the bronze medallist from the 1964 Olympics, toured Pakistan. Some have reported that the players themselves had to pay a large portion of the airfare. Great Britain won the gold at the 1988 Olympics. The legendary goalkeeper Ian Taylor had to leave his job to join the squad for training. The family ran out of money and it became difficult to even put food on the table. Hockey was a strictly amateur sport. Gradually, the FIH allowed payment to players and coaches. Now players get money in the European leagues and also in countries like Malaysia.

In addition, government support has also increased. For instance, in the UK there is a government-sponsored National Lottery. A substantial part of the income generated goes to the UK Sport which in turn supports sports especially those capable of bringing medals and hockey is one of them. The hockey federations of all the leading hockey nations have commercial partners.

A way forward

We all would like to see Pakistan hockey back to the former days of glory. For this, we all would like to see the same hockey culture that existed in the past, as discussed above. At the same time, one has to be realistic and take into account the ground facts as well as the compulsions of the present time. People can't be forced to establish hockey clubs or play hockey at schools, colleges, etc.

Many among us believe that the revival of the departmental teams is the solution. The previous government (PTI) abolished the sports wings of the departments as a policy matter. But most of the departments had already abolished their sports teams. WAPDA, SNGPL, SSGC and National Bank were the only departments that still had sports teams with players either employed permanently or on contract. In this era of retrenchment/rightsizing in the public sector and cutthroat competition in the private sector, perhaps no organisation can afford to employ twenty-odd people (as hockey players) who give no definite output to the corporations/ banks/ departments.

A possible solution is a franchise-based league on the pattern of highly successful Pakistan Super League (PSL). It is very much feasible and the owners of some PSL franchises have expressed interest. A hockey match takes less than 90 minutes in total. The PSL 2022 lasted one month, from January 27 to February 27. Hence, there is a huge window for the hockey league in Pakistan.

In the PSL, each franchise is owned and controlled by investors. According to a PCB press release, around 20 parties showed an interest in buying franchises for the league before the first season. All five franchises for the first season of the league were sold on 3 December 2015, for a total price of US\$93 million.

Despite having lost the popularity it once enjoyed in Pakistan, hockey still has the potential to attract investors. In a country, where there are very limited entertainment avenues, a properly marketed franchised based hockey league has all the chances to be successful.

Such a league will lead to positive effects from top to bottom. The owner of the franchise-based team will ask for results, so the selectors will be compelled to search for the best talent from inside as well as outside the country. Teams will also hire the best coaches not only from Pakistan but also from other countries.

All this should translate into a highly competitive league. Hence, Pakistan's national team will get good and battle-hardened players. Likewise, competent and successful coaches of the league could be picked and assigned the job with the national team. Pakistan's performance in the international arena will improve and after some time we could aspire for medals at the Olympics and World Cup.

A league on the PSL pattern will also revive the general public's interest in hockey. With money and glamour in the sport, more and more children could choose to take up hockey. As in cricket, academies will sprout. As in cricket, the franchises will go for their own high-performance centres.

Ijaz Chaudhry is a freelance sports journalist based in Lahore. He tweets @IjazChaudhry and can be reached at ijaz62@hotmail.com. All information and facts are the sole responsibility of the writer



WHY WE CAN'T PAY ATTENTION ANYMORE

As masses of information flood our senses at unprecedented speeds, they swamp, exhaust and abuse us. Deep thinking is becoming difficult for us as an acute attention crisis across the planet engulfs us. In *Stolen Focus*, ex-journalist Johann Hari tackles our growing inability to concentrate and offers possible solutions

By **HEBA MOEEN**

Anyone of us can relate to what Johann Hari's book basically points at. Since the last few months, we are mostly stressed about the chaos around us, are unable to prioritise things that really matter to us, we are easily distracted from reading or writing with full or say maximum concentration, and get bored quickly with working out and relationships. Instead, we somehow fill our days with countless random shortish periods of mindless browsing on the net or scrolling up and down our phones. Our minds feel exhausted to think hard about something, and we want mindless stuff that does n't take us beyond our zombie existence.

A typical self-help book would give advice on practicing self-discipline, allocate a time for prioritised tasks and maintain certain habits to equip us for becoming productive. On the other hand, multitasking and staying connected on social media is imperative for an informed, and highly organised individual as the internet makes life easier with accessibility for all. We wonder if something about us or our environment and surroundings or our thought processes has changed over the last two years of the pandemic.

The fast paced world that we live in today is not just highly demanding, but it comes at the added cost of our collective freedom, meanwhile to maintain focus amidst our deteriorating attention spans has become quite an effort in the tech enabled society that never seems to take a break. What we see today is regress at many levels than progress of the consumers' minds. It should come as no surprise that tech innovators prefer to have their own children disconnected from tech and opt for sending them to schools which still prefer and orthodox teaching styles.

Johann Hari in his book *Stolen Focus* argues that our focus has gradually been stolen from us over a period of time and that we could be headed towards a human-made crisis, that too, at a global level. Feeling the strong inability to maintain focus and eventually realising the need for a solution, he decided go on a three-month long, tech and gadget free sabbatical where he could experience life as it was before tech became widespread and thus a norm.

