

Slogan

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Japan	¥ 1250
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Maldives	Rf 150
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*Hira Mani,
unfiltered*



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Celebrities are Humans Too!

Some say, 'We are all the same because every human being experiences pain, suffering, love, joy, illness, loss and death.' Others say, 'No. Celebrities are different; they don't face the same challenges that we normal working people do, and they can buy their way out of life's problems, including those times when they break the law.' Both above clashing opinions are true. Celebrities do have huge advantages the average person doesn't – money, power and influence, which affords them the opportunity to hire the best help – nannies, personal trainers, private chefs, masseuses, doctors, attorneys and so forth.

Celebrities can also take extended luxurious holidays to the most exotic places in the world – and usually be surrounded by other rich and famous people. But no amount of money or power can prevent the inevitable of the human experience such as loss. John Travolta just recently admitted that following his son Jett's death in 2009: "I didn't know if I was going to make it... I didn't want to wake up... it took a lot for me to get me better."

But as a Celebrity Life Coach and Human Behavior Expert PhD who works with and coaches celebrities, I can also reveal that they also have certain specific psychological issues that are unique to fame & celebrity, which the average person doesn't have, and yet celebrities do have one issue that we all share, regardless of money, power or fame. From the Oscar's red carpet to the tabloids lining supermarket checkout lines, celebrity obsession is everywhere. Even the most casual moviegoer might find him or herself flipping through a slideshow of Academy Award fashion after the big event. So why do we fixate on celebrities? In most cases, it's perfectly natural. Humans are social creatures, psychologists say, and we evolved — and still live — in an environment where it paid to pay attention to the people at the top. Celebrity fascination may be an outgrowth of this tendency, nourished by the media and technology. In our society, celebrities act like a drug.

They're around us everywhere. They're an easy fix. It's only relatively recently in human history that people have had near-constant access to celebrity news and gossip. But celebrities themselves are nothing new. People have long looked to monarchs for social, and even fashion, cues: The now-ubiquitous white wedding dress caught on after Queen Victoria wore one in 1840. Even hunter-gatherer societies in which material goods are relatively scarce have status hierarchies, said Daniel Kruger, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Michigan. Other primate species also keep a close eye on the dominant individuals in their groups. Naturally, the rise of social media has increased these links tenfold.

'We now have a 24/7 celebrity news cycle,' Laurie points out. 'That means we've gone from seeing celebrities for maybe an hour or so a day on TV, to inhabiting a media world that's completely saturated with celebrity. We can interact with celebrities more directly through channels like Instagram and Twitter: they have become more accessible than ever.' But for the purposes of this comment, we are referring to "celebrity" as someone who is from either category – they have achieved something great or they are simply known for being known. Also, the term "celebrity" infers that the public recognizes their name and face, and that they are mentioned and highlighted in the media.

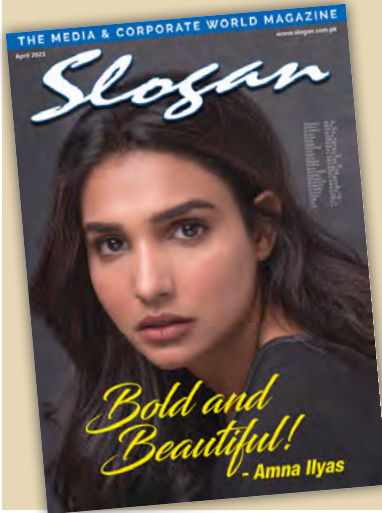
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More Attention

It is timely that you have featured Amna Ilyas on your cover. She is a well-known celebrity who started her career as a model. She made her name by proving her talent. In a society that obsesses over fair color for women, she showed them that dusky tone is also beautiful and something to be proud of.

Perhaps she does not have an effective promotion lobby and that is why she is left behind. Or perhaps she is too lazy to push herself personally and the media just walk over her. That is the tragedy in Pakistan and in the showbiz industry everywhere else around the world. Along with talent, you need a promotion lobby as well. If you have that, your talent may be a little shade under but you come out the best. This is what happens in cricket and other sports as well. With talent goes self-promotion. Amna Ilyas should learn a lesson from this and push harder to get a place under the sun. That way, she will be more noticed and certainly get many more assignments.

Jamil Ahmed, Knaniwal, Pakistan

Importance of Foreign Remittances

The national economy is currently facing its worst crisis and several factors have contributed to bring it to this state, chief among which is the trade imbalance, i.e. foreign exchange is withdrawing more than the inflow and the resulting deficit is on the most severe terms. It has to be fulfilled by taking external loans. The size of the country's safe reserves, which fell to less than four billion dollars a few weeks ago, has been slightly managed by the government's hard efforts, but its status can be estimated from the Indian reserves, which currently stand at over \$600 billion. Remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis are considered very lucrative in the conditions created by the trade imbalance. The good news is that the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has crossed its target investment milestone of 6 billion dollars under which the number of its account holders has crossed 500 thousand. Currently, about 1.12 million Pakistanis are living abroad, of which more than 10 million are in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Oman, while the rest are residing in Western countries. With the involvement of these people, a substantial increase in the number of account holders in Roshan Pakistan Digital Account is possible.

