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Read Pakistan: A Book in Every Hand “An Enlightened Nation—A Vision of Farrukh Shehzad Dall”



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By Haroon Rashid Qureshi

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Introduction

Knowledge has been the eternal thirst of the human soul since time immemorial. To ignite that thirst, Allah's very first revelation to humankind commanded: Iqra "Read." That primal injunction underscored the vital importance of learning. They say a book is man's best friend: a beacon of wisdom illuminating darkness, awakening consciousness, and expanding the horizons of thought. Yet today, in our fast-paced social-media age, we see this noble tradition of reading waning. Our youth, engrossed in swiping screens, drift ever farther from the scent of pages, the whisper of turning leaves, and the enduring light of knowledge.

Into this void steps Read Pakistan, a movement like a fresh breeze, dedicated to reviving a dying habit. Read Pakistan not only highlights the importance of reading but also aspires to reconnect the nation with its books. At its helm is Mr. Farukh Shehzad Dall, Chairman of Read Pakistan. He recently visited Qatar on a private trip, where Mrs. Shahida Khan, President of the Read Pakistan Qatar Chapter, hosted a grand reception in his honor. Distinguished figures from the Pakistani community in Qatar—Arshad Hashmi, Javed Iqbal, Qaiser Anwar, Liaqat Malik, and Rashid Atiq

attended. What began as a formal gathering bloomed into a rich exchange of ideas and insights. On that occasion, I, accompanied by senior local journalist Liaqat Malik, seized the rare opportunity to discuss the founding, objectives, and plans of Read Pakistan with Mr. Dall. Here is our full conversation, presented for our readers:

Interview

Haroon: How was Read Pakistan founded, and what is its core purpose?

Farukh: (In a confident tone) “Read Pakistan began in 2011 and was formally registered as an NGO in 2014. Our fundamental goal is to connect every citizen with books and build a ‘knowledge society’ where learning is valued as the highest form of wealth. We take our guiding principle from the Quran, Surah Az-Zumar, verse 9: ‘Say, are those who know equal to those who do not know?’ We firmly believe that knowledge is the first rung on the ladder of human progress, and reading is the only means to acquire it. The more a society embraces reading and literacy, the more swiftly it advances. From day one, Alhamdulillah, our efforts have yielded positive results that surpassed our expectations.”

Haroon: What inspired the concept of Read Pakistan?

Farukh: (Smiling) “The idea sprang from my own passion for books and my dream of sparking an intellectual revolution in society. I am a lifelong reader, and much of my strategic thinking has

been shaped by the books I've devoured. I deeply felt that Pakistan's absence from the ranks of developed nations stemmed largely from an intellectual deficit especially among our youth. This gap costs us dearly every single day. Until we reclaim reading as a collective habit, neither our society nor our country can truly succeed. Thus, to join the league of developed nations, we must cultivate a reading culture at the grassroots. Reading doesn't merely convey information; it hones critical thinking, encourages questioning, and fosters the discovery of new pathways—qualities that constitute a nation's real treasure."

Haroon: What programs has your organization launched in Pakistan?

Farukh: "Our work centers on fostering the reading habit through two main initiatives. First is our 'Awareness' program: seminars, social-media campaigns, writing workshops, public speeches, and community engagement. Second, we run practical projects designed to instill reading among children and parents. We've adapted nine proven 'Reading Models' from around the world—each so effective that after two to three years, participating children develop an organic love for books. We're rolling out a system in schools where students narrate a story daily. We plan to present this model to the Qatari government as well, demonstrating how to cultivate bookish passion and establish "reading schools" without new funding or infrastructure. For example, in Japan, 10,000 schools practice a five-minute morning assembly reading session, which has transformed the

nation's literary culture. The UK practices a similar program, where one hour each week, everyone—from the janitor to the principal—reads in solidarity."

Haroon: What types of books should people read—science and technology, or spiritual literature?

Farukh: "We value every form of book, be it hardcopy or e-book. The essential factor is the habit of reading itself. Scientific volumes, fiction, philosophy, or spirituality—all are beneficial. However, we recommend favoring hardcopies where possible to savor the book's tactile essence. Beyond that, dedicate at least ten minutes daily to reading a book related to your career. Ten minutes each day can make you as proficient as a PhD graduate in three years—that's backed by research from the United States, which shows daily professional reading sharpens your intellect and communication skills."

