

Slogan

Afghanistan	Afg. 200
Australia	A\$ 20
Bangladesh	Taka 200
Bhutan	NU 150
Canada	CS 20
China	RMB 30
France	FR 100
Hong Kong	HK\$ 75
India	Rs. 200
Japan	¥ 1250
Korea	Won 7500
Malaysia	RM 20
Maldives	Rf 150
Nepal	NrRs. 200
New Zealand	NZ\$ 20
Pakistan	Rs. 200
Philippines	P 188
Saudi Arabia	SR 40
Singapore	S\$ 20
Sri Lanka	Rs. 300
Thailand	B 250
Turkey	Lira. 10
UAE	AED 20
UK	£ 5
USA	\$ 10

Cuisine:

Delectable Dhokla

Film Review:

The Midnight Sky

TRIBAL FUSION

'My Symphony' by Khaadi is one of the most awaited special edition collections of versatile and vibrant designs that suit every occasion and celebrate the facets of one's personality with confidence. The assortment celebrates heritage with Esra Bilgic as the face of it.



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Slogan

January 2021

Vol. 26 No. 01

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Price: PKR. 200

Slogan is published every month by

Syed Jawaid Iqbal for

JAWZ Communications (Pvt.) Ltd.

and printed by Shabbirsons, Karachi.

Read complete issue of Slogan on:

www.slogan.com.pk

The views expressed by the contributors are not necessarily shared by the editor.

Available on EBSCO and affiliated international databases through Asianet-Pakistan.

The New Variant

The coronavirus pandemic is a complication that doesn't seem like it will be vanished with just a vaccine. The second wave of the virus has plagued the world, once again prompting lockdowns, flight cancellations and border restrictions.

The new strain of coronavirus might just be making its impact in Pakistan too. Pakistan reported the highest number of deaths during the second wave of Covid-19 and the second-highest since the beginning of the pandemic as large number of people died in the country. According to the data of the National Command and Operation Centre, as many as 111 deaths and 2,256 new cases were registered in a single day.

While these are definitely worrying statistics, Pakistan is doing better compared to the rest of South Asia. Still, the government needs to be at its most cautious so that the new strain of virus does not spread in the country. The travel barriers against passengers arriving from the United Kingdom is a good first step and was needed but it is not enough as the strand has already arrived here. A total of 149 passengers recently arrived in the KPK from the UK—44 out of whom have been traced along with 32 of their contacts. Despite travel restrictions in place and the government being more prepared to trace the flow of the new strand, the authorities have been unable to trace 46 people because they provided incorrect residential addresses.

While research is still being done on the new mutations of the virus, with a team comprising American scientists and paramedical staff of Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) commencing research on COVID-19 patients in Pakistan, the true risks of the new strand are still unknown. Experts have said that this new variant of the coronavirus pandemic is said to be up to 70 percent more transmissible. This should put the government on further alert—just travel bans are not enough. There need to be better monitoring and tracking systems in place in order to isolate the new strand—as well as the prevention and lockdown strategies already in place.



**“ A people that
elect corrupt
politicians,
imposters, thieves
and traitors are
not victims... but
accomplices ”**

– George Orwell



**SOCIETY FOR GLOBAL
MODERATION**

STRENGTHENING TOLERANCE, INTERFAITH HARMONY AND DEMOCRACY

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Readers' Thoughts



Wedding Attire

This is related to the last month's cover story titled 'Dreamy Wedding Look' highlighting what every girl wants for her big day. Despite the chaos of Covid-19, the designer Amna Arshad didn't compromise on her latest wedding collection titled 'Emira' that included exquisite luxury formals. The collection has transformed basic wedding wear into a fresher, younger and more stylish form attracting women of all ages and making them feel fashionable and fun at the same time. Kudos to the designer for such an amazing work in such a stressful time.

*Bhavna Sharma,
New Delhi, India*

Connection Lost

With schools and institutions closed, students are taking online classes. Unfortunately, students in GB cannot attend these classes as they don't have good internet connectivity.

In this modern era where everything is going digital, Gilgit-Baltistan is still deprived of 4G services. The lone network which is providing 4G services in the region does not provide a strong internet connection and the remote areas don't have a connection at all. The government must pay attention to this issue and restore 4G facilities in GB.

*Nasir Ahmed,
Rawalpindi, Pakistan*



Reckless Drivers

The number of road accidents has been increasing at a rapid pace. The main reason for these accidents is underage drivers. It is shocking to see that parents allow their young children to drive cars and bikes. When the government has restricted underage drivers, why don't the people feel responsible? Don't they realise that their driving could harm someone? The government needs to take strict actions against these underage drivers.