He termed this as the much needed 'digital detox' for which he gathered the bare minimum stuff including some classics *War and Peace* being one of them which he never got the chance to read in the fast paced life he was living. The thought of not being blasted with sometimes dubious news every minute on social media versus

a refined and consolidated summary of the previous day's happenings in the form of a newspaper was nothing short of a blessing itself for him.

The topic that he has gathered proof points for through in-depth research, discussions, and interviews with various stakeholders, referring to over 250 scientific studies, a process spanning three years have been published in the form of this glaring reality which we are faced with today. Hari has mentioned causes in the form of chapters responsible for short attention spans and dying focus.

hampering our problem solving skills, take for instance the boom of Zoom calls during the surge of the pandemic.

Information overload is adversely affecting the ability of people retain whatever gets hurled their way. Once again, drawing analysis and facts from the West, it is known that in 1986, the information an individual being subjected to in the form of TV, newspaper, and radio amounted to 40 newspapers worth of information on a daily basis, something which had risen to 174 newspapers worth of information in 2007, and it keeps



Modern day parents may perhaps get impressed with schools which capitalise upon AI enabled classrooms and PowerPoint lessons bombarded at the nascent stages of a child acquiring education, the corporate world would instill the thought that multitasking is one of the basic attributes that it looks for in a candidate and that he/she should be a hustler, having the capability of switching between tasks like a modern day robot which must not malfunction.

In fact, as mentioned in the book, it takes an individual on average 23 minutes to regain focus if they get interrupted, meanwhile, most workers never get an hour of uninterrupted work during an ordinary work day. Although this is based on a study conducted the US, it is still relatable for those on the daily grind anywhere in the world.

The concept that human beings are not wired like computers, they are single-minded and are only capable of carrying one or two thoughts at a time, has been used for computers in the 1960s has been applied to humans. The need to constantly switch between tasks means that we have to reconfigure our thoughts when we jump from task to task, explained by Hari as the 'switch cost effect'. Furthermore, the need for constantly being connected and available is

counting further now. Hari cautions that we are lacking depth when we trying to focus on doing a certain task amidst a constant spree of interruptions and cites one of the studies which mentioned, "We are collectively experiencing a more rapid exhaustion of attention resources."

Similarly with the adaptation of reading on screen, the general reading habit is dying down significantly because people tend to scan and skip while reading on screen. One of the researchers reiterated the fact that we live in a society which now thrives upon the values of consumer capitalism and sleep deprived people whose share of an ever-increasing screen time helps contribute to the economic output.

Hari further explains the adverse effects of social media and how after interviews with past Google and Facebook employees, he got to know that engineers are constantly developing strategies to keep users glued on screen for revenue generation through user data sold to advertisers. For instance, YouTube is evidently radicalising people, or that Facebook's earliest investors mentioned that since its inception the creators focused on the idea of 'consuming as much of the user's time and conscious attention as possible'. The concept of infinite scroll makes users spend 50% more

time on social media sites. There is strong correlation of people becoming less empathetic and more aggressive with increased social media use, and because of the way the algorithms at Facebook work, quite a number of users show lack in the depth of processing and you would find vituperative comments way too often.

Negativity and absurd content would gain more traction, as such Bolsonaro winning the elections in Brazil, is a prime example being quoted with his supporters having developed maligning content about the opponent which lured voters away. Tristan Harris, the former Google employee terms this general degradation of society because of such factors as 'the collective downgrading of humans and upgrading of machines'.

Hari also discusses the common assumption where we feel that Facebook is listening to us and as creepy as it sounds can sometimes even hear our thoughts. The reality is that it has created such an accurate model of us as users that it continues making predictions about us, our wants, and what we may be thinking. Scarier yet is that fact that Google has a prototype model of one in four humans on Earth. Our trail online and clicks are gathered to accumulate our digital footprint which is the cost

of using free services like Google Maps for example it has been exposed as surveillance capitalism.

The algorithms of social media sites are damaging focus and have a 'cascading effect' on people's ability to think deeply, eventually being connected most of the time is making them hyper vigilant as they become less of problem solvers and become entangled in less focused thinking. In order to investigate the claims that Facebook was damaging people's collective attention it formulated a united front called 'Common Ground' which justified these findings and while another internal team's evidence revealed that Facebook algorithms are recommending people to join extremist groups as 64% them were routed as a result of these. Eventually Facebook scientists recommended an anti-growth strategy which meant less business and that is history because that would have been against their business model.

Unhealthy work patterns have also been described as the common culprit behind stealing people's focus. For example, clocking in extra hours undermines productivity and is not sustainable. Countries which implemented a four day work week were able to maintain healthy productivity levels with employees being able to strike a resilient work-life balance. Similarly, stress enables more distractions and hampers a person's ability to think, something becoming more prevalent in children as well who now face an increased risk of ADHD, which is more of a cause due to circumstances rather than it being genetic. Other factors, the author explains are processed and unnatural foods which possess food dyes and preservatives.

