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Vol. 24

Issue 37

Friday 12 Dec to 18 Dec 2025

\$1

www.thesouthasianinsider.com



Why NATO is Now Predicting a Coming World War



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Australia is trying to enforce the first teen Social media ban

Governments worldwide are watching

New under-16 restrictions
now in effect.



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London councillor to pay hefty fine for hiring Indian student as nanny illegally

The court heard that Mir referred to the student by the nickname "Ria" and claimed she was only a "social visitor" who came to the house to "play video games, to watch TV and to chill" as well as help with occasional chores.

(Our Staff Reporter) A Labour Party politician from west London has been ordered to pay a £40,000 fine after losing her appeal in a case involving the illegal hiring of an Indian student as a nanny. The ruling was delivered by the City of London County Court, which found that Councillor Hina Mir, a qualified solicitor and former deputy mayor of Hounslow, employed 22-year-old Himanshi Gongley despite the student having no legal right to work in the UK. According to court details reported by The Daily Telegraph, Mir paid the student £1,200 a month in cash. The court was told that the young woman was effectively on call "24 hours a day for six days a week" to care for Mir's two children. Judge Stephen Hellman



acknowledged Mir's standing, noting, "Councillor Mir is a person of exemplary character. She is a solicitor, a councillor and is involved in the community." However, he added that "the inconsistencies in the appellant's (Mir) evidence mean I cannot place much reliance on her evidence as I normally would."

STUDENT SAID SHE WAS

DISTRESSED AND SOUGHT HELP

The UK Home Office told the court that the student appeared visibly upset when she "flagged down a police car for help" in August last year. Officials later determined that her visa had expired in March 2023, leaving her in the country illegally. She told authorities that she had been

"physically abused" and felt "suicidal". The court heard that Mir referred to the student by the nickname "Ria" and claimed she was only a "social visitor" who came to the house to "play video games, to watch TV and to chill" as well as help with occasional chores. The Home Office, however, argued that the student's account suggested a much more demanding role that resembled full-time domestic labour. Mir's representative, Arif Rehman, dismissed the student's account, telling the court: "This story was fabricated with an intention to claim immigration advantage and to present herself as a victim of modern-day slavery. Nothing was done with the allegations with the evidence of abuse because there was no evidence. This is not

someone who can be trusted by the court." Judge Hellman disagreed with the defence's view, stating that he found it "unlikely" the student would have "concocted the quite detailed evidence she gave at short notice after she had been arrested by the police". Mir had appealed an immigration ruling earlier this year, but the court confirmed that she must now pay the £40,000 fine, along with £3,620 in court costs. The case has triggered political fallout in Hounslow, where members of the Opposition have demanded that Mir step down from her position as councillor. "This is a serious breach of the law, and residents rightly deserve a lot better," Conservative councillor Jack Emsley told the newspaper.

New Zealand women are promiscuous: Shocker from Indian-origin driver who raped teen



(Our Staff Reporter) A 37-year-old Indian-origin driver was sentenced to seven years and two months in jail for raping a teenage passenger in New Zealand in 2023. The judge questioned Satwinder Singh's upbringing for the distorted view he held of New Zealand women, whom he called "promiscuous". Satwinder Singh was previously found guilty on all four charges: three of indecent assault and one of rape. He was sentenced last week for the crime in February 2023. A 37-year-old Indian-origin driver was sentenced to seven years and two months in jail for raping a teenage passenger in New Zealand in 2023. The judge questioned Satwinder Singh's upbringing for the distorted view he held of New Zealand women, whom

he called "promiscuous". atwinder Singh was previously found guilty on all four charges: three of indecent assault and one of rape. He was sentenced last week for the crime in February 2023. The NZ Herald reported that the teenager had booked a late-night ride from Speight's Ale House to a location in Hamilton East. In what should have been a trip that took a matter of minutes, Singh instead turned off his GPS as he neared the destination and drove her to Peachgrove Road, according to the report. Judge Clark noted that the culprit's sexual interest in the survivor was "piqued" after he asked her if she was wearing underwear when her dress rode up during the ride.

INDIAN-ORIGIN DRIVER SWITCHED OFF GPS AND

RAPED TEENAGE PASSENGER: REPORT

Satwinder Singh then began touching and rubbing her thigh, despite the survivor telling him, "No, can you not?", and later, "Get off me." However, he kept making unwanted contact. He then made a "deliberate decision" to switch off the GPS, creating the false impression

that the trip had ended. However, cameras later captured his vehicle heading toward Peachgrove Rd. It was then that he locked the car doors, reached over and put the woman's seat in the recline position, before kissing her and touching her chest, NZ Herald reported. Later, the Uber driver raped her, which the survivor described as

"very rough and very hurtful." He then dropped her off at her friend's house in a "distressed state." She immediately called police and reported her ordeal. Judge Clark rejected Singh's defence submissions at trial that the sexual activity was either consensual, did not happen at all, or that he had rejected her advances.