*Samuel Richard,
London, England*

Precautionary Measures



Pakistanis, in large numbers, are visiting markets without following SOPs. Even though some people do wear masks, they fail to maintain a six-foot distance. The authorities have asked people to avoid public gatherings and maintain social distancing as a precautionary measure against the spread of the virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also stated that social dis-

tancing is one of the measures that can ensure safety from the infection. Pakistan is witnessing a surge in the number of coronavirus cases. It is important for everyone to follow SOPs and play their part in containing the spread of the virus. But it seems as if people have still not taken the coronavirus seriously. The pandemic won't go away with only a few people following the SOPs. It's a collective effort.

*Sania Abbasi,
Rawalpindi, Pakistan*



Low Pressure

Ever since winter arrived in Karachi, many households have reported the problem of low gas pressure. However, the gas issue is not new to the people of Karachi. Every year during winters, we are faced with the same problem and no one is there to help solve it. The condition is so pathetic that it is almost impossible to cook and people are then left to suffer on their own. They have to buy food from outside but for how long can they manage this? It is almost impossible. Its time SSGC realise their responsibility.

*Basharat Aslam,
Karachi, Pakistan*

Use Wisely

Technology has played a vital role in fast-track communication in the 21st century. Had it not been for cell-phones and the internet, we would still have been waiting for days, weeks and perhaps months to receive letters from our loved ones.

While it has certainly proven to be beneficial on many occasions, it has also brought along with it consequences that threaten the very fabric of values our society is based on. People are left

with their phones and internet rather than interacting with their loved ones.

We must address this. Healthy debates at home and offices should be done to educate people in a manner that is both friendly and convenient for everyone. The responsibility lies on all of us.

*Raima Aarav,
Dhaka, Bangladesh*



“Never give up, no matter how hard life gets no matter how much pain you feel. Pain will eventually subside, nothing remains forever, so keep going and don’t give up.” – **Imran Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan**



“I choose a lazy person to do a hard job. Because a lazy person will find an easy way to do it.” – **Bill Gates, Microsoft Founder**

“I don’t like to share my personal life... it wouldn’t be personal if I shared it.” – **George Clooney, Actor**



“I want to thank all my team-mates as well as the opponents in red ball cricket. It has been a privilege to play with and against them.” – **Mohammad Amir, Cricketer**

“Long suspensions of political processes under military authoritarianism have led to a general disdain for politics and politicians in the country.” – **Ayesha Jalal, Professor**



“I think the biggest part of being a girl boss in the office, at home or anywhere you go is just knowing your value.” – **Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex**

“I told my dad that not doing the work I wanted would kill me and doing it would keep me alive. Let me go.” – **Khalida Brohi, Pakistani Activist**



“Comfort and simplicity are two keys that I follow when it comes to fashion.” – **Fawad Khan, Actor**



Only Dreams

When Bakhtawar Bhutto got engaged, it was the talk of the town. This is perhaps the only notable thing she has done to come into the news. Her brother Bilawal's engagement and/or wedding will cause a bigger rumble and he should go for it instead of simply following the Maulana around. As for the third Zardari child Aseefa, though she has been billed as the next BB, her prospects are bleak and she too could perhaps tie the knot and forget about politics.



Turkish Attack

Not only the TV sector but advertising in Pakistan also faces the prospect of being steam-rolled by Turkish talent following the runaway popularity of the serial 'Ertugral' and many other Turkish serials before it. Turkish actress Esra Bilgic has appeared in commercials for many Pakistani brands, her latest foray being in Khaddi's winter fusion collection. Engin Altan who has played Ertugral will be appearing for another brand and other Turkish actors are also being approached. Looks like there is a famine of good models in Pakistan.



She Opens Up

Though TV actress Bushra Ansari separated from her husband Iqbal Ansari in 2015, she has spoken about it just recently. She told Ahsan Khan in a TV show that she is quite a family woman but her differences with Iqbal got a bit too far and they had to part. She also said that this sort of thing happens not only to actors but others as well, such as bankers, doctors, etc. To her, it was a personal issue and not worth sharing with the rest of the world, including her fans.



Local is No Fun

Now that manufacturing of mobile phones is coming to Pakistan in a big way and many top international brands are vying to enter the market, what will happen to those who flaunt expensive, high-end foreign brands and look down upon locally-made sets? International manufacturers can now produce mobile phones in Pakistan without paying any local withholding taxes and those who are very fond of their foreign-made, highly expensive sets will not be very happy about it.