Haroon: How many libraries has Read Pakistan established so far?

Farukh: "To date, we've set up 52 libraries—4 public libraries and 48 within educational institutions or underserved areas. Our public libraries serve Gilgit-Baltistan, FATA, and Kashmir. The educational libraries operate in Sindh, the slums of Islamabad, and government schools. Consider this: since 1980, China has built over 600,000 libraries; the United States supports around 123,000 public libraries, even in small towns; modern European nations place a library every 1.5 kilometers to guarantee book access. Western European and African countries similarly

champion reading through school partnerships, campaigns, and conferences.”

Haroon: What role do women play in Read Pakistan—or any platform—and how crucial is their involvement?

Farukh: “Women are the backbone of any movement. They are the ambassadors of knowledge and architects of social change. When a woman reads, she enlightens not just herself but an entire family, a generation, a way of thinking. In Read Pakistan, our women leaders have been indispensable: Mrs. Shahida Khan, President of the Qatar Chapter; Ms. Syeda Namira Mohsin, President of the Gulf Chapter; and Ms. Syeda Fatima Hassan Gilani, CEO of the Pakistan Chapter. Their participation brings the empathy, continuity, and intellectual depth that slogans alone cannot provide.”

Haroon: How can we cultivate reading habits among children?

Farukh: “Two primary methods: First, parental involvement read to children for five minutes before bedtime. Second, introduce a ‘Book Time’ program in schools. We’ve developed nine systems that help parents nurture a bookish bond with their children.”

Haroon: How can adults adopt the habit of reading later in life?

Farukh: “Forming new habits in adulthood is challenging, as the mind’s adaptability wanes with age. Psychologists propose methods—most notably a 21-day technique to embed reading into the

routine. Write a clear, positive command like ‘I will read daily’ in the language you’re most comfortable with, then repeat it morning, afternoon, and evening. Consistent repetition trains your subconscious until reading becomes second nature.”

Haroon: Why don’t educational institutions in Pakistan foster a reading culture?

Farukh: “Frankly, our schools and colleges are disconnected from book culture and lack related activities. We’re collaborating with national and international bodies such as the Islamic University of Africa and the University of Gambia to host monthly book-discussion sessions. Each year we release a curated reading list; if hardcopies aren’t available, we distribute e-books via WhatsApp. We organize conferences inviting top teachers to speak on the importance of reading, and hold an annual ‘Fifty Books of the Year’ competition on human development and leadership, judged by retired professors and expert scholars. Our goal is to shift education from rote learning to a genuine appreciation of literature and scholarly discourse.”

Haroon: Does Read Pakistan encourage e-books or hardcopies?

Farukh: “The advantage of e-books is immense; some 300 million titles are freely accessible as open-source. Google is digitizing about two billion books, and that number grows daily. Yet we also champion hardcopies for their scientific and psychological benefits; the tactile experience forges a deeper connection. For instance, people who hold and read the Quran often memorize it

faster and retain it longer than those who read digitally.”

Haroon: What international projects are you undertaking to bolster Read Pakistan’s global presence?

Farukh: “We have two major global initiatives: first, connecting with foreign scholars, authors, librarians, and educators we’re proud to have sixty international scholars on our roster, including figures from the West, Africa, and Arab nations, such as Dr. Bilal Philips. Second, we’re expanding our network worldwide to spread our message and recruit more ambassadors.”

Haroon: What is Read Pakistan’s vision for stemming brain drain from Pakistan?

Farukh: “To combat brain drain, we must cultivate a love for books and lifelong reading habits. As an avid reader, I know reading continually supplies fresh ideas. If we neglect books, we risk a national weakness that costs us dearly. Until we return to a knowledge-centered culture, real progress will elude us.”

This inspiring dialogue with Farukh Shehzad Dall underscores that promoting education and rekindling our bond with books is the bedrock of societal advancement. Through Read Pakistan’s multifaceted programs raising awareness, establishing libraries, engaging communities, and forging global partnerships Mr. Dall and his team are lighting the way toward a knowledge-driven future. By nurturing the habit of reading across all ages and demographics, Read Pakistan is

charting a course for intellectual revival and sustainable progress. In the words of its chairman, “Until we read, learn, and question, our journey toward greatness remains incomplete.”