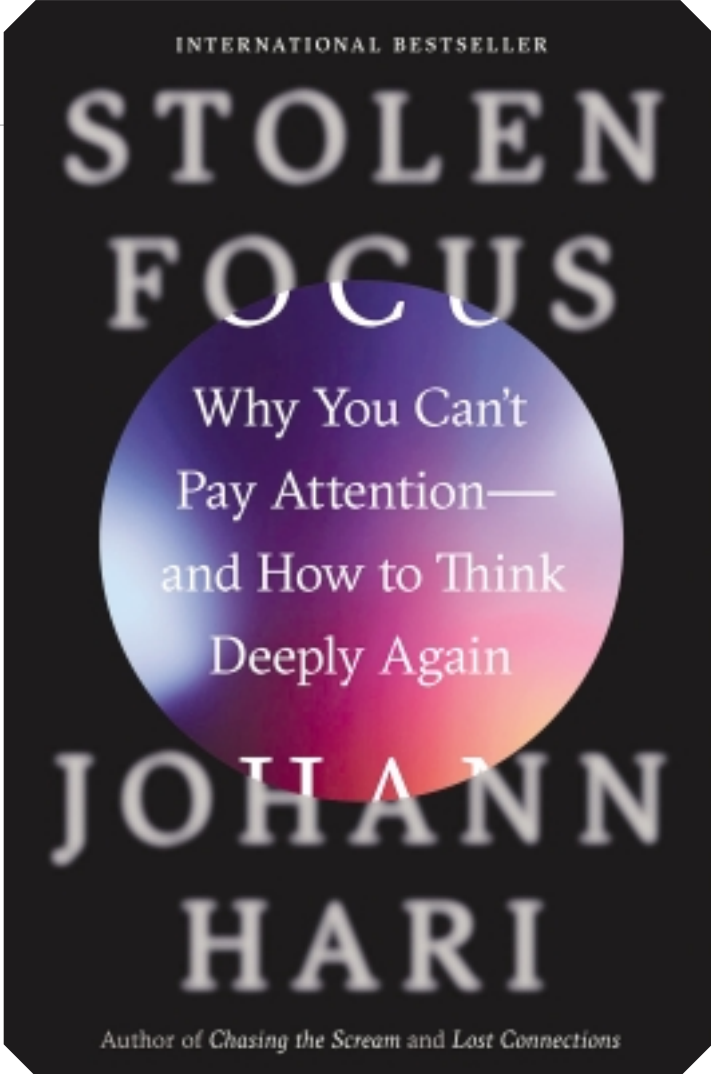
Overall *Stolen focus* is the reality check of what we are subjecting ourselves to as once highly sophisticated societies, and it is rather a real-life depiction of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's 1984 which though were written far ahead of their time, showed that what the human mind thinks could one day

appear as or become reality. The dwindling intelligence seems directly proportional to the content consumed or vice versa, our local TV content is a prime example. With more entertainment channels came a dearth of meaningful content, while one channel in the past decades produced unmatched intellectual content during an era bygone.

Hari has given his recommendations for rectifying the issues and causes which have been taking us downhill with strong emphasis on the influencing power of individuals like you and me, who may perhaps be uninfluential but possess the ability to bring about change through a collective voice.

As harrowing as people's feelings about the emergence of a more connected world have been, it's no exception that some had a philosophical take on it while describing both the pros and cons. English rockstar, David Bowie during an interview in 1999 said: "I think that we, at the time up until at least the mid-70s really felt that we were still living under the guise of a single and absolute created society where there were known truths and lies and there was no kind of duplicity or pluralism about the things that we believed in. That started to break down rapidly in the 70s and the idea of a duality in a way that we live emerged. There are always two, three, four, five sides to every question. The singularity disappeared and that I believe, has produced such a medium as the internet which absolutely established and shows us that we are living in total fragmentation. I don't think that we've seen the tip of the iceberg. I think the potential of what the internet is going to do to society, both good and bad, is unimaginable. I think we're actually on the cusp of something exhilarating and terrifying!" He could be right, but who knows.

Heba Moeen is a communications professional, an artist and a wildlife photographer. She can be reached at moeen.hiba@gmail.com. All information and facts are the sole responsibility of the writer



T Magazine's picks



Binge this week:
Guillermo Del Toro's Cabinet of Curiosities



The horror anthology series was curated by Guillermo del Toro with eight handpicked directors who take on a new frightening tale in each episode. Some are original stories, others adaptations, but all episodes have a separate, but equally star-studded casts. Each episode begins with a towering wooden structure with hundreds of secret compartments with del Toro introducing and naming each figurine as a director, making *Cabinet of Curiosities* a treat for fans of standout horror filmmaking. Way more scary than *Twilight Zone*, but darkly humorous.



Read this week:
Playing with Fire



While journalists, policy wonks and Western politicians readily offer their home-cooked theories about what's happening and what will happen in Pakistan, this book offers something totally different. It may lack an overarching argument or thesis, but it boldly describes the gross inadequacy of the state institutions, especially the courts. Pamela Constable provides the context that helps explain why the country has not fulfilled some of the dire predictions made about its imminent collapse. The book is an essential read for anyone wishing to understand modern Pakistan and its global position.



Watch this week:
The Pale Blue Eye



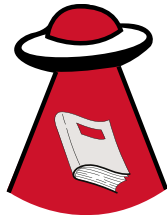
In the grayest northern winter, a man is hanged, while another, Augustus Landor is alive, but does he really want to? Landor investigates the death of the other man, a soldier-to-be. On the lines of Sherlock Holmes, this is a deeper crime drama with a weeny bit of horror. A highly watchable film,, powerful in every technical capacity, from an emotive score to its beautiful funereal lighting of candles and lamp oil burning in dark brown space. This rock-solid historical mystery is a great, but perhaps not a very memorable watch.