Sajal Awarded

Actor Sajal Aly has now won an award for her contribution to film and television by the Distinctive International Arab Festivals Awards (DIAFA). The event is annually held in Dubai to honour outstanding international and Arab figures. 🇸🇦



INTENSE DRAMA

Produced by Big Bang Productions and directed by Badar Mehmood, ARY Digital's new drama 'Dunk' has an interesting and unusual storyline. The drama stars Bilal Abbas and Sana Javed along with veteran actor Naumaan Ejaz in lead roles. The cast also includes Yasra Rizvi, Fahad Sheikh, and Azekah Daniel in important roles. 🇸🇦



ITALIAN CUISINE CELEBRATED

Italian chef Marco Saracino conducted a culinary training workshop 'Hand-made Pasta and Italian Desserts' at Beach Luxury Hotel in Karachi. The



workshop was part of a Italian Cuisine Week.

The Week of Italian Cuisine in the world is the annual thematic review dedicated to the promotion of quality Italian cuisine and food products promoted by a network of embassies and consulates. 🇸🇦

UNFINISHED

Priyanka Chopra Jonas expressed her excitement while unveiling the cover of her memoir 'Unfinished'. She shared a photo on her social media platform holding the book saying, "That feeling when I'm holding my book in my hands for the first time. Just kidding guys, I only received the jacket so I wrapped it around a book to see what it would really feel like. I can't wait to get the first printed copy." 🇸🇦



Iqra University Recognised

Stanford University recently released a list of 160,000 accomplished persons from around the globe out of which 81 are from Pakistan. The list represents the world's top 2% scientists, based on the international evaluation of their research work and are ranked based on either the life-long citation impact of their work till 2019.

Put together by Prof. John Ioannidis and his team of researchers at Stanford University, Professor of Finance and Research and Director Academics, Dr Syed Ali Raza at Iqra University has been listed among the top 2% scientists under the discipline of 'Business and Management' evaluated based on his research work in 2019. 



THE YEAR'S BEST

BTS has had everything they wanted in 2020 by becoming a global phenomenon. Recognising their efforts, Time magazine named the South Korean group its 2020 'Entertainer of the Year'. The magazine cited BTS a massive global presence amid the pandemic including their massive fan base to support causes like Black Lives Matter. The group has become a staple of recent award shows performing their hit song 'Dynamite' which in November brought the band its first Grammy nomination.

Time also announced President Joe Biden and Kamala Harris combined as its Person of the Year while Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James as its Athlete of the Year. 



'NAAM KYA RAKHA'



Hajra Yamin and Fahad Sheikh have been entertaining viewers with their chemistry in the drama serial 'Jalan' and seeing them together in See Prime's latest short film 'Naam Kya Rakha' was a treat for the viewers. The cast includes Faizan Shaikh who plays the girl's husband. The story of the film touches hearts and proves to be a real tearjerker. 

NOMI ANSARI DESIGNS FOR AIRSIAL

Nomi Ansari has designed the cabin crew's uniforms for AirSial. The uniforms come with a princess-cut tailored shirt and tailored pants along with a top jacket. Accompanying scarfs come in different variations to differentiate the lower ground staff and the cabin crew and the air purser. The cabin crew has a different colour of piping and a different scarf. The colour of the uniform is the same for all - army olive green.

Nomi has also been affiliated with PIA uniforms. His designs for flight crew were chosen out of 16 designers at a fashion show organized by PIA. His design became PIA's official uniform in August 2016. 



Pakistanis on Forbes List

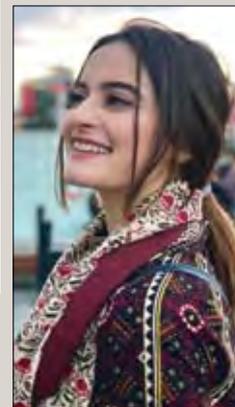
Mahira Khan, Atif Aslam, and Aiman Khan are three of the most popular names in Pakistan's entertainment industry that were included in this year's Forbes 100 list of Asia-Pacific's most influential celebrities on social media.

Forbes Asia recently released its 100 Digital Stars list which features artistes with huge social media influence. The list seemed to be in no particular order. Mentioned first among the three by the publication was Mahira Khan who the publication says is returning to the screen with the much-awaited action-drama 'The Legend of Maula Jatt', Pakistan's

most expensive film to date.

The publication praised Atif Aslam for his commendable efforts in curbing the spread of the coronavirus. They also applauded Aiman Khan for her work on television.

The list also features renowned names



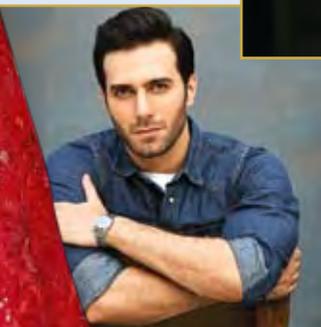
including Amritabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Anushka Sharma and Katherine Langford among others. 