Know your rights, Zohran Mamdani tells New Yorkers how to resist immigration raids

(Our Staff Reporter) New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani has told immigrant residents that they have the legal right not to speak to or comply with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, releasing a video on Sunday days after an ICE raid in Manhattan. In the video, Mamdani said his administration will work to protect the city's large immigrant population. "We can all stand up to ICE if you know your rights," he said, stressing that people in the United States can legally refuse to answer questions from immigration agents. He added that individuals may film ICE officers as long as they do not interfere, and may decline requests to enter private areas. Mamdani said ICE officers cannot enter a home, school or private workplace without a judicial warrant signed by a judge. "ICE is legally allowed to lie to you, but you have the right to remain silent. If you're being detained, you may always ask, 'Am I free to go?' repeatedly until

they answer you," he said. Mamdani will be sworn in as mayor on 1 January. The remarks followed a tense scene on Canal Street in Chinatown last week, where demonstrators gathered as ICE officers attempted to detain several people. A similar operation in the same neighbourhood last October also drew protests from local residents and immigrant rights groups. Mamdani said such incidents reinforced the need for clear information on legal protections. "New York will always welcome immigrants, and I will fight each and every day to protect, support, and celebrate our immigrant brothers and sisters," he said in the video.

NO CHANGE IN POLICY AFTER MAMDANI-TRUMP DISCUSSION

The video also came more than two weeks after Mamdani's unexpected cordial Oval Office meeting with President Donald Trump.

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN TASK FORCE CHAIR GRACE LEE AND ASSEMBLYMEMBER NILY ROZIC PRESENT \$589,061 TO SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITY IN QUEENS



(By our staff reporter) New York — Recently, the New York State Assembly Asian Pacific American (APA) Task Force Chair Assemblymember Grace Lee and Assemblymember Nily Rozic announced \$589,061 in state funding for the South Asian Council for Social Services (SACSS), a leading South Asian American community organization in

Queens. This award is a part of a historic \$30 million investment in Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) New Yorkers in the FY 2025-26 State Budget, secured for the third consecutive year by the APA Task Force. "The APA Task Force has worked tirelessly to ensure that the state budget prioritizes Asian American communities that

have historically been overlooked. I am proud to have led the effort to secure this year's historic \$30 million investment for Asian American organizations, which includes this crucial grant for SACSS," said Assemblymember Grace Lee, Chair of the APA Task Force.

"This funding is vital and will directly support SACSS's trusted work as a leading institution empowering South Asian and immigrant New Yorkers in Queens." "SACSS has been a lifeline for countless families in Queens, especially those navigating food insecurity, language barriers, and limited access to essential services," said Assemblywoman Nily Rozic. "This investment ensures they can continue meeting the needs of South Asian and

immigrant communities with dignity and care. I'm proud to support SACSS's integral mission and the communities they uplift every day." The South Asian Council for Social Services (SACSS) is a community-based nonprofit that serves more than 300,000 underserved New Yorkers each year. Its mission is to empower South Asians and other immigrant communities. Founded in 2000 to address the significant barriers New York City's rapidly growing South Asian population faced in accessing social services, SACSS has since become a trusted institution for more than one million New Yorkers. The organization opened the city's first South Asian food pantry in 2016 and, in 2021, launched a new community center in the heart of Flushing, Queens.

"SACSS is truly grateful to the New York Assembly APA Task Force and Assembly Member Grace Lee for continuing to advocate for Asian communities and for organizations such as ours that provide critical services such as healthcare access, food security, senior services, mental health programs, connection to benefits and workforce development initiatives," said Sudha Acharya, Executive Director of SACSS.

"Special thanks to Assembly Member Nily Rozic for her long standing support and unwavering commitment to SACSS and for always being there for us. This grant will strengthen SACSS' programs and ensure a healthier and stronger future for the communities we serve."

'Rot in hell, you b***d': Indian-origin man convicted for Australia woman's murder

Toyah Cordingley's 2018 murder led to protests against violence towards women across Far North Queensland and protestors demanded justice, and when the Supreme Court jury was reading its verdict, Cordingley's father Troy was seen trying to control his emotions, saying "Rot in hell, you bastard", while Singh sat still in the dock.