Play this week:
High on Life



This epic story of alien space travel with incredible dialogue, and simple and smooth gameplay is an addictive blast. Created by Justin Roiland and released in December 1922, this comedic first-person shooter game with action-adventure and Metroidvania elements, takes you into a science fiction world which features talking guns. These extremely rude weapons called Gatlians are also the stars of the show, while Kenny is the easily flustered pistol! Critics have praised its humour, characters, level design and story, but repetitive gameplay, bugs and glitches are the downside.



The Messiah of the Seas – Part 2



By ASADI I. MIAN

The sun was rising just beyond the cliffs along the sea coast. I was out for my early morning jog; nothing unusual about that. I was making my way along the harbor towards the docked sailboat Sofya. Although the man on deck had his back to me, I could tell from the ponytail and the cigarette smoke that it was him.

It was intriguing that I was able to smell something as specific as Turkish tobacco amongst all other olfactory stimuli at the harbor.

Without turning around Mehmet greeted me. “Salaam-aliekum my friend”.

“Waaliekum-assalam. What are you up to?”

“I’m fixing her sails”. He said in a rather matter of fact manner.

“How long have you been sailing Mehmet?”

“As long as I can remember. At times, I think I might have been born on a ship.”

“Why do you think so?”

“That’s the narrative I prefer. I was born an orphan. I don’t know anything about my biological parents. I was found abandoned outside a small orphanage in Konya. After being adopted at the age of 5, my foster parents raised me in Fethiye. It was them who instilled into me love of the sea. And of course, growing up with the Mediterranean in my backyard, made up for the rest. What those parents also imparted was religion...”

Mehmet let that last bit trail off, lost in thought for words to articulate what he needed to say. That was unusual. In all my interactions with him thus far, I had not found him to be at a loss for words.

After a few moments, Mehmet continued his soliloquy.

“Being staunch believers in an organized, almost orthodox, form of religion, they ensured I was raised within the strictest of tenets. However, once I had joined the Turkish navy as a young adult, I felt that the more accustomed I got to the ritual of religion the further away I had moved from the essence of it. My travels on the high seas either for skirmishes while I captained the battleship Ottotürk or for more leisurely trips later, exposed me to diverse people, places and religions. I realized that religion was just one, somewhat limited, form of expression of one’s true identity. I felt connected to all people for the first time in my life-regardless of age, social status, gender, or else. I was like a human magnet. They would flock to me no matter which port I docked at. And then they would reveal their problems. I attributed that to my tolerance and openness about differences in viewpoints.”

“Were you were their in house shrink? Did you charge them for being their problem solver? I bet you could’ve made big bucks that way!” I interjected.

“It doesn’t happen that way. It’s not about money, you silly man.” He said.

“Then was it about women? I bet you were able to attract several of them, and mighty pretty ones for sure - given you were a human magnet!” I wasn’t let going of this line of inquiry anytime soon.

“Hah! That’s funny! No, it wasn’t even that. I was so into my own self, had some girl even indicated romantic inclinations I would’ve been clueless. For me it was never the sustained romantic kind of love for a precise individual. Although I did fall for one, albeit transiently. Sofya the firebrand, I called her, because of her temper. She impressed me enough, hence the sailboat’s name; the tattoo, however, was named after the sailboat. With the passage of time my woman became bitter about my life that I dedicated to her namesake. Perhaps it was the solitary lifestyle as a skipper to blame for that. Anyhow, I was good at solving problems of people who came to me, and as their miracle man they dubbed me messiah of the seas. Then I got bored of their never-ending problems that they were equally capable of fixing, if only they would choose to do so. I dealt with people infrequently after that.”

Somewhat wistfully Mehmet ended: “Like my love for an ocean, I experienced love for a sea of humanity, although the latter occurred over a shorter period. In either case, I think the sea became my cosmos rather than the sky or heavens above.”

“That is allegorically beautiful, Mehmet.” I said.

“It must be the lifetime spent on the seas bringing out the poet in me!”

Mehmet’s perspective on religion, humanity and love reminded me of Jacob, a friend from decades ago. Jacob had been one of the most spiritual people I had come across; for that phase of my life when I was seeking understanding in or for my own religion it had been Jacob’s comfort in expressing himself through both Catholicism and mystic Islamic Sufiism that had illuminated me immensely. He had been somewhat of a teacher too, albeit not a sustained mentor for all matters of life – or love.

As I was mulling about Jacob, through Mehmet’s lens, he caught on, as expected.

“Don’t try too hard to find that one teacher. There will be many. Jacob did his thing as he was meant to. He left an indelible mark upon you. As shall I. And so will you upon others. It’s the cycle of life and love. Once you find a teacher or two then stick to him, her, or it, as long as need be. Only you can know who your teacher is. The best learning is experiential; trial and error initially but then with increasing accuracy. Thus, your most sustainable teacher is

yourself and your core beliefs that have been stripped of conditioning. But your best teachers are life and love...”

My eyes must have glossed over while listening about teaching and learning, regardless of poignancy, so he stopped.

He then abruptly stood up and pointed towards the sea.

“Care to join?”

That didn’t register at first, but when it did, I resisted for a moment because I was fully dressed.

“Don’t overthink, my friend!” He smiled, deftly raised his right hand in a crisp salute, and fully clothed, jumped over the side of the sailboat into the waters of the Mediterranean waiting below.