*Javed Humayun,
Sydney, Australia.*



Deep Economic Crisis

The real reason for the destruction of our country's economy is that our agriculture policy is made by businessmen and industrialists, and the policy of the poor is made by the rich, who have never seen poverty and are born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Despite this, inflation is at its peak day and the unusual size of the cabinet is also touching its limit. If the prime minister cares so much about the people, he would first make the cabinet smaller and put an end to the extravagance of the ministers and parliamentarians. Today we are suffering from economic hardship. Austerity needs to be made a permanent national attitude.

*Sara Ali,
Lahore, Pakistan.*



Look Beyond China

During the last few years, Pakistan is becoming a market for Chinese goods, so China is benefiting in all respects. In complete contrast, the industrial and agricultural condition of Pakistan is becoming thinner, but both the government and the people do not realize the dangerous situation. There is a fear that Pakistan may also face the same situation as Sri Lanka. Expensive Chinese loans have also played a major role in making Sri Lanka bankrupt. It is necessary that instead of taking loans from China, Pakistan should adopt a policy of self-reliance. In this regard, the policies of countries like Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary can be adopted, but before that, it is necessary that Pakistan should reconsider its careless approach towards China. The policy should be re-examined and revised and the goal of common development and prosperity should be achieved by making it compatible with the national interest.

*Syed Naveed Qandahari,
Dubai, United Arab Emirates.*



The Way Forward

The people of Pakistan can also benefit from real democratic freedoms and political and journalistic freedoms will be promoted in the country, the economy will improve and the common people of the society will get equal opportunities to advance. There is a dire need of a leadership that has the idea of a corruption-free society. Unfortunately, the current rulers of Pakistan do not realize that Pakistan is currently drowning in debts of more than fifty thousand billion rupees. The requirement of the situation is that the national and provincial elections should be completed as soon as possible and the power should be handed over to the elected representatives so that the government with the new mandate can make a new agreement with the international community to save the country from this crisis.

*Zahida Anjum,
Islamabad, Pakistan.*

Decrease in Exports

The Industrial sector plays an important role in the development of the country. After the agricultural sector, this sector provides the most employment in the country and earns a lot of foreign exchange through exports. However, the industrial sector of Pakistan is in constant decline and hundreds of industrial units, including large, small and medium enterprises, are shutting down, increasing unemployment and poverty in the country. Due to decrease in exports, the value of rupee is continuously falling due to decrease in foreign exchange reserves. Our competitiveness in the global market is adversely affected due to record increase in cost of production, which can be seen from decrease in production and export of textiles and other products. The government should take immediate steps to save the industrial sector from closure by forming a taskforce with the business community on an emergency basis to bring out the large-scale industries from the crisis.

*Zafar Ali,
Karachi, Pakistan.*



"I am trying to reduce tensions and bring parties to the negotiating table to save democracy from derailing."

**-Dr. Arif Alvi,
President of Pakistan**



"Bangladesh will buy its first submarines to boost its naval power in the Bay of Bengal."

**-Sheikh Hasina Wajid,
Prime Minister of Bangladesh**



"There are sick-minded people on social media and their hobby is to insult artistes."

**-Mehwish Hayat,
Pakistani actress**



"I can safely say the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has no real problem with corruption."

**-Satya Pal Malik,
Former IIOJK Governor**



'Love isn't always about hanging on. Sometimes it's about letting go.'

**Reham Khan,
British-Pakistani Journalist**



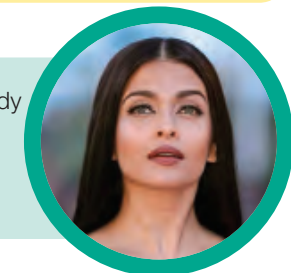
"Pakistan is not hell. People there are just like us."

**-MP Ramya,
Indian actress**



"Dhol-playing is a game of immense physical and mental strength."

Arishma Maryam, Dhol Player



'I don't believe in proving a point to anybody. Nobody is that important.'

**Aishwarya Rai Bachchan,
Indian Actress**

‘Rape Analogy’ or a Self-goal?

Nabeel Gabol, the leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party, recently came into serious disgrace for making a shameful and insensitive comment about rape in a podcast. In the video of the podcast, Gabol talked about being overpowered by the opposition, saying “when rape is imminent, just enjoy it”. Making light of a heinous crime like rape, he was officially issued a show-cause notice by the PPP Sindh president, with a warning of organisational disciplinary action to be taken against him for making inappropriate conversation and using non-parliamentary words. Though the matter will be settled down soon with mutual agreement within the party corridors, this time Nabeel Gabol seems to have inflicted a self-goal by using rape as an analogy. One wonders whether he would be equally enjoying the moment or not? ❏



Pappu Can't Dance Saala!



Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the Indian National Congress, has been sentenced to two years imprisonment in a case about remarks he made in 2019 seen as insulting to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The sentence also rendered Gandhi ineligible to stand in the poll next year. On the face of it, the BJP-government, led by Prime Minister Modi, looks hell-bent on keeping the leading face of the opposition out of political race by fair means or foul. Commonly referred to as ‘Pappu’ across the country because of his royal-like pampered upbringing and gullible persona now despite a proper full-face beard, Rahul is still considered a newbie in Indian politics. However, the Modi sarkar takes the Congress party, once the dominant force in Indian politics, quite seriously and thus cannot allow its supremo to occupy the political dance floor to show his moves. ❏

The Son Also Rises!

Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of the Iranian Mohammad Reza Pahlavi toppled in the 1979 Islamic revolution, recently grabbed the media attention when it was announced that he was going to visit Israel in April last week.

According to Israel, Reza Pahlavi would be the “most senior Iranian personality” to ever pay a public visit to Israel. It bears mention that Iran and Israel enjoyed warmer ties under the US-backed Mohammad Reza Shah. Israel says the visit by Reza Pahlavi is meant to create “a bridge between Israel and the Iranian people, and expressing joint opposition to the Ayatollah regime”.

The rise of Reza Pahlavi shows he is determined to carry the legacy forward, becoming a darling of the West like his father. ❏



NBP continues to support farmers

National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) launched a new low markup rate agricultural loan programme to support the farming industry. With this initiative, farmers can increase their crop yield by availing agriculture loans with swift processing.

In addition, NBP is offering special discounts on the markup rate for women to encourage female participation in the farming industry. The loan can be used to finance a range of agricultural needs, including warehouse, solar tube-well, fisheries, new tractors, agriculture baler, seeds, soil, and pesticides, etc.

"We are proud to launch this new programme to support the farming community in Pakistan," said Rehmat Ali Hasnie, President and CEO (A) of the National Bank of Pakistan. "Inclusive Development Group of NBP is dedicated



for facilitating the farming community in adopting modern agricultural technologies to increase their farm efficiency, productivity and profitability. NBP has wide range of agricultural financing products fulfilling the farmer's needs"

"Our goal is to uplift the agricultural sector of Pakistan by providing easy access to financing and other resources. We strongly believe that the growth of this sector is closely linked with the

growth of Pakistan" said Ms. Naushaba Shahzad, Group Head (A), Inclusive Development Group, NBP.

NBP has a long history of supporting the farming industry in Pakistan and this new program builds on the bank's commitment to providing innovative financial solutions to its customers. Farmers interested in applying for agricultural loan can contact their nearest NBP branch to learn more about the program." ❏

IMF Comes to the Rescue

The International Monetary Fund is lending Sri Lanka \$3bn (£2.4bn) to help it deal with its worst economic crisis in its history as an independent nation. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka is now putting efforts to be able to keep the currency strengthened, eventually reduce interest rates, and continue to see inflation ease.



Sri Lanka has been unable to buy goods it needs from abroad. The island nation started experiencing soaring prices, shortages of essential goods and crippling international debts, economy shrank by record 7.8 percent last year. To make things worse, in May 2022 it failed to make an interest payment on its foreign debt for the first time in its history. ❏

Qatar, UAE to Reopen Embassies

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are working to reopen their long-closed embassies "in the coming weeks", as a wave of rapprochement sweeps the turbulent Middle East region.

The two countries re-established relations in January 2021, after the UAE took part in a nearly four-year Gulf blockade of Qatar, but despite several meetings they are yet to restore the diplomatic missions.

"Regarding the opening of embassies between the two countries, I think it will be in the coming weeks," foreign ministry spokesperson Majid Al-Ansari told a briefing.

"The technical committees are now doing their work in this context, and it is expected that there will be exchange visits to consider the procedures we need to reopen embassies." A UAE official confirmed that the reopening of embassies is "under process". ❏



Adnan Siddiqui calls out Priyanka Chopra

When it was announced that filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy will be the first person of colour and first woman to direct a Star Wars film, people were over the moon. Many celebrities also expressed their pride in her achievement, including Indian actor Priyanka Chopra.

"First person of colour and first woman to direct a 'Star Wars' film...and she's South Asian!! What a historic moment @sharmeenobaidchinoy. So so proud of you my friend! May the force be with you!" Chopra wrote on her Instagram story.

Pakistani actor Adnan Siddiqui didn't like how the actor addressed the director as "South Asian" and called her out for it.



He emphasised that she's Pakistani, calling her out for "flaunting" her Indian nationality whenever she gets the opportunity before claiming to be a

South Asian.

Some of Chopra's fans were quick to react to the tweet and bashed Siddiqui for it. ❌

Mercedes launched with a price tag of Rs 3.30 crore... only

Mercedes-Benz has launched its most powerful production car ever, the AMG GT 63 S E Performance, in India at a starting price of Rs. 3.30 crore only.