(By our staff reporter) A Supreme Court jury in Australia on Monday unanimously found Rajwinder Singh guilty of murdering Cairns woman Toyah Cordingley in 2018 in a four-week retrial after his first trial ended in a hung jury eight months earlier. The jury in Cairns held that 41-year-old Singh, who fled to India after murdering 24-year-old animal shelter volunteer, Cordingley, and was on the run for over four years before his arrest in 2022, fatally stabbed her and cut her throat at Wangetti Beach before fleeing the following



m o r n i n g , theaustraliatoday.com reported. Cordingley's 2018 murder led to protests against violence towards women across Far North Queensland and protestors demanded justice, and when the Supreme Court jury was reading its verdict, Cordingley's father Troy was seen trying to control his emotions, saying "Rot in hell, you bastard", while Singh sat

still in the dock. The jury will hear arguments on Singh's sentence on Tuesday and decide the sentence. As per the report, Cordingley had gone to the beach to walk her dog Indie on 21 October 2018 and didn't return home. Her anxious father, Troy, searched for her daughter through the night and found her body the next morning. He also found the alive dog, tied tightly to a tree nearby. Before fleeing,

Singh told his wife that he was going to India as his grandfather was critical and would be back to Australia in the next few days. However, he didn't contact his wife for the next four years, during which his family lost the home they were living in. Singh was identified by the police as a suspect in the case within three weeks of the murder after police matched the movements of his blue Alfa Romeo to the

path of Cordingley's phone. The Queensland police in Australia announced a \$1 million reward for information on Singh's whereabouts and within a month, he was arrested by the Delhi Police at a Sikh gurdwara in New Delhi in November 2022. Extradition process later commenced in a court in New Delhi, where he didn't contest extradition. He was extradited to Australia in early 2023. Singh's

initial trial, which was scheduled for 2024, was delayed on account of concerns raised by defence lawyers about a large volume of late-disclosed material and later in February – March, 2025, a subsequent trial ended without a verdict. The matter then reached the Supreme Court jury in Cairns, which heard evidence in the case from more than 80 witnesses over three weeks.

Gratitude For Your Support And The Work Ahead

(By Legislator-Elect
Viviana L. Russell)

On Tuesday, Nov. 4, the people of Legislative District 2 made their voices heard by electing me to represent them in the Nassau County Legislature. I am deeply inspired by your confidence and pledge to earn the trust of every resident I serve in the years ahead. his election is more than a win - it is history in motion. In 2009, I became the first African American woman of Latino descent elected to the North Hempstead Town Board. Today, I carry that legacy forward to the Nassau County Legislature with deep gratitude and humility.

This achievement belongs not just to me, but to every voter, every volunteer, and every community member who believed that representation, equity, and access matter.

On Jan. 1, I will have the privilege of taking office in a newly apportioned Legislative District 2, which now includes the entirety of Westbury and New Cassel, along with portions of Carle Place, Hempstead, Hicksville, Jericho, and Uniondale. This configuration, adopted through 2032 as part of a legal settlement addressing prior



gerrymandering concerns, ensures District 2 remains one of Nassau County's six majority-minority districts, where at least half of residents reflect underrepresented voting communities. District 2 is home to some of our region's most significant educational, cultural, and economic institutions, including the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum HUB, Hofstra University, Nassau Community College, Planned Parenthood, and Roosevelt Field Mall. As a center of growth and activity, our district faces important challenges, including

housing accessibility, downtown revitalization, infrastructure improvements, economic development, PILOT agreements, and protecting a woman's right to choose. These challenges are real. But so is our readiness. With more than two decades of grassroots advocacy and hands-on government experience, I am committed to delivering thoughtful, community-centered solutions that uplift, strengthen, and invest in the people and places that define our district. My journey in public service began as a PTA parent. a role

that sparked a deeper calling to civic leadership. Over the years, I became a civic advocate, a senior community leader, and later, district liaison for the 13th and Assembly District. These roles grounded my leadership in compassion, accountability, and service to everyday families. From 2010 through 2021, I served on the North Hempstead Town Board, representing a diverse community of Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and neighbors from all backgrounds and walks of life. I earned my community's trust by listening deeply, acting decisively, and always prioritizing the needs of the people. During my tenure, I helped spearhead \$80 million in downtown revitalization efforts, supported the development of over 200 units of affordable, senior, and workforce housing, and championed transformational projects including the award-winning \$26 million Yes We Can Community Center, designed to build access, opportunity, and pride in our local neighborhoods. As we begin this next chapter in county government, I am committed to continuing the work of S.O.W.ing into our community by: Strengthening

the connection between residents and responsive government; Overcoming challenges with unity, collaboration, and transparency; and Welcoming new ideas that reflect justice, equity, and shared progress. Together, we will advocate for equitable investment, strengthen public safety with community trust, expand diverse and affordable housing options, and ensure our district receives the resources and attention it deserves. As the holiday season reminds us of gratitude, community, and hope, I want to thank you for believing, for voting, and for standing with me. I cannot and will not take your support for granted. Starting on Jan. 1, please do not hesitate to contact my office at 516-571-6202 or vrussell@nassaucountyny.gov to share your ideas, your concerns, and your vision for our district.