Shoaib Mansoor's Next

Known for 'Khuda Kay Liye' and 'Bol', Shoaib Mansoor is working on 'ABG' with Maya Ali and Emmad Irfani. 'ABG' is perhaps an acronym for the project. Maya feels blessed to have gotten a chance to work with Mansoor.



Shoaib Mansoor



Emmad also feels equally excited. His film on the Khilafat Movement titled 'Gawah Rehna' is ready for release. Meanwhile, Maya has back to back successful films like 'Teefa in Trouble' and 'Parey Hut Love'. 

VIRGIN ATLANTIC IN ISLAMABAD

Virgin Atlantic's first flight to Pakistan landed in Islamabad. After British Airlines, Virgin Atlantic is the second-largest airline in the UK to start flights to

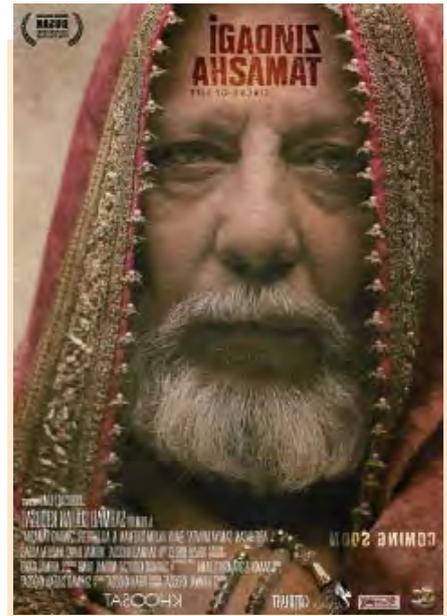


Pakistan. This will further enhance the scope of relations between Pakistan and the UK and will boost trade.

Special Assistant to Prime Minister Imran Khan for Overseas Pakistanis Zulfikar Bukhari and the British High Commissioner Christian Turner welcomed the Virgin flight. 

Authentic Smiles

Deepika Padukone has been featured at the Athens airport in an exhibition of 'The Authentic Smiles'. She has been crafted in a grey marble bust sculpture draped in a saree with a choker around her neck and a small bindi. The text on the bust reads: "Indian Bollywood Actress smiles at Athens International Airport. Grey Marble, 2020 A.D." The Authentic Smiles Campaign was held when the Athens International Airport resumed welcoming guests after a break due to Covid-19. 🇮🇳



'ZINDAGI TAMASHA' FOR OSCARS

Though Sarmad Khoosat's directorial 'Zindagi Tamasha' got embroiled in all sorts of disputes, it is Pakistan's official submission for Oscar consideration in the International Feature Film Award category for the 93rd Academy Awards. The film has already won at the Busan International Film Festival. 🇮🇳

AIJAZ ASLAM'S NEW VENTURE

Aijaz Aslam recently introduced his skincare line in collaboration with 'Hemani'. The collection caters to both genders and includes styling and grooming products under two subcategories. The 'Sylver Range' and 'Advance Self Care and Grooming'. 🇮🇳



NEW VP CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Mohammed Ali Ibrahim has been appointed as Vice President Corporate Communications at Mobilink Microfinance Bank Limited (MMBL).



Prior to joining MMBL, Ali was serving as the Stream Head Digital Communications at Jazz where he contributed to the transformation of corporate communications to a business-critical function. 🇮🇳

PLAGUE OF LONELINESS

The time and energy spent on social media may be happening at the expense of more rooted, genuinely supportive and truly close relationships.



By Gulnaz Nawaz

So, here we are. A University of Pennsylvania study just released concludes what we've all known for years: Social media has always had a dark side but it just got darker.

Today, we are more associated than we have ever been previously. From the second we wake up, until the time we put our heads down to sleep, we are plugged into the world around us and the people we know and love. So for what reason do we feel more lonely than at any other time? As per some exploration, the appropriate response is social media.

Perhaps the best incongruity of the ascent of social media is that overuse of its platforms can cause us to feel more lonely and more disengaged than we may be. In case you're feeling alone, online media platforms like Facebook may appear to be a life vest on a sinking ship. However, it may be the exact opposite thing that you need. Coming to acknowledge that, notwithstanding, it takes unplugging and coming to comprehend what genuinely satisfies us.

Before such innovations, face to face communication was a normal thing and loneliness was a problem that was rarely talked about or experienced. Individuals approached their day without checking their telephone like clockwork. Now they check whether somebody preferred the status they posted or they feel desolate when no one among the people they knew responded. It has been found that now an ever-increasing number of individuals have sentiments of dejection and melancholy. More individuals currently utilize social media,

for example, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It has been found that Facebook can prompt an individual's inclination towards loneliness. It is likewise obvious that it relies on how you utilize the application - whether for your potential benefit or as a depressant.