The 4-door coupe is also the luxury automaker's first plug-in hybrid car, boasting a 4.0-liter twin-turbocharged V8 gasoline engine that generates 630 horsepower and a 201 horsepower electric motor. It offers an all-electric range of 13 kilometres and a combined output of 831 horsepower and 1,470 Newton-meters of torque. ❌



India becomes the most populous country of the world

India is set to become the world's most populous country by the end of June, posing huge challenges to a nation with poor infrastructure and insufficient jobs for millions of young people.

The seismic shift will see India's population hit 1.4286 billion — almost three million more than China's 1.4257 billion — at mid-year, the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) State of World Population 2023 report forecast.

Meanwhile, the latest UN estimates show that Pakistan's population has reached 240.5 million in 2023, and it has emerged among the eight countries that will account for half the projected growth in global population by 2050.

China has generally been regarded



as the world's most populous country since the fall of the Roman Empire but last year its population shrank for the first time since 1960, while India's has continued to rise.

According to the Pew Research Centre, the number of people in India has grown by more than one billion since 1950, the year the UN began gathering population data. ❌

HBL signs agreement for Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme

HBL, Damen Support Program, and Thardeep Microfinance Foundation have joined hands to offer interest-free financing to individuals and small businesses under the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme (PMYB&ALS).

Speaking on the occasion, Khaqan Muhammad Khan, Global Head Financial Institutions and Remittance Business – HBL, said, "The Bank is committed to promoting financial inclusion and poverty alleviation. The partnership between HBL, Damen Support Program, and Thardeep Microfinance Foundation under the PMYB&ALS scheme would play a crucial role in uplifting the lives of thousands of people."

Dr. Sonu Khangharani, CEO – Thardeep Microfinance Foundation, said, "The partnership with HBL will be



Khaqan Muhammad Khan, Global Head Financial Institutions and Remittance Business – HBL, Dr. Sonu Khangharani, CEO – Thardeep Microfinance Foundation and Musharraf Khan, CEO – Damen Support Program signing the agreement.

instrumental in advancing our mission of promoting financial inclusion and will help individuals from marginalized segments of society to realize their entrepreneurial dreams."

Musharraf Khan, CEO – Damen Support Program, said, "Amidst inflationary pressures, interest-free

financing is a boon that small businesses and individual entrepreneurs could take advantage of. The partnership with HBL had previously delivered successful financial inclusion projects and this scheme would provide another opportunity to support small businesses and entrepreneurs in need of financing." ❏

Ramazan and Eid Boost Pakistan's Remittances

Pakistan's remittances from overseas Pakistanis surged to a seven-month high of \$2.5 billion in March, which is an increase of 27% from February, as per the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). However, the figure was down 11% compared to March 2022. The rise in remittances



is attributed to Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, as well as the use of legal channels by non-resident Pakistanis to send money to their families due to the closing gap between interbank and open market rates. Historically, prior to the annual Eid holidays, Pakistanis living abroad send record-high remittances. Experts predict that the inflows will continue to be elevated due to the forthcoming Eid-ul-Adha. ❏

Saudi FM meets Assad on first trip to Syria since 2011

Syrrian President Bashar Al Assad met Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal Bin Farhan in Damascus in April last week, ending more than a decade of diplomatic deep-freeze between the two countries.

The Saudi prince arrived in Damascus on the first visit to Syria's capital by a Saudi official since the start of the country's civil war in 2011. Assad has been politically isolated in the region since the conflict began, but a flurry of diplomatic activity has been underway in the past week as regional relations shift following a decision by Saudi Arabia and Iran to resume ties.



The trip comes less than a week after Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad visited Saudi Arabia, also on the first such visit since the conflict began. In April, diplomats from nine Arab countries met in Jeddah to discuss ending Syria's long spell in the diplomatic wilderness and its possible return to the 22-member Arab League after Damascus was suspended in 2011. Saudi Arabia severed ties with Assad's government in 2012 and Riyadh had long openly championed Assad's ouster, backing Syrian rebels in earlier stages of the war. Several other Arab countries also cut ties with Syria as some powers bet on Assad's demise. ❏

Bangladesh swears in new president

Mohammed Shahabuddin, a former judge and an official of the ruling party Awami League, was sworn in as the president of Bangladesh in April last week. Shahabuddin replaces Abdul Hamid, a former speaker and Awami League stalwart, whose second term expired in April.