Right at the moment Mehmet hit the water, I woke up to the rough swaying of the sailboat. It was early morning based on the light filtering through my cabin’s window. As I lay on the bed I was surprised to find myself naked - I couldn’t recall getting out of my clothes, and even if I had why wasn’t I in pajamas, as was my nocturnal routine? Unusual as this was perhaps, enough oddities had already occurred during the trip for me to take this too in stride.

Not fully awake, my mind still in a fugue, I felt the utmost urge to write Mehmet’s parting comments.

“Your most sustainable teacher is yourself and your core beliefs that have been stripped of conditioning... your best teachers are life and love...”

Mehmet’s perspective on religion, humanity and love reminded me of Jacob, a friend from decades ago. Jacob had been one of the most spiritual people I had come across

That seemed to be the crux of it all. Strangely enough, after several years of angst that could best be described as unrest, I felt content and contained; this feeling, although novel, was much welcomed. Even my nudity made sense then. It was like a new self being born, without any layers between self and creator, vulnerable to the core. True submission.

Had someone walked into my cabin then and seen me sitting at the desk, furiously penning something on paper, in the nude, they would surely have raised a serious concern...

After jotting down the gist of the conversation with Mehmet, I quickly put on some clothes and went up on deck. As happened the past few times, I went looking for him - neither knowing where exactly to look nor expecting to find him, but seeking him out all the same.

I came across the chef, busy supervising breakfast. Being the final meal of our watery sojourn coming to an end in a few hours, the kahvalti that morning on the deck was meant to be special: cuisine consisting of eggs and meat served in various Turkish styles. Trying not to get distracted by the food that I couldn’t really eat much of anyway, no thanks to Mehmet, I focused on the task at hand instead.

“Erhaan, I urgently need to talk to the Captain. Can you take me to him?”

“Sure sir. I shall take you to Captain Izmir”.

“No not that one. The other one. Mehmet”. I corrected him.

“Mehmet...” The confusion on Erhaan’s face was apparent.

“Just take me to your Captain”.

Erhaan pointed me in the direction of the Captain’s lair below the deck. In the 3 days I’d been on the sailboat, I must’ve passed by the Captain’s cabin multiple times on the way to my own cabin, but I had never realized what lay past that door, as the ‘do not enter’ sign on it precluded access to the room.

I knocked on the door.

There was no response.

I knocked again, a bit louder and with urgency that was not difficult to muster.

Still no response.

I decided to enter, uninvited.

Despite the time of the day, the 2 portholes had heavy blinds drawn across them. Hence, the room was quite dark, except for a small table lamp on the nightstand that created a circular halo of light. The bed was unmade. I heard someone in the shower. Izmir, likely, just woken up and taking a bath perhaps? I wondered.

In the dark room, the small amount of bedside illumination highlighted a framed photograph on the bedside table. Curiosity got to me, so throwing both caution and decorum to the wind, I walked up to it. My plan was to take a quick look and then beat a hasty retreat before Izmir came out of the bathroom. By then, I felt less enthusiastic about conversing with the Captain and relating to him my ‘Mehmet conundrum and connection’.

The wooden photo frame was old and worn. The mostly black and white collage within, with many photos with frayed margins, seemed even older. The largest photo right in the center was of Sofya’s crew from years ago. Around a dozen crew members were standing on deck cheering at the camera man who had positioned himself on the dock for the photograph. Mehmet was slam dunk in the middle of the boisterous crew. His central location aside, I couldn’t have missed his commanding presence anyway. He towered over quite a few of his crew by several inches. He was wearing the same red bandana and small fitted t-shirt, biceps bared enough so you could just catch a glimpse of the tattoos on his arms.

It seemed like Mehmet was mighty pleased with himself, or his life, the way he was foolishly grinning into the camera lens, looking right at and through you. The caption in English in small text at the bottom of that photo stated: Crew of the sailboat Sofya at her inaugural

ral Mediterranean journey led by Captain Mehmet Mustafa, May 1990.

On the bottom left of the collage was a black and white headshot of a young Mehmet with the caption, Mehmet Mustafa, b.??-1990, Beloved Captain & Messiah of the Seas. And on the bottom right of the collage was one of the few color photos, also a headshot, of someone who resembled the younger Mehmet. The caption was Captain Izmir Mustafa, b. 1990.

I had seen enough.

I ran out of the room, being careful not to slam the door behind. Luckily, no one had seen me enter the room, nor exit.

My heart hammering against my chest, I felt really shaken. I headed straight for my cabin. Once there I realized I was hyperventilating, so I tried my best to calm myself down.

The first order of business I felt then was to confirm what I had observed in Captain Izmir’s cabin. Google came to my rescue when I searched for Mehmet and Izmir Mustafa. The description that came up for both was on the website of Fethiye Blue Cruise, the travel company through which I had arranged my 3-day trip. Mehmet had been the first captain of Sofya in 1990, the year her construction was completed and she set sail on her maiden journey. The website mentioned the mysterious circumstances under which Mehmet had gone missing during that trip within the first few days of sailing. It was presumed that he had drowned, although for such an experienced mariner and skipper to succumb to a watery grave like that seemed odd. The sea at that time had been rough, so perhaps it was just an unfortunate occurrence, regardless of anyone among the crew or passengers actually witnessing Mehmet fall overboard.