Together, we will shape a future rooted in equity, dignity, progress, and possibility. Viviana Russell was elected this November to serve the communities of District 2 in the Nassau County Legislature starting on Jan. 1, 2026. She resides in Westbury.

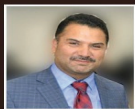
The Beginning

MAD MEN

OF

NU WAY ADVERTISING

About the Author



Sharanjit Thind Singh, for more than 29 years has spent his career immersed in the world of advertising, marketing, and media. His professional journey includes working with well known Media, FMCG and Telecom Companies in India and the US.

Hailing from a small postal stamp size city in Punjab, Thind's academic background reflects his drive for excellence. After completing a Bachelor of Commerce degree, he pursued an MBA. He further strengthened his expertise with a Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism and Mass Communication. This combination of business knowledge and media insight became the foundation of his career.

He founded and, is CEO of Nu Way Advertising in Manhattan now known as Nu Way Media Group Inc. He has served as a Commissioner of the Nassau County Human Rights Commission in New York.



The Beginning

MAD MEN OF NU WAY ADVERTISING

Sharanjit Thind Singh

The Beginning

A True Story of the iconic rise of an
Indian American Advertising Agency in
Manhattan, New York in early 2000

Sharanjit Thind Singh



MAD MEN

OF

NU WAY ADVERTISING

"Women By The Age Of 25...": Case Against Spiritual Leader For Crass Remarks

(News Agency) Spiritual leader Aniruddhacharya has been accused of making derogatory remarks about women. The complaint, filed by Meera Rathore -- the Agra District President of the All India Hindu Mahasabha -- was accepted by the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) court, which has now registered the matter. The court will record Rathore's statement on January 1. The controversy traces back to a video that went viral in October, in which Aniruddhacharya commented on young women and marriage. The remark triggered widespread criticism online, with many social media users and women's groups accusing him of making statements that demean women and perpetuate stereotypes. Rathore, who leads the Agra unit of the Hindu Mahasabha, publicly denounced the comments, saying they were unbecoming of a religious figure. "Such statements do not befit our saints," she said. She initially filed a complaint at the Vrindavan police station, but when no FIR was registered, she escalated the matter to the court. Rathore revealed that she had taken a personal vow as part of her protest. "Ever since I filed the petition, my hair has remained loose," she said. "I had decided that I would not tie my braid until a case was filed. Now that the court has accepted our petition, perhaps the time has come to tie it again."

LATEST

88 Minutes In PMO: Inside Story Of Rahul Gandhi's Meeting Wi Shashi Tharoor Declines 'Veer Savarkar Award' With A Jibe At Pakistan Pushes For A South Asian Bloc Without India. Why It Did JD Vance, Usha Fight At Restaurant? What US Veep Said On Polyester Shawls Sold As Silk In Rs 54 Crore Scam In Tirupat "We Are Also Victims": Details Of Luthra Brothers' Pre-Arres Opinion: There Is An Unexpected 'Mentor' Guiding Rahul Gandhi "Best Offers Ever": US Official On Trade Talks With India "Someone With A Lot Of Attitude": KKR Coach Abhishek Nayar O Hours Before Hearing, Key

The controversy traces back to a video that went viral in October, in which Aniruddhacharya commented on young women and marriage.



Gupta, confirmed that the police had not acted on the original complaint at Vrindavan Kotwali. The decision to approach the CJM court, he said, was taken after the police failed to register a case despite her objections. After the video attracted criticism, Aniruddhacharya issued a clarification, arguing that his words had been taken out of context. He said he had made comments about both men and women, and the intention was not to single out women. "A woman who has relationships with multiple men cannot be of good character, and a man who has relationships with multiple women is considered an adulterer," he said in his statement. "The matter was presented to the public in a distorted manner." He maintains that the viral clip omitted key parts of his speech and that the interpretation circulating online does not match what he intended to convey.

Luthra Brothers Booked Thailand Tickets While Their Nightclub Was On Fire

(News Agency) The probe into the nightclub inferno in Goa -- a fire that killed at least 25 people on the night of December 6 -- has uncovered new evidence indicating that the owners, brothers Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra, booked flight tickets to Thailand at the very moment emergency services were trying to control the blaze and rescue trapped patrons. Officials have confirmed that the Luthra brothers logged onto the MakeMyTrip (MMT) travel platform at 1:17 AM on December 7, while Goa Police and Fire Services teams were still engaged in rescue operations at the Arpora-based nightclub.