Shahabuddin, 73, was an anti-corruption commissioner as well as a

Mukti Bahini activist, was sworn in as the 22nd president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh today," the presidential palace said. He was elected by lawmakers in February after the ruling party nominated him instead of the speaker of parliament, who had been seen as the favourite. According to the Xinhua, China's official news agency, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a message of congratulations to Shahabuddin. ❏



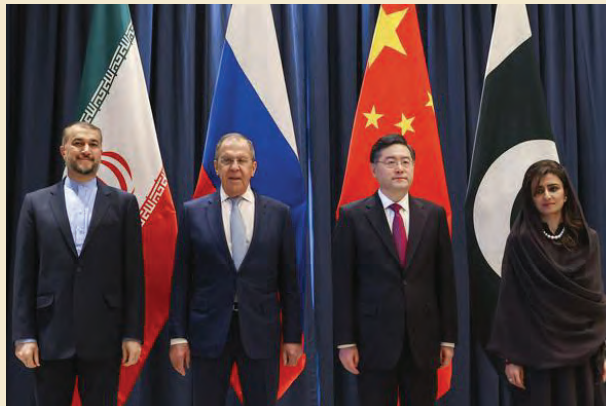
Foreign Ministers Hold Talks

Foreign Ministers from China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran recently held talks with regard to

several issues in the region. The meeting was chaired by Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang. During the second formal meeting, the countries came to several agreements, including calling for the U.S. to lift its unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan and appealing to the Afghan authorities to build an inclusive government that protects the interests of all people, including women, children and ethnic minorities.

Foreign minister Qin commended

China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran's joint efforts to ensure the smooth transition



of the situation in Afghanistan. He further said that China recently released

"The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper" and "China's Position on the Afghan Issue," which advocate a spirit of solidarity to adapt to the profoundly adjusted international landscape, a win-win mindset to deal with the complex and intertwined security challenges, and reaffirms a political approach to promote the resolution of international regional hotspot issues such as Afghanistan.

The meeting emphasis on China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran should unite and cooperate to encourage the international community to pay more attention to the security issues related to terrorism in Afghanistan. ❏

Foreign Ministers Hold Talks

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda' has said that his government will make necessary arrangements to grant voting rights to Nepali citizens living abroad. Over 65,0000 Nepalis have migrated overseas in 2021 seeking employment, the country's Department of Foreign Employment said.

Arrangements will be made to allow Nepalis living abroad to cast their votes, Prime Minister Prachanda said while addressing a virtual event of the CPN

(Maoist Centre) Migration Coordination. He said lakhs of migrant Nepalis will benefit from this move and enable them to exercise their franchise. The Prime Minister said remittances sent by Nepalis living abroad have boosted the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Remittances account for about a quarter of the country's national income. Over the past few years, migration and remittances have played a significant role in the socio-economic development of Nepal. ❏





Hira Mani, unfiltered

By Buraq Shabbir

She's a rising star, with a credible body of work to her credit. Titles like *Yakeen Ka Safar*, *Sun Yaara*, *Thays*, *Dil Mom Ka Diya*, *Do Bol* and *Mere Paas Tum Ho* are drama serials that catapulted Hira Mani to new heights; her chemistry with Affan Waheed in *Do Bol* was so powerful that she signed on another serial, *Ghalati*, with him. There's no denying Hira's prowess as a performer and yet she's almost always in a pickle for saying the wrong thing, at the wrong time. She has 3.5 million followers on Instagram and her popularity constantly swings

between adulation and disapproval.

At home, she also plays the role of wife to VJ/actor Salman Saqib Sheikh, better known as Mani, and they have two children together. Twelve years into marriage, these days Hira has put her work on hold and is finally enjoying the role of a housewife. "Right from the time I got married, I started working," Hira recalled as we finally managed to speak for this extensive telephonic interview.

"I was always popular in school, college and even where I lived due to my many talents (singing, acting, etc.) but I never thought of pursuing acting professionally," Hira shared, adding that it was Mani who encouraged her to act.

Beginning with co-hosting a show in

2011 alongside her husband, whom she is grateful to for sharing the spotlight with her without any insecurity, Hira received a lot of criticism for being very blunt. People told her to talk less and let Mani speak. But all she cared about at that time was the money she was getting for the job; beginning from Rs. 12,000 as an intern to getting 5 lacs for the show.

Hira saw a bright future for her kids and her family. Some people shamed her that she married Mani for this reason. She says that she if she wanted to become an actor first and foremost, she wouldn't have given birth to two children. She loved her "six packs" prior to that.

"I treated it like any other job one takes to earn a livelihood; Mani and I are



self-made and we share the financial responsibility of our families,” stressed Hira, who was pregnant with her second child when she hosted her next show with Mani. However, she admitted that this changed after she began acting and felt as if she was rewarded for her efforts. “I am glad I listened to Mani and switched from hosting to acting because morning shows saw a downfall of sorts at that time.”

Hira made her television debut in 2015 with drama serial Preet Na Kariyo Koi in which she played a politician opposite Ahsan Khan. However, it did not turn out the way she’d expected; she thought she would become the talk of the town but nobody watched it even though it was a good story. She decided to take a break because Ibrahim, her second child, was very young then and her debut didn’t go as planned. The next drama offered to her was Sun Yaara opposite Junaid Khan, in 2017,

which garnered a lot of praise for her and became the turning point in her acting career.

According to her, Do Bol in which she was cast opposite Affan Waheed (the two will soon be seen in a web series too), was the second biggest hit after Humsafar, until her next, Mere Paas Tum Ho launched. “TikTokers went crazy after Do Bol’s OST that has the highest number of views on YouTube,” Hira reflected, adding that this was her climb to success.