Interestingly, the website also revealed that he had left behind a pregnant wife, Ayse Mustafa, although to me he had alluded to a general lack of sustained romantic inclinations and biological ties. The same year he went missing, within a few months of the tragedy, Mehmet’s wife gave birth to a son. As I had suspected, Izmir was Mehmet’s son. Izmir became Captain of Sofya in 2015, when both sailboat and he turned 25, 25 years to the date of Mehmet’s presumed death. In his pursuit of a career as a sailor, Izmir had taken after his father.

The website shed no light on Mehmet’s maritime adventures, likes and dislikes, religious, political or other views, and so on. Sofya the firebrand’s name never showed up in that account too. Hence, I figured what he had revealed of himself in our conversations was not likely common knowledge.

The remaining few hours of the return leg of the journey I chose to spend in my cabin.

Why didn’t I meet with Captain Izmir to tell him about my encounters with Mehmet and what I had learnt subsequently? I wondered. Other than the fact that I didn’t feel like meeting with Captain Izmir or anyone else from the crew or passengers, for that matter, I concluded that what I had experienced could not be spoken about to anyone. Not because I was afraid that no one would believe me, but because I felt there had to be some purpose to all that had happened, which was best not shared willy-nilly. I had to explain it to myself first in a manner of my own understanding.

Sailing back to Fethiye was generally subdued and uneventful for me.

From Fethiye I made my way to Istanbul and then caught my flight to Karachi later that evening. Once there I returned to my routine, life happened, and I never mentioned him to anyone at home or work.

Over time I forgot him.

A few years have passed since that eventful trip.

Last night, while cleaning my laptop bag I came across a handwritten note, long forgotten in one of the inside crevices.

The following was scrawled on it:

Your most sustainable teacher is yourself... your best teachers are life and love.... [Mehmet]

In a rush of recollection of those 3 days spent at sea, I realized how much I had learnt from him. He indeed was the teacher I had been seeking then. Yes, I might have forgotten him, but his guidance could not be overlooked. In a subtle manner, all he had taught became incorporated in me. And the best part was that he had taught without even realizing that he was doing so. Perhaps that is why he had such impact?

Mehmet left his mark on me, like he said he would, and that in itself was reason enough to share his story with you.

(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.)

Asad Mian MD, PhD is an ER physician-researcher-innovator at the Aga Khan University and a freelance writer. He writes on topics ranging from healthcare and education to humor and popular culture. This story and its preceding part were inspired by Richard Bach’s “Illusions: Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah” that I read on a Mediterranean cruise

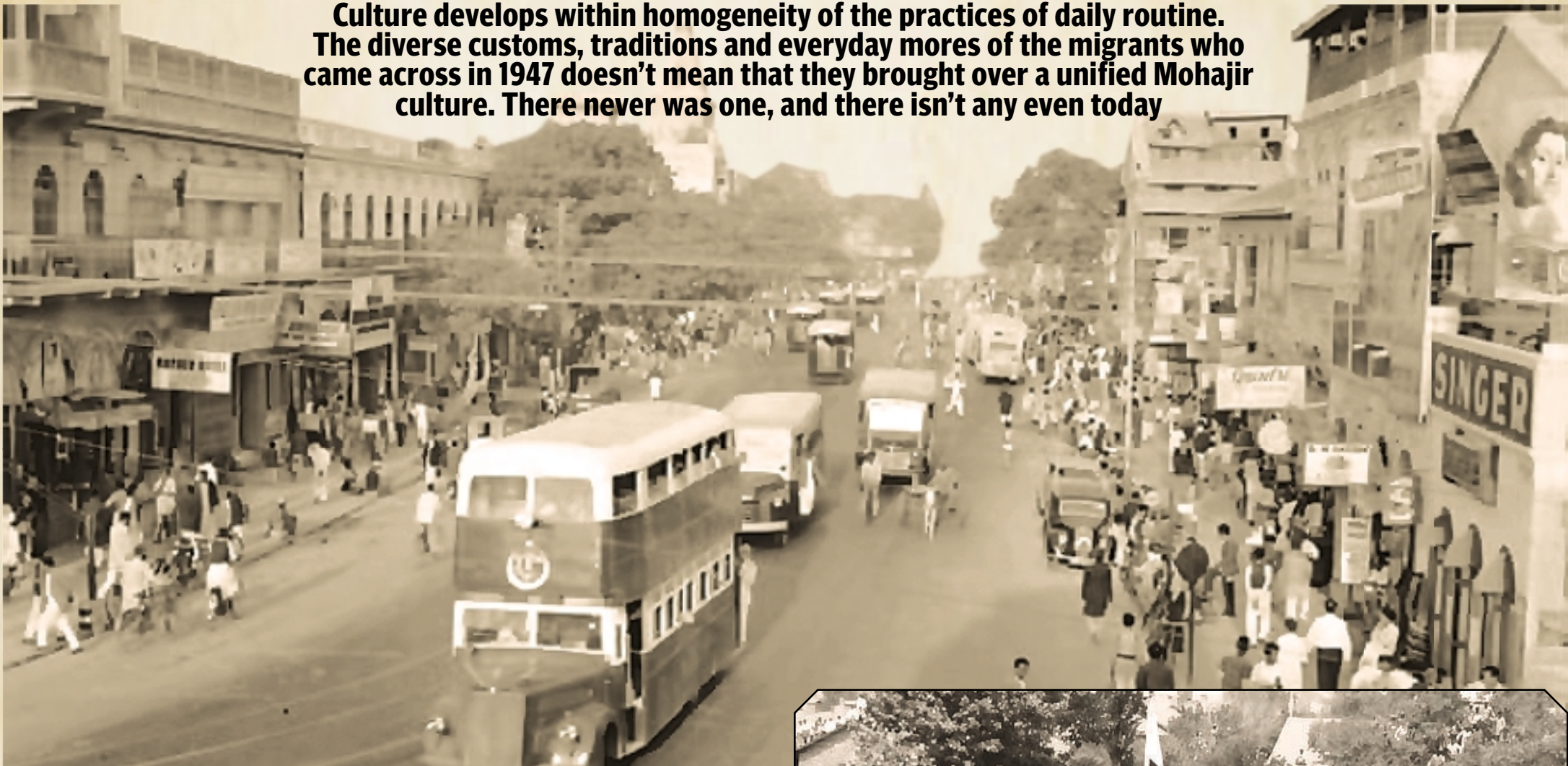
Why didn’t I meet with Captain Izmir to tell him about my encounters with Mehmet and what had I learnt subsequently? I wondered. Other than the fact that I didn’t feel like meeting with Captain Izmir or anyone else from the crew or passengers, for that matter, I concluded that what I had experienced could not be spoken about to anyone