Hours later, immigration records show the two boarded IndiGo flight 6E 1073 to Phuket, departing Delhi at 5:30 AM. In Delhi, the Rohini Court on Wednesday heard the transit anticipatory bail plea filed by the brothers. The petition sought four weeks of protection from arrest, as well as interim relief, to allow them to return to Delhi from Thailand without facing immediate custody. Ajay Gupta, one of the four owners of the

Birch by Romeo Lane establishment, was produced before a Delhi magistrate by the Goa Police team stationed in the capital. Gupta had earlier been declared missing, prompting the issuance of a Look Out Circular (LOC) after police could not locate

Hari Singh, a former driver employed by the family. An NDTV team visited the address linked to the mobile number on Wednesday and found that Singh was not present. Reached by phone later, Singh confirmed he had worked as a driver for Saurabh Luthra

for two years, until he was dismissed when the COVID-19 lockdown was imposed in 2020. He said he was never recalled after the lockdown ended. Singh further stated that he has had no contact with the Luthras for five years and was unaware that any SIM card existed in his name. Investigators have also discovered discrepancies regarding vehicles owned by the family. According to sources, the Luthra brothers owned three cars until 2020. Before their escape, they reportedly possessed more than four luxury vehicles. All these vehicles are now missing. Police are examining whether the cars were removed deliberately prior to their departure for Thailand. The family's large, recently constructed house in Goa -- built at a cost running into crores two years ago -- has been deserted since the nightclub fire. Only a dog was found inside the premises.



him at his residence. He was detained in Delhi and, after a medical examination, will be taken to Goa to face arrest and questioning. Another co-owner, Surinder Kumar Khosla, a British national, is also under an LOC, according to police. Fresh revelations have surfaced concerning the mobile phone used by the Luthra brothers. The SIM card used by Saurabh and Gaurav Luthra was issued under the name of Ram

U.S. to mandate checks of some tourists' social media history from past

(News Agency) The U.S. is planning to impose social media inspections on some tourists as President Donald Trump continues to ramp up travel restrictions for foreign visitors. Tourists — including those from Britain, Australia, France, and Japan — will be mandated to provide five years of their social media history as part of their applications to visit the U.S., according to a notice posted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, on Wednesday. The proposal, which has been given a 60 day-notice with requests for comments from the public, is not final and may see some revisions. Tourists from nations that are included in the U.S.' Visa Waiver Program can apply to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization, or ESTA, to visit the country for 90 days or less, with a fee of \$40. The social media check will now form a "mandatory data element" as part of the ESTA application. The border force said it will also collect "several high value data fields," including applicants' email addresses from the past 10 years, their telephone numbers used in the past five years, and names and details of family members. In addition to social media



checks, applicants will also be expected to upload "selfies" which CBP said will improve their screening processes and better identify whether a person is the rightful possessor of the documents being used to secure an ESTA authorization. The plan is an escalation of a series of measures Trump has implemented in recent months to restrict the movement of foreign travelers, after a man from Afghanistan was accused of shooting two

National Guard members near the White House. The president said at the time that he would tighten immigration rules, including "permanently" pausing all migration from "third-world countries," as he cast blame on his predecessor, Joe Biden, for admitting "millions." More recently, the Trump administration said it is expanding its travel ban to more than 30 countries, which was initially announced in June and previously blocked travel to the U.S. from

12 countries and restricted access from seven others. Some of the countries included are Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran and Haiti. "If they don't have a stable government there, if they don't have a country that can sustain itself and tell us who those individuals are and help us vet them, why should we allow people from that country to come here to the United States?" Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said at the time.

Trump says Zelenskyy isn't ready to accept US peace plan to end war in Ukraine

US-backed peace talks with Ukraine hit a pause as Zelenskyy has yet to review the proposal. The US President has been arguing that the war has dragged on too long, saying the US has spent too much money and too many lives have been lost.



(News Agency) Talks on a US-backed peace proposal for Ukraine have hit a pause, after President Donald Trump said he was "a little bit disappointed" that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has not yet read the proposal aimed at ending the war with Russia. Trump said Zelenskyy "isn't ready" to move ahead, even after American and Ukrainian negotiators wrapped up three days of detailed talks in Florida. Speaking to

reporters before attending the Kennedy Centre Honours, Trump said Ukrainian negotiators had responded positively to the proposal but claimed Zelenskyy had not reviewed it. "I'm a little bit disappointed that President Zelenskyy hasn't yet read the proposal, that was as of a few hours ago. His people love it, but he hasn't," Trump said. He added, "Russia is, I believe, fine with it, but I'm not sure that Zelenskyy's fine with it. His

people love it. But he isn't ready." However, Russian President Vladimir Putin has not officially endorsed the the proposal. Last week, he said several aspects of the plan were unworkable, even though the first draft had been seen as favourable to Moscow. The US President has been arguing that the war has dragged on too long, saying the US has spent too much money and too many lives have been lost. He has pushed Ukraine to give up land to Russia.