Everybody is lonely at some time or the other. Not only are adults affected, but increasingly young people as well. Loneliness is described as a state of being without any company or in isolation from the community or society. It is considered to be a dark and miserable feeling, a risk factor for many mental disorders like depression, anxiety, adjustment disorder, chronic stress, insomnia, or even late-life dementia.

The causes of loneliness break the essential construct and disrupt social integration, leading to an increase in isolation. According to a spate of recent studies, loneliness is a plague of its own. Young people often feel quite isolated, alone and excluded. One reason why these young people may have feelings of increasing isolation may be their greater tendency to use social media.

A recent study has found an increasing correlation between social media usage and feelings of loneliness. Among seven out of 10 heavy social media users, 71%, reported feelings of loneliness, up from 53% a year ago. That compares to 51% of light social media users feeling lonely, up from 47% a year ago.

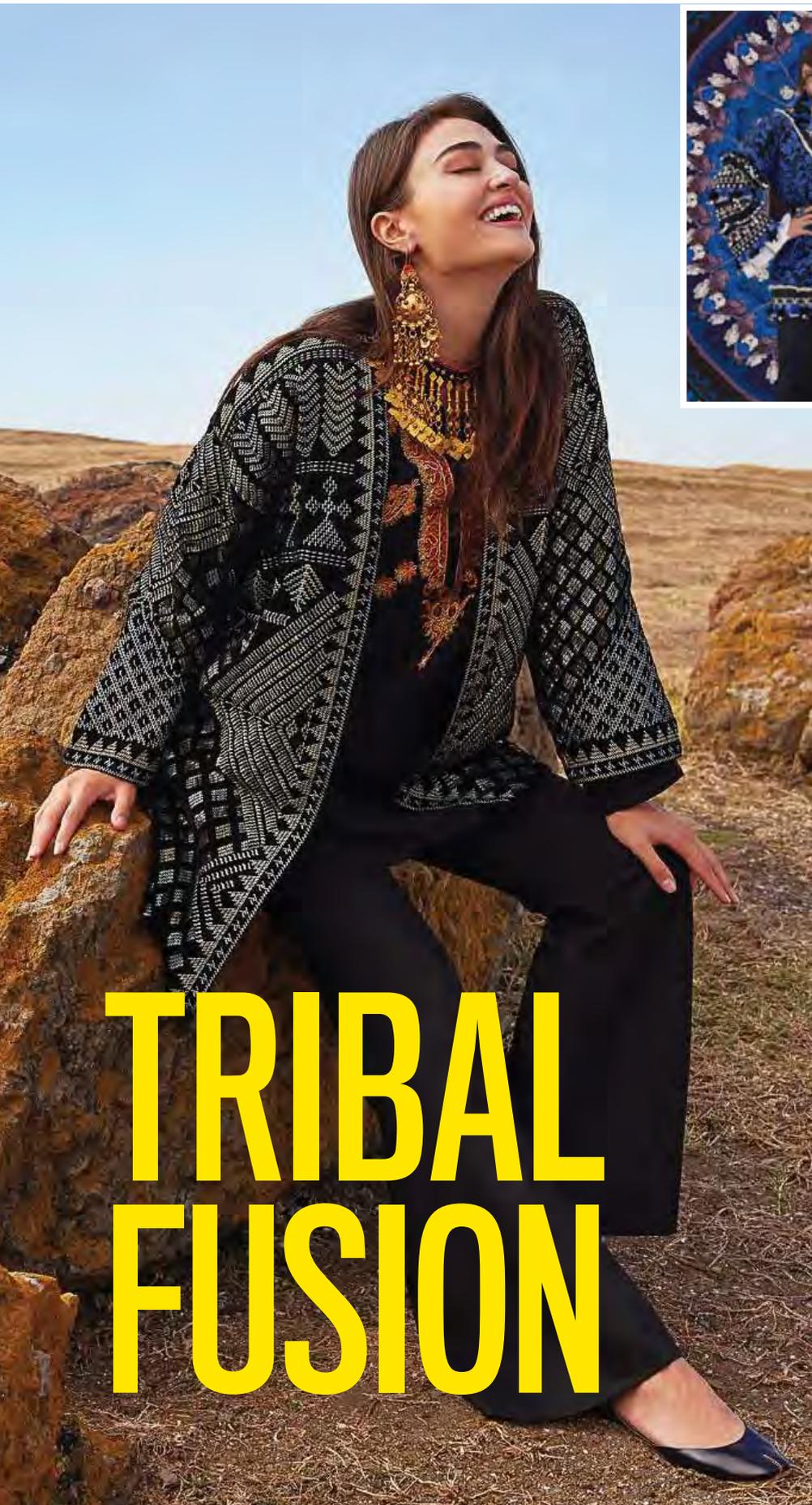
Some studies have shown that feelings of loneliness and social isolation can lead to shocking physiological changes that can cause one to fall sick or even die prematurely. In older adults, feelings of loneliness can

increase such a risk. early death by 14%.