In the dark room, the small amount of bedside illumination highlighted a framed photograph on the bedside table. Curiosity got to me, so throwing both caution and decorum to the wind, I walked up to it



CULTURE, CONFUSION & THE GENESIS OF IDENTITY

Culture develops within homogeneity of the practices of daily routine. The diverse customs, traditions and everyday mores of the migrants who came across in 1947 doesn't mean that they brought over a unified Mohajir culture. There never was one, and there isn't any even today



By **SIRAJUDDIN AZIZ**

To the Muslims, the Arabic word, 'Mohajir' has a religious reference and value. The word acquires significance, because the Prophet (PBUH) migrated from Makkah to Madinah. The Muslims of Makkah emigrated in large numbers.

Not all those who move from one place to another qualify to be called Mohajirs. Nomads cannot be considered Mohajirs, because they move out of their own volition. Mohajirs are those who because of one reason or the other are persecuted and hence exercise the choice to leave their ancestral lands, in search of safety.

The people of Makkah emigrated because of torture and persecution. Madinah was safe for the people from Makkah as the Ansars welcomed them with grace. Culturally and linguistically, the people of Madinah were not significantly different from the Meccans, so the assimilation between the two was smooth and easy. Hence, with this historical background, a certain nobility is attached to the word Mohajir.

Recently, the Mohajir Culture Day was celebrated in Sindh. First celebrated in December 2020, it was a good move, which was possibly initiated more out of political compulsion than anything else, and may have had very little to do with culture.

In the words of T.S. Elliot, "Culture is the one thing that we cannot deliberately aim at. It is the product of a variety of more or less harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake." Man, at worse, has base animalistic tendencies and it is only through culture that he is able to rise over and resist the beast and carnal self in him.

Normally, invaders consider those whom they subjugate and vanquish, as less intelligent and inferior to themselves. It is generally believed and presupposed by them that the standards of civil behaviour and the refinement of their own culture gives them an edge over local practices.

Most Muslims of the South Asian subcontinent are, in more than one way, descendants of the practices of the mighty Mughal Empire that spread over 3.2 million sq-km. The plundered wealth constituted their treasure, while the Mughal opulence and sophistication spread its influence over all the inhabitants from Kashmir to the Deccan plateau. The ceremonies, etiquette, music, poetry and exquisitely executed paintings and objects of the imperial court fused together to create a distinctive aristocratic high culture.

Hermann Hesse, the German-Swiss poet, novelist and painter had remarked the following painful truth: "Human life is reduced to real suffering, to hell, only when two ages, two cultures and religions overlap." Culture finds manifestation in the manner we live which has usually a connection with the past. The massive influence upon the subcontinent of the culture of Central Asian States, the Arab world and Turkey is evident. The Turkish influence travelled southwards to the extent that even today, many Muslims of Hyderabad Deccan adorn the Rumi Topi (Rumi, the Sufi Saint's cap) as part of their

formal dressing.

"Educated people do indeed speak the same languages; cultivated ones need not speak at all." (The Cart and The Horse by Louis Kronenberger). Learning, education, and training when conjoined with cultural manners and a general sense of civility contribute to create and produce the most exquisite and remarkable products for a culture to subsist.

The development and sustainability of culture lies in the impact it has upon elements that prompt the emergence of character. But if it fails the test of not ennobling and strengthening

fluenced and inspired by the cultural practices of local citizenry of Delhi, that over a few centuries it got enshrined as part of Mughal culture. The culture of the rivers Ganga-Jumna is predominant in the daily lives and practices of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Culture is not law, it is a heritage, and the way we live and conduct our lives is a reflection of culture. It is commonly said that culture is half way to heaven. The crystallisation of cultural practices go towards making a civilisation. It is an excellent fusion of the present with the past. As English literary critic, Cyril



Culture by its nature is both hard and malleable. The universal foundations of truth and human goodness as pillars of culture cannot be allowed to remain in any state of fluidity. There can be no room for either disbanding or refashioning these cornerstones, hence these are entrenched firmly



behaviour, then it is of no use. Culture must be for goodness and not for display as a thing of beauty.