ZELENSKY CALLS TALKS CONSTRUCTIVE BUT NOT EASY

Zelenskyy said on Saturday that he had a "substantive phone call" with US officials involved in the talks and had received a full update. "Ukraine is determined to keep working in good faith with the American side to genuinely achieve peace," he wrote on social media. In his video address, he said the American team "knows the basic Ukrainian positions" but warned the pathway to a settlement remains complicated. The discussions in Florida were part of the latest push to narrow

differences between both sides. Ukrainian, American and Russian positions remain far apart on key issues, especially territory. Meanwhile, Russia welcomed the Trump administration's newly updated national security strategy, with Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov saying the document aligned with Moscow's preference for dialogue. "There are statements there against confrontation and in favour of dialogue and building good relations," Peskov said. He added that Russia hopes the approach will lead to "further constructive cooperation with Washington on the Ukrainian settlement." The White House national security strategy, released on Friday, said the US aims to rebuild stability with Russia and views ending the war as essential for long-term security. Even as political talks progressed, Russian attacks over the weekend killed at least four people across Ukraine. On Sunday, three people died and 10 were wounded in shelling in the Kharkiv region, officials said.

China wants revenge: Chinese virologist who linked Covid to Wuhan lab is scared

(News Agency) A Chinese virologist, Li-Meng Yan, who claimed the coronavirus was developed in a Wuhan laboratory, and who has been hiding in the US fearing Beijing's retaliation, has now said she is afraid the Chinese government is using her relatives to lure her back and carry out "the perfect crime", according to the US media reports. Li-Meng Yan had made headlines when she claimed to have proof to show that the deadly virus was made in the Wuhan lab. She reportedly fled China after becoming a whistleblower in the case in 2020. Yan had been working at a prestigious lab at the University of Hong Kong with her husband when the coronavirus pandemic broke out, with the new virologist quickly becoming convinced that the Chinese government purposefully grew the contagion and released it to the public, killing millions around the world, The New York Post reported. According to Yan, her theory created a deep rift within her family. She fled to the US with help from conservative organisations that amplified her claims, and now alleges that her work has put her in the crosshairs of the Chinese government, according to a New York Times (NYT) report. Her plane ticket to the US had been paid for by a foundation tied to President Donald Trump's former strategist, Steve Bannon, and the exiled Chinese billionaire Guo Wengui, NYT reported. They had also arranged for her to meet some of the president's top advisers.

CHINESE VIROLOGIST YAN ACCUSES CHINA OF TARGETING HER THROUGH FAMILY TO 'ERASE TRUTH ABOUT VIRUS'

"For over five years, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) has used my parents and Mahen (her husband, an experienced virologist) as tools to lure me back, attempting to carry out a "perfect crime" to erase the truth about the virus and avoid accountability," NYT quoted Yan as saying. Yan was living in China with her husband, veteran virologist Ranawaka Perera, when her supervisor allegedly asked her to investigate the emerging coronavirus in Wuhan, according to the New York Post. Doctors that she knew reportedly confirmed that the virus could indeed jump from human-to-human, with rumours swirling that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was linked to the contagion, the New York Post reported. After the Chinese government ultimately acknowledged the virus's dangers and its ability to spread between people, Yan became convinced key facts were being concealed. She then began speaking with social media figures critical of Beijing to amplify her message.

Chinese virologist Li-Meng Yan, who fled to the US after claiming Covid-19 was developed in a Wuhan lab, says she fears Beijing is using her family to lure her back to China. Meanwhile, her husband, virologist Ranawaka Perera, who hasn't spoken to her since she fled, wants to speak to her once to confirm her safety, even as Yan remains in hiding.

VIROLOGIST PERERA SAYS INFLUENCERS MANIPULATED LI-MENG YAN

Yan and her supporters maintain that she chose to leave her husband and travel to the US of her own free will, while Perera argues she was influenced by online figures who rose to prominence by presenting her as a Covid-19 expert and promoting her claims. One such person was Wang Dinggang, a former businessman from China who ran a YouTube channel from the US where he criticises the leadership in Beijing and also spreads misinformation, according to the Times. In 2023, she and Wang were identified as victims in a New York criminal complaint accusing members of China's national police of running a transnational repression campaign against US residents. According to the New York Post report, the charges are still pending in the case. And earlier this year, Google e-mailed Yan to inform her that she was most likely the victim of a state-sponsored hacking attempt to



steal her password, according to the Times. Yan has decided never to have contact with her family again and continues to stay in hiding from them.