Loneliness can be beaten While, in proper dosage, social media can be a useful asset for association, it can likewise be a harming weapon in the possession of one's wrecked ability of self-awareness. At the point when one is feeling alone or confined from things and individuals, the overuse of social media can exacerbate these feelings and leave one's mood worse than before. Maintaining a strategic distance from this anguish is tied in with getting to one's base and grasping the actual sentiments and needs.

In case there is a feeling of over-empowerment and disengagement by addictive social media use, a start can be made by turning off notifications and finding a few social media-free minutes every day. On the off chance that the allurements are still excessively solid, such applications can be erased from the cell phone or computer. Alternative methods must be figured out as to how to reconnect with such individuals by keeping the cell phone far out at suppers, discussions or social gatherings. One's desires for social media can be substituted with real-life experiences that leave a feeling of satisfaction and motivation so that more can be accomplished in life. At the point when a person is ready to genuinely distinguish what it is he or she is getting from their advanced fixation, they will have the option to sincerely recognize what parts of their life are missing.

As someone said, "Overcoming social media enslavement isn't simple, yet it is important to discover our bliss once more, each day in turn." ❌



Pakistan famous fashion brand Khaadi has recently released its fusion collection named 'My Symphony' with the beautiful and talented Turkish actress Esra Bilgic. Earlier, when both Esra and Khaadi also followed each other on Instagram, the audience was eager to know what was in store for them. It seemed that the Khaadi X Esra fusion was all they were waiting for as the pictures of the photoshoot went viral on the internet.

Bilgic has been extremely popular in Pakistan ever since the broadcast of Turkish series 'Dirilis Ertugrul' in Pakistan in which she played the leading role of Halime Hatun - the Seljuk warrior princess. Khaadi is Esra's third collaboration with a Pakistani brand after being the brand ambassador of Q-Mobile and Pakistan's leading cellular network Jazz 4G. She has also done a photoshoot with OK magazine.

'My Symphony' is one of the most awaited special edition collection of versatile and vibrant designs that suit every occasion and celebrate the facets of one's personality with confidence. The assortment celebrates heritage with Esra as the face of it.

With sleek parted hair and bright gold jewellery, Esra shines bright in the Kashmiri embroidered kurta with a vibrant tribal-style crystal-embellished jacket. The turquoise dress with heritage design embossed in symmetry and hand-embroidered traditional jewellery



complement the traditional pattern. The collection included traditional Pashtun embroidery in vibrant colours with a fusion of modern cuts representing the tribal amalgamation.

Established by Founder and CEO Shamoon Sultan in 1998, Khaadi is a leading fashion retailer offering compelling home and clothing, shoes and acces-



sories, fragrances, skin and hair care solutions for women and children. What began as a single store start-up in Karachi is now easily Pakistan's most iconic fashion retail force. It also has its footprint in the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, Qatar and Bahrain.

Khaadi pioneers new traditions in fashion with an innovative approach inspired by global fusion; a contemporary and fashion-focused context. This ethos

manifests itself within all Khaadi's designs and products that are sought-after for their unique high street fashion and global ethnic inspiration.

'My Symphony' collection is available online as well as in stores. Go and grab your favourite outfit before it is sold out. ❏

Delectable *Dhokla*

The Gujarati community has preserved its brilliant heritage and traditions, all of which have deep-seated roots in their past.

By Sophiya Qadeer

We all have been taken in by the popular Gujarati culture at some point in our lives. Be it their music, art or their food, Gujarati culture has a pervasive influence across South Asia. Gujaratis are well-recognized for their ingenuity in business, their amiable disposition and decency in deportment. The Gujarati community is a socially thriving one, being not only financially strong, but culturally very well-heeled as well. The Gujarati people believe in fostering strong communal ties, which is why not only do they enthusiastically partake in collective, traditional rituals like wedding ceremonies, but also are at the forefront in generously carrying out charity works for the underprivileged in their community. The fairs and festivals of Gujarat showcase the true fervour, zeal and colours of its diverse culture. Thousands of people congregate in Gujarat to experience the rich cultural Gujarati heritage of Navratri, Mahotsav, Deepawali, Rathayatra and Kite festival.

In Gujarati dishes, the essential taste is a blend of sweet, spicy and sour. Each region has a distinctive zest tied to its local food. A typical Gujarati dinner includes bhakri-shak or khichdi-kadhi. The Gujaratis are distinguished predominantly for their sweet tongue, and hence every meal is followed by a sweet dish or sometimes even jaggery.