“Somewhere between raising my kids and being an actor, I became a heroine and that is a blessing. I have come to prominence with acting gradually; it did not happen overnight.”

The actor has played a mix of lead and supporting roles till date and to one’s surprise, it’s her side roles that attracted more appreciation; Do Bol being an exception.

Cases in point: Gaiti in Yakeen Ka Safar, Tamkinat in Dil Mom Ka Diya and Hania in Mere Paas Tum Ho.

“I think your work has to be exceptional to stand out irrespective of the screen time,” Hira said about the roles she took on. “Viewers notice you for your performance and I work for them, not for the industry, so it doesn’t matter to me whether I take the lead role or



the supporting one, as long as it is not a negative character. Highlighting a negative character is easier than making a simpler character stand out; I don't find it challenging."

Despite an overflow of socially relevant dramas on local television these days, she hasn't been a part of any of them. When asked if it was a choice she made, she informed that she wasn't offered many but she believes an issue-based drama needs to be executed properly. If that's not the case then she prefers scripts that revolve around love and romance; she is offered more of those too.

Things, however, are changing for Hira Mani. Her upcoming drama *Kashf*, directed by Danish Nawaz, highlights a unique theme in addition to a romantic sequence with Junaid Khan. She will be playing the titular role of *Kashf*, who suffers from a nightmare disorder. "Written by Imran Nazir, it revolves around the story of a father-daughter duo," Hira revealed, adding that she is very close to her father in real life and the drama offers a completely contrasting relationship between the two.

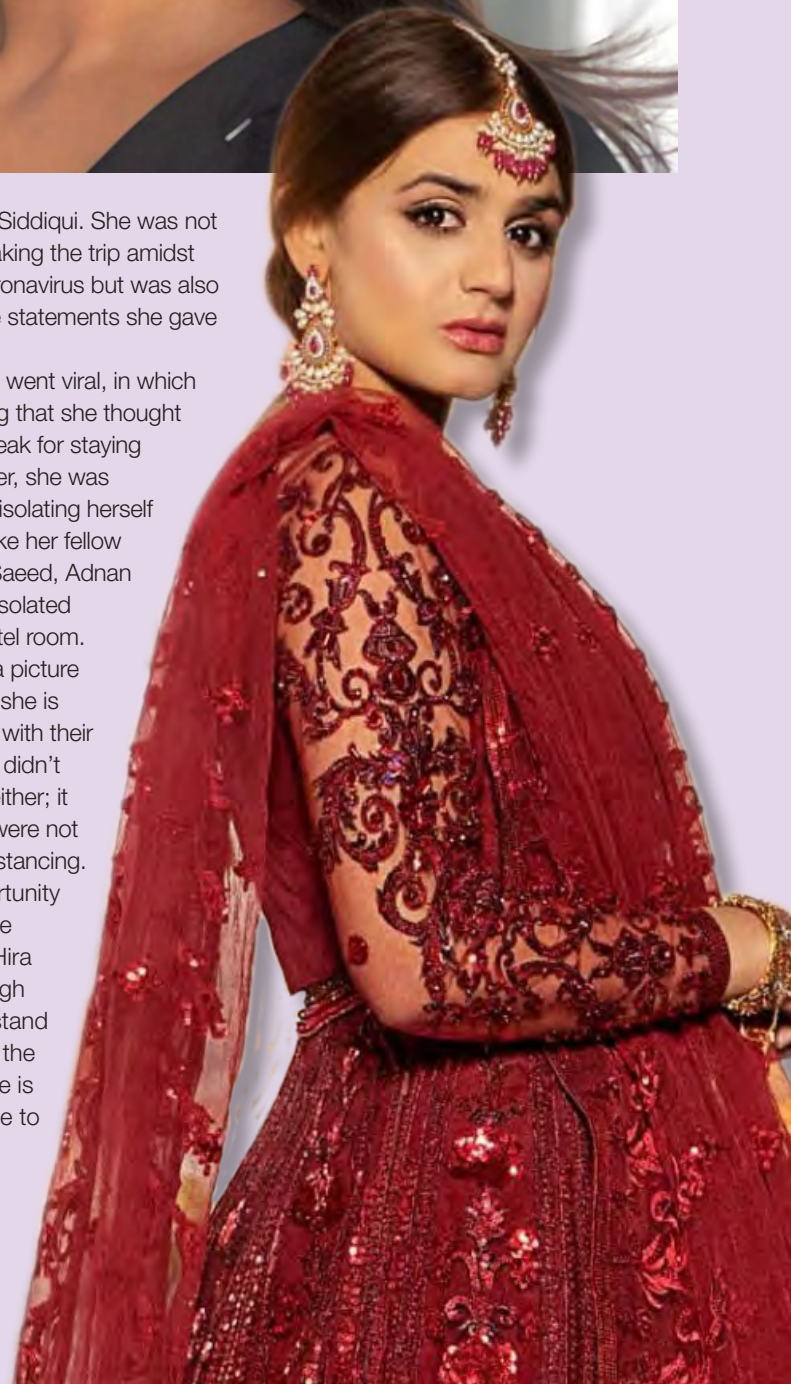
As for Hira's most popular drama till date, it has to be *Mere Paas Tum Ho* that recently went on-air once again. The actor was in U.S. last month as part of a promotional tour for the drama, with co-actors Humayun

Saeed and Adnan Siddiqui. She was not only criticized for taking the trip amidst the outbreak of coronavirus but was also bashed for multiple statements she gave after that.