In a 1964 essay, The Culture Consumer, Alvin Toffler made the following observation on the dissemination of cultural values and standards over the time scale of human history. He called it "The Law of Raspberry Jam the wider any culture is spread, the thinner it gets."

Culture by its nature is both hard and malleable. The universal foundations of truth and human goodness as pillars of culture cannot be allowed to remain in any state of fluidity. There can be no room for either disbanding or refashioning these cornerstones, hence these are entrenched firmly.

Culture has the ability to absorb, the goodness and reconcilable elements of other cultures. Regardless of religious inclinations, it is undeniable that the hugely popular rasm-e-mehndi or henna ceremony in our local wedding functions is a direct incorporation of Hindustani culture, not to be confused with Hindu culture.

Amir Khurro was so deeply in-

fluenced and inspired by the cultural practices of local citizenry of Delhi, that over a few centuries it got enshrined as part of Mughal culture. The culture of the rivers Ganga-Jumna is predominant in the daily lives and practices of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh (UP).

Culture is not law, it is a heritage, and the way we live and conduct our lives is a reflection of culture. It is commonly said that culture is half way to heaven. The crystallisation of cultural practices go towards making a civilisation. It is an excellent fusion of the present with the past. As English literary critic, Cyril

fluenced and inspired by the cultural practices of local citizenry of Delhi, that over a few centuries it got enshrined as part of Mughal culture. The culture of the rivers Ganga-Jumna is predominant in the daily lives and practices of the Muslims of Uttar Pradesh (UP).



is not in the size and number of its practitioners, nor in the economy that they generate. Instead, it lies solely in what kind of human beings it produces. To be recognised, culture must the ability to create civil people. According to Arnold Toynbee in an October 1958 issue of Readers Digest, "Civilisation is a movement and not a condition, a voyage and not a harbour." All cultures have geographical links.

Following partition and independence from the British, hu-

man history witnessed a story of great sacrifice when the largest and the bloodiest exodus took place. This was the migration of Indian Muslims to their new homeland that they had fought and struggled for. The enthusiasm and joy of wanting to live in Muslim Pakistan outweighed the considerations of leaving behind ancestral property, relationships of decades and the comforts of what then constituted their previous home. Leaving everything behind, they marched towards

the Promised Land, The Land of the Pure, christened as Pakistan.

The cultural mix that existed till the breakup of Pakistan in 1971 was a pot-pourri of people from UP (who considered themselves culturally superior to all others), Rajasthan, Bombay Presidency, East Punjab, the Kanks from south Maharashtra, the Madrasis from Tamil Nadu, the Mysoreans from Karnataka, the Bhopalis of Central Province, and the Gujaratis from Kuchh, Surat and Ahmedabad, etc. The influx into what was then West Pakistan was largely from North and Central India and the provinces of the west, going down South to Hyderabad and Kerala, while the migration to East Pakistan was from West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

The only common denominator between this spaghetti of human kind was their religion of Islam, the only binding factor. Each had their distinct and separate culture, with very few overlaps in practices and manner of living. Even after migration they did not mingle among themselves, let alone with the natives. This attitude is best explained by the existence of Karachi's Aligarh Society, Hyderabad

stan's Punjab province because of linguistic reasons. They mingled with and married into the local population and presently no one can distinguish between them. Similar was the case with people from West Bengal who moved to East Pakistan.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of Mohajirs in Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They chose to remain distinct, despite the apparent diversity between themselves. Hence integration did not happen. The only commonality is that they speak Urdu, albeit, with pronounced difference in pronunciation. They are now classified as Urdu-speaking, which is a great negative fallout, since Urdu is their national language.

The sad and traumatic year of 1971 saw the exodus of Biharis from Bangladesh. They arrived and like earlier migrants settled in the urban areas of Sindh. Today, they are part and parcel of the political Mohajir clan, but still quite different. A very dear friend, who sheepishly traces his origins to Patna (Sharif!), gets extremely excited when I exhort his children to marry a foreigner, as in not from Bihar. And that is just one example. The same is true of Hyderabad, Bhopalis, and the people of UP, etc.

In short, barring the one unique and common feature of Urdu being the language of conversation, culturally there was nothing in common. The Hyderabadis relish their double ka meetha, the Gujaratis promote malpooora, the Biharis flaunt Bihari kababs. So even in the culinary aspect, the differences remain.

Hence, there never was a concept of Mohajir culture, because there isn't any that existed in the past or even the present. As a political play, it is an interestingly entertaining concept.

Amending the words of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, for the purpose of this piece, the culture, if any, of the migrant Karachites and also the original Karachites, for the last seven decades is like the lamb skin in which barbarism masquerades.

"What do you think of modern civilisation?" a journalist asked Gandhi, who replied, "That would be a good idea." Borrowing his words, if someone asked me about Mohajir culture, I would repeat Gandhi's reply.

The writer is a senior banker, an author, and contributes regularly to newspapers. He can be reached at azizsirajuddin@gmail.com. All information and facts are the sole responsibility of the writer