One of the most popular indigenous foods of Gujarat is dhokla. A tasty snack -- recognized as a staple dish and enjoyed all over the subcontinent, particularly in Maharashtra and the adjacent states. The dish is proudly served in Karachi as well. Prepared with rice and split chickpeas, which are soaked overnight, this soaked mixture is then ground and turned

into a paste that is later left to ferment for about four to five hours (or overnight). In order to make these dhoklas flavourful, chilli flakes, coriander and ginger are added to the fermented paste, as well as baking soda in order to make the dhoklas spongy, soft and fluffy. The more the baking soda, the more spongy and porous the dhokla will be. The cooking preparation includes this fermented paste to be kept in plates, often shut in a container that does not let the steam escape. After the dhoklas are completely ready, they are taken out and shallow fried in oil with roasted mustard or cumin seeds (tardka). The dhokla slices are garnished with fresh coriander and mint leaves, and then served with a variety of chutneys — typically tomato or the plain besan-coriander chutney.

There are a variety of dhokla recipes. It is the ratio of the chickpeas that basically decides the taste as well as the texture of the dhoklas. In addition to the traditional rava, khatta, khaman and mixed dal dhokla, there are some enticing dhokla recipes that not many in South Asia are aware of. Some of these include cheese dhokla, quinoa-barley dhokla, mango dhokla and sandwich dhokla. The basic preparation of the dhokla is very similar: soaked split chickpeas, ground into paste, and the paste fermented which is then shaped in plates and steamed.

The quinoa-barley is the healthiest of the dhokla recipes, which could be served with fruit chutney, preferably mixed-berry or mango chutney — satiating your sweet-and-sour afternoon cravings.

For the “Mango Dhokla”, raw mango puree is added to the fermented mixture (fermented split chickpeas



and rice paste), which gives the dhokla a very unique, tangy flavour. It also enhances the taste's appeal to your palate.

The “Cheese dhokla” is a delightful recipe for cheese-lovers, as it is just perfect for a tea-time snack. In this recipe, the dhokla is layered. The cheese -- which could be cheddar, mozzarella, a combination of both or even cottage — would be usually sprinkled between the two spongy layers of dhokla, where it will melt, making the dhokla mouthwateringly luscious.

The “Sandwich dhokla” needs 7 to 8 hours for preparation and just around 15 minutes for cooking. This recipe includes layering again. The layers are simply a combination of KhamanDhokla and RavaDhokla. It is your choice as to which layer comes first and which last. This type of dhokla is extremely popular in Gujarat, and is the most in-demand dish at weddings and other collective gatherings.

The Gujarati community has preserved its brilliant heritage and traditions, all of which have deep-seated roots in their past. The assimilation of the diverse ethnic rituals in Gujarat has resulted in a well-balanced community that displays significant qualities like friendliness, unity and has given birth to mesmerizing recipes like the dhokla. ❏

PIECES OF A WOMAN

A Journey of a Lifetime

By Monica Castillo

Kornél Mundruczó's 'Pieces of a Woman' actually begins with a man. Sean (Shia LaBeouf) is working on building a bridge in Boston, but soon leaves the job site to be at home with his partner, Martha (Vanessa Kirby). Their first baby is due any minute but when the time comes, things don't go according to plan. Still the parents are ecstatic over their new bundle of joy. But the happy moment is short lived as something goes terribly wrong and everyone holds their breath as paramedics rush in.

Kata Wéber, who wrote the film, based its central tragedy on the experience of losing her child with Mundruczó, her creative partner for 'White God' and 'Jupiter's Moon'. For their third collaboration, the writer-director team dug deep, unearthing the pain caused by awkward stares and the isolation that comes with losing a baby. 'Pieces of a Woman' is at its strongest when exploring those cavernous silences and such unimaginable grief. It's less interesting when the perspective shifts back to Sean's side of the story. The script has him go down a checklist of self-destructive bad behaviour which adds little to the heart of the story. Looming in the background of this deeply personal tale is a sensationalized trial over the midwife's negligence, which like Sean's antics, distract from the already powerful drama.

On the other hand, Kirby has to navigate her character through every parent's waking nightmare, which she does impressively. As Martha, Kirby shifts from catatonic to chaotic, becoming just as destructive as her partner without

feeling like a cliché. She's angry at Sean, her co-workers, her family especially her mom Elizabeth (Ellen Burstyn), who talks about her loss as if it were a personal failure and chides Martha for not actively pressing charges against the midwife. It's a tension that leads to the best scene of the film, a showdown between mother and daughter, both grieving and each with entirely different ideas on how to move forward. It's a moment so electric, it makes the martial drama feel like window dressing.