First, a video clip went viral, in which she was suggesting that she thought Americans were weak for staying in their homes. Later, she was questioned on not isolating herself after returning, unlike her fellow actors (Humayun Saeed, Adnan Siddiqui) who self-isolated themselves in a hotel room. Then, she posted a picture with Mani in which she is facing him (literally) with their masks on and that didn't go down too well either; it seemed that they were not practicing social distancing.

Taking the opportunity to address all of the above and more, Hira admitted that though she did not understand the seriousness of the matter initially, there is always another side to a story. ❏

Courtesy: Instep Today



YAARA VEY

A Tad Underwhelming

By Sara Danial

The film 'Yaara Vey', directed by Manish Pawar, is a strikingly local version of such Indian blockbusters as Dilwale Dulhania Ley Jaengey and Kuch Kuch Hota Hai. Brimming with scenic landscapes of Thailand, the dingy airs of Tbilisi, Georgia, and the cutting-edge metropolis of Dubai, the film Yaara Vey is divided into two in terms of story, locations, and times, despite the love triangle.

The plot dominates the character of Sania Siddiqui (played by Aleeze Nasser), a strong woman raised by a stronger mother Sonia Siddiqui (played by Marina Khan). She knows what she wants and she makes sure she gets it. Not quite so where her heart is concerned. This brings us to the next character and Sania's childhood friend Sameer (played by Sami Khan), who is head over heels for Sania. Both work together in an architectural design firm, looking to build a resort in Thailand for a major client.

Armaan Syed (played by Faizan Khawaja) makes his presence felt when he lands at the same property to build a dream restaurant that he has been working for, since eons. When he brings along a Japanese investor for approval of the deal, but it has already been signed up for by the architects (Sania and Sameer). Amidst the confusion and misunderstanding, Sameer receives a call from Dubai for his dream job and leaves Sania to deal with the mess. Just like Kajol was stranded on her European tour and ends up falling in love with her hero in the time she spent there, Sania and

Armaan find a soft spot for each other.

In a parallel world, Sania comes across Kabir's bookshop (Jawed Sheikh) in Thailand during her stay. Kabir happens to be her father, and both bridge the gap between themselves about a long-forgotten

through bland dialogues.

Although Faizan and Sami have been around in the industry for a while, playing diverse roles in varying genres, they seem to have fallen flat. This can be more attributable to the lack of punch in the dialogues

which made a disappointing fare in delivery. This is exactly why a strong script is important because it has cascading effects on every part of the value chain of filmmaking.

Talking about Aleeze Nasser's debut, she walked away with the film. It was her show all the way, as she slips into the role of a strong, independent woman, while containing her emotions for the right times, and then morphing into the boss lady when she finally confronts Armaan. It doesn't take a while for viewers to figure out that while it was her debut and not the most perfect of performances, she shows immense potential with her expression game going strong. Perhaps, a little work on the dance skills could have done the magic. However, by the end of it, you find yourself rooting for her - especially when you watch her dish out dialogues with

supreme confidence, audacity, and a killer instinct. It can be safely said that she was not just a glamour queen pulling off flowery dresses, trendy bags, and designer heels, taking away from the film's main theme.

Having recently watched films like Kamli, The Legend of Maula Jatt, and Joyland, and experienced an elevated bar of filmmaking in Pakistan by Pakistani film producers and directors, the film 'Yaara Vey' has come across as a tad underwhelming. It is a visually-pleasant film for a one-off watch that may sell well but may not have a houseful. ❌



love story of Kabir and Sonia – leading everyone to a rollicking emotional ride.

While the film is remarkably inspired by the Indian film industry (this may be due to the fact that the technical crew consisting of many Dubai-based Indians drove the film's narrative), with elaborate high-street fashion and stylized locations, the content of the film lacks substance. Hinging peripherally on tuneful music, beautiful dresses, and stunning cinematography left the audiences looking for more. The narrative takes time to build up, even slowing down along the way, with weak impact

THE LAST OF US

Warm and Inviting

By Sara Danial

A Hollywood film featuring Lily James, Shabana Azmi, and Sajal Ali, directed by Shekhar Kapur, written by Jemima Khan, and produced by Working Title Films, is one to be watched in a cinematic experience. Or so we thought.

Zoe (Lily James) is a documentary filmmaker. She goes through a dating app that only recommends a whole lot of Mr. Wrongs. However, for her childhood friend and immediate neighbour, Kaz, an oncologist, the answer to marriage is following the path of age-old parents' chosen one - an arranged marriage. Kaz's parents hope to find a bright, educated and beautiful bride from Pakistan. The commitment-phobic Zoe is working on a film project for which she is casting. She learns that her friend Kazim (Shazad Latif) will opt for an arranged and settle down like his parents. She begins to convince him to let her film the quest, but her personal misgivings threaten the project and Kazim's search.