I JUST WANT TO KNOW SHE IS SAFE: HER HUSBAND PERERA

Perera, who is of a Sri Lankan origin, got a job at the University of Pennsylvania in 2021 and tried to find his wife. He said he simply wants one

last conversation to ensure she is comfortable with her choices. "I just want to talk to her directly, and make sure that she's safe," Dr Perera was quoted as saying by The New York Times. "If she's safe, and doesn't want to be with me, I can move on. But not until I know exactly what happened. She is the person I love the most," he added.

Why Macron's China visit might be good for India

(News Agency) Emmanuel Macron's recent visit to China looked like standard diplomatic theatre. The French president arrived with CEOs from Airbus, BNP Paribas and Schneider Electric. He signed cooperation agreements on nuclear energy and education. China even promised to lend France two giant pandas from 2027.

But beneath the cordial veneer, Macron delivered an ultimatum that signals a fundamental shift in European trade policy. Europe's problem is straightforward yet severe. The continent buys far more from China than China buys back. Since 2019, this trade deficit has ballooned by nearly 60 per cent. France alone imports 45



billion dollars worth of Chinese goods annually whilst exporting only 35 billion, creating a 10 billion dollar annual shortfall. Chinese platforms like Shein have exploited EU customs rules that exempt online purchases under 150 euros from tariffs, flooding European markets with subsidised goods. Meanwhile, China has climbed the technology ladder. Where France once sold nuclear technology and Airbus aircraft to Beijing, the tables have turned. China now produces its own passenger planes and leads in batteries, electric vehicles and solar power. In a

post-visit interview, Macron revealed his blunt message to Chinese officials. Europe would impose tariffs similar to America's unless China addressed the trade imbalance. He warned that China was "killing their own customers" with unsustainable export surpluses. •For China, the stakes are equally high. Facing American tariffs and EU

investigations into dumping practices, Beijing cannot afford to lose access to Europe's 27 countries and hundreds of millions of consumers. President Xi Jinping emphasised that China and France should chart their own course, a thinly veiled suggestion that Europe resist American influence. Yet no major business deals materialised.

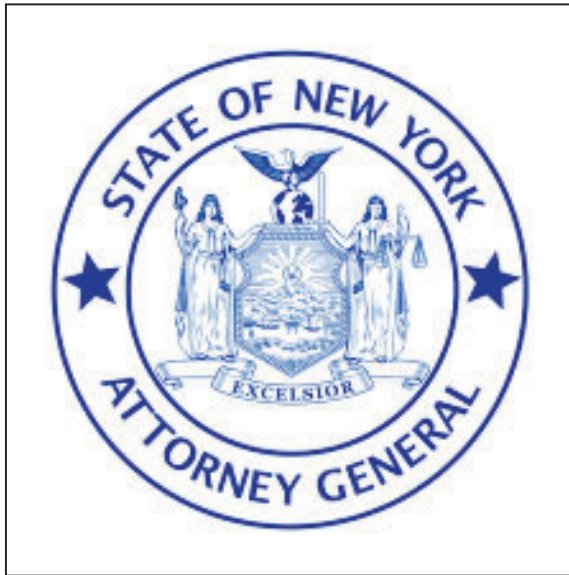
The anticipated Airbus order worth billions never came, likely because China is using aircraft purchases as leverage in negotiations with America over Boeing. The visit exposed a fragmenting global order where trade has become inseparable from geopolitical power. Europe is attempting to forge strategic independence from both Washington and Beijing, whilst countries like India see opportunities in diversifying supply chains away from China. Macron's trip proved that the era of easy globalisation is ending, replaced by harder bargaining and tougher choices.

Attorney General James and Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force Secure More than \$672,000 from NYC Landlord for Creating Unsafe Living Conditions for Tenants

(News Agency) BlueSky Management Violated Several NYC Construction Codes, Forcing Hundreds of Tenants to Live in Hazardous Conditions Settlement Secures Rent Credits for Tenants, Refunds on Overcharges, Civil Penalties, and Safer Construction Conditions NEW YORK – New York Attorney General Letitia James and the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force today announced a settlement with Steven Kashanian and his real estate company, BlueSky Management NY, LLC (BlueSky), for violating the New York City construction codes and creating unsafe and unsanitary conditions for hundreds of tenants. BlueSky owns 72 buildings comprising 1,150 units, including rent stabilized units in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, and the Bronx.