LaBeouf is doing his damndest Stanley Kowalski. His character is a brutish, working class raw nerve who's reached his limit on being undermined by his partner and her family's money. He's stubborn, commandeering and resentful in a way that makes you wonder how a soft-spoken woman came to fall in love with him in the first place.

In some instances, it might be easy to ignore allegations of abusive behaviour but it's simply not possible in 'Piece of a Woman', where LaBeouf's character acts aggressively towards Kirby's. FKA Twigs' lawsuit against LaBeouf alleged the actor had sexually assaulted her, knowingly passed on an STD and caused great emotional distress. Sean's anger at her and her family then leads to him lobbing a yoga ball at her face. She defiantly deflates the yoga ball, something she likely used to bring herself some sense of calm and wellness, with a cigarette. She is also short tempered but she doesn't lash out with violence like he does. Instead, she takes away the weapon he used to hit her with as she won't let him hurt her again.

Thankfully, it's Kirby's perfor-



mance that makes the film memorable. Despite a cumbersome bridge building analogy and a story set in Boston that does not look like Boston, Martha's emotional journey is more impressive than the story gives it credit. There could have been more scenes between Martha and Elizabeth or her family including her sister Iliza Shlesinger, brother-in-law Benny Safdie and a lawyer cousin Sarah Snook.

Through Martha and Elizabeth's sometimes contentious relationship, there's even a brief exploration of generational trauma and how that affects a person's ability to grieve or how they think grief is supposed to be handled. The latter half of the film is just as tense, leaving the audience waiting with bated breath. Although the outcome of the trial won't change what happened, this time, Martha can do more than watch helplessly. She can take her first steps away from the expectations of her mother, partner and society and grieve in her own way. ✘

FILM

THE MIDNIGHT SKY

End of the World

By Nick De Semlyen

The year is 2049, and the Earth is toast. Three weeks after a devastating global event that has left the planet uninhabitable, reclusive scientist Augustine Lofthouse (George Clooney) races to stop a team of astronauts from returning, thereby accidentally dooming the future of the species.

The film opens with a man with a hefty grey beard, toiling in the Arctic to help humanity. So far, so ‘The Christmas Chronicles 2’. But unlike that other Netflix offering of this season, ‘The Midnight Sky’ is a sombre yet urgent affair. George Clooney’s seventh film as director, it adapts an elegiac 2016 novel by Lily Brooks-Dalton into a double-stranded sci-fi helix about planet Earth’s last, desperate days. It cuts between a scientist down here trying to get a message into the sky and the inhabitants of the spacecraft he’s attempting to reach. And it’s by far Clooney’s most ambitious work behind the camera to date, not least as he had to toggle technical duties with maintaining that massive beard.

Half of the film sees him channeling both *Iñárritu* and *DiCaprio*, as he drops himself into a kind of polar spin on ‘he *Revenant*’ (scripted by the writer of the actual *Revenant*, Mark L. Smith). Clooney’s sickly scientist Augustine Lofthouse (a character name that sounds like

he should be getting upset about a gazebo in a P.G. Wodehouse novel) must trek through a blizzard, fend off wolves and face freezing waters, all the while looking after a mysterious young girl who has come into his orbit. Presumably there’s a deleted scene in which he wrestles a walrus. As director, Clooney whips up a convincingly bleak tundra. And Lofthouse is a glum but compelling character, stooped over with regrets but trudging forward with the determination of a man who knows



he has one chance to finally make things right. A series of touching flashbacks fill in his back story, with Ethan Peck (*Gregory’s* grandson) playing the younger Augustine and he and Clooney sharing the voice through some effective audio trickery.

The other half of the film is closer to *Gravity*, tracking a band of bewildered astronauts aboard a vessel called *Aether* as they inch closer to Earth, wondering why they’re getting radio silence from home. Again, it’s technically impressive, and there are lovely moments, from a Neil Dia-



mond space-walk sing-along to the sight of Kyle Chandler boxing a virtual-reality monkey. But while they’re played by a strong bunch of actors (also including Felicity Jones and David Oyelowo), the characters remain slightly thin, representations of the best qualities of humankind rather than living, breathing people. And a third-act, deep-space action sequence feels more like a Netflix note (“Now, we don’t want to go full *Solaris*, George”) than a necessary story beat.

‘The Midnight Sky’ is a big swing from Clooney. Just as ‘*Suburbicon*’ took on racism and ‘*The Ides Of March*’ had things to say about the American political process, this is a strong note of caution as to what the near future could look like if the environment is allowed to fester. Its disparate threads may not all quite tie together and a big reveal near the end won’t be easily swallowed by everyone but it’s still a moving tale, by turns muscular and poetic. **S**

FILM



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