Nonetheless, Zoe films Kaz's journey to marital bliss with a complete stranger, but she soon begins to wonder if she can learn a lesson or two from an entirely different approach to finding love. Kazim's attempt at 'assisted' marriage is subtly portrayed by Zoe. With many of its complications.

Kapur and Khan have attempted to tread uncharted waters by exploring the rom com genre in a Pakistani setting. They have touched upon the virtues of arranged marriage and highlighted the qualms of Western romantic marriage. While there is disparity in divorce rates, a lot of cultural sensitivity is

undermined in the film's entire structure of the romance that comes across quite believably on the poster, but not on the screen.

Latif is a great actor, with likeable, assertive presence as Kaz. He has a streak of light-hearted comedy. For instance, when he reminded Zoe and her mum Cath (Emma Thompson) that he must reach the airport before time to be ready for 'random' searches. On the other hand, James is sharp but rather torn between personal and professional loyalties.

James and Latif share screen space together relatively fewer times, especially when they are alone, so any potential romance is primarily based on childhood friendship and awkward first kisses, with a few steady glances.

Shabana Azmi, as usual, makes a warm presence and she is wonderful to watch. As Kazim's mum, Aisha, she is composed while speaking with her son, yet stern when required.

Sajal Ali, Kazim's bride-to-be, Maymouna, has been an impactful actress historically, but she fails to appeal with monotone dialogues and poker-faced expressions.

I also felt like Thompson's character, as Cath, made a tried effort at the odd role she was designated. Cath is ecstatic about her neighbours and loves to share food, dress and celebrations. She also tosses insensitive language



and some micro-aggressions intermittently. It is important to note that these needless, casual comments are uncalled for, coming from a likeable character. Very discombobulating. Maybe that's the point.

It is said that Jemima Khan has pulled elements from her own experience of marrying a Muslim man and living in Pakistan, with a strong focus on childhood friends living on the same street but hailing from different backgrounds.

An extremely lovable cast with colourful portrayal of Pakistani (and Pakistani-British) culture makes this film quite warm and inviting, but a dragging story and the lack of central romance will not hold the attention as it should have. For a well-marketed film, this may have garnered sufficient sales but not enough to grace a full house. ❌

FILM

THE LAST OF US

WAR AGAINST FUNGI

By Maleeha Faisal Siddiqi

Starring Pedro Pascal and Bella Ramsey, 'The Last of Us' is HBO's live action adaptation of the video game. On the face of it, the show tells the story of yet another zombie apocalypse, making one question, how much dystopia, is too much dystopia?

But ten minutes into the first episode, all the aforementioned reservations go down the drain. The plot opens in the 1960s and we are introduced to two epidemiologists being interviewed on live TV. This is a hauntingly beautiful scene, performed masterfully by actor John Hannah. Hannah, as Dr. Newman begins to explain to the host of the show why, to him, fungus is a bigger threat to humanity than any other

job at pulling you in for the long haul and you are too keen to watch what the rest of the episode has in store.

The story moves forward to 2003 and we are introduced to Joel Miller, his daughter Sarah and brother Tommy. Joel and Tommy are both contractors. The Millers' escape from their fungi-infected neighbourhood in their truck is an outstanding frame by frame adaptation of what it's like playing the video game. What makes this show standout is the stirring picture it paints of humanity in times of crisis, since when all hell breaks loose, the value of human life is not a matter of empathy, or compassion. It is measured in terms of risk, numbers



microbe. It is a haunting picture he paints as he goes on to explain how mankind has always won the war with viruses but fungus is the danger we should all be worried about. This is how the first episode opens with a devastating picture of what the future could hold for humanity.

Living in times of COVID, the viewer is forced to relive the disturbing reality and acknowledge the truth to this man's words. By this time, the show has done a brilliant

and ratios.

It may be a little disturbing to some viewers to grasp the gruesome nature of fungus, The Last of Us is not a show that should be missed. It is an extraordinary story of survival, love, hope, friendship and a striking study of humanity. The attention to detail is immaculate. The cinematography is breath-taking, with every frame structured so beautifully, you can almost forget the wreckage. The

show wins the heart with the songs that serve as code worked out by Frank and Tess. Songs from the 1960s mean they haven't received new stuff, 1970s mean there's new stock, and 1980s songs mean trouble. We see Joel's panic when Wake Me Up Before

You Go-Go by Wham plays on the radio at the end of episode one.

Music is an important theme throughout the show. We see Bill and Frank fall in love with Linda Ronstadt's "Long Long Time". It is devastatingly gorgeous and brilliantly juxtaposed as it just goes to show how carefully the entire story is handled. With a season finale bound to leave you questioning your own morality, one cannot wait for the sequel. **S**

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