Tenants at BlueSky's properties were subjected to dangerous living conditions, including but not limited to illegal construction and frequent interruption of essential services such as gas and water. As a result of today's settlement, Kashanian and BlueSky will pay \$672,578 in civil penalties, provide refunds for tenants who were overcharged rent after February 2023, give tenants \$100 credit for each day there was no heat or hot water during the 2022-2023, 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 heat seasons, correct open construction violations, and hire monitors to oversee construction activity and compliance.

The Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force is comprised of the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), the Tenant Protection Unit (TPU) of New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the New York City Department of Buildings (DOB), and the New York City Law Department (NYCLD). "No family should ever feel unsafe in their home," said Attorney General James. "BlueSky consistently forced tenants to live in dangerous and unsanitary conditions, putting the safety of New Yorkers and their families at great risk. Recently we are putting money back into tenants' pockets and requiring BlueSky to make their buildings safer and cleaner for the New Yorkers who call them home." "We have zero tolerance



for those who target vulnerable tenants to exploit them for profit and attempt to unlawfully deregulate apartments," said HCR Commissioner Visnaukas. "Working alongside Attorney General Letitia James and New York City's regulatory agencies, HCR's Tenant Protection Unit has imposed additional penalties against a landlord for erroneous or missing apartment registrations. This \$100,000 fine levied against BlueSky is an essential deterrent to thwart the illegal deregulation of apartments and demonstrates our commitment to protecting the rights of millions of rent regulated tenants."

"This settlement against BlueSky, led by the mission-driven and determined agencies and government entities that make up the Tenant Harassment Prevention Task Force, demonstrates the value of coordinated enforcement and how, together, we can do more to ensure that no tenant lives in fear in their own home," said Acting HPD Commissioner Tigani.

"The Task Force acted decisively, drawing on the unique strengths of each agency to secure justice for these tenants. HPD is proud to have played a role in this case, and, more generally, is proud to stand alongside our partners in this important work every day.

Let this serve as a clear message: we will not stand idly by while landlords let buildings fall into disrepair – we will take action to ensure our neighbors are protected and housing is made habitable." "When city

agencies order a landlord to fix ongoing safety issues at their buildings, the nonnegotiable expectation is that those owners will live up to their legal obligations and make the needed repairs," said DOB Commissioner Oddo.

"This important settlement will mean that these repairs will finally happen, and the New Yorkers living at properties owned by BlueSky Management will no longer be put in harm's way due to hazardous building conditions. We are grateful of the combined efforts of this Task Force, working alongside DOB's Office of the Tenant Advocate and our Borough Enforcement Unit, to spotlight the important public safety issue of proper building maintenance." Between 2018 and 2022,

BlueSky purchased scores of distressed buildings in New York City and began construction projects.

During their management and operation of these buildings, Task Force members received numerous complaints from tenants about conditions in the buildings, including complaints of unsafe conditions, unpermitted and unsafe construction activities, lack of proper maintenance and repairs, failures to comply with the requirements of rent regulation, and harassment.

The Task Force conducted its own investigation into these complaints, including site inspections, interviews with tenants, and review of documents and agency records.

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President Trump Is Right to Get Tough on Maduro—But the Endgame Must Be Flawless



After four years of diplomatic appeasement and misplaced hope, the United States has finally returned to the only language the regime in Caracas understands: leverage.

President Trump's recent escalation against Nicolás Maduro—marked by the deployment of naval assets to the Caribbean, the seizure of a Venezuelan oil tanker, and the designation of the Cartel of the Suns as a terrorist organization—has drawn predictable hand-wringing from the foreign policy establishment. Critics warn of "gunboat diplomacy" and "escalation." They are missing the point.

The Trump administration's confrontational approach is not just a tactical shift; it is a necessary corrective to the failed policies of the Biden era. For years, the previous administration bet on the idea that sanctions relief and diplomatic engagement would coax Maduro into holding free and fair elections. We saw the result of that wager in 2024: Maduro took the relief, consolidated his power, and then brazenly stole the election in front of the world.

The lesson of the last four years is clear: You cannot shame a narco-state into democracy. Biden's strategy of easing pressure in exchange for empty promises only emboldened Maduro, allowing his regime to deepen ties with Iran, Russia, and China while flooding the hemisphere with refugees and illicit drugs.

President Trump is right to recognize that the status quo is a threat to American national security. By treating the Maduro regime not just as a political adversary but as a criminal enterprise, the White House has finally aligned U.S. policy with reality. The seizure of the oil tanker this week sends an unmistakable signal: the days of Maduro financing his repression through illicit trade while Washington looks the other way are over.

However, while the "tough" part of the equation is now active, the second half of the strategy—"what comes next"—is where the true danger and opportunity lie.

Pressure without a clear exit ramp is a recipe for a forever crisis. The administration has successfully cornered the rat; now it must decide how to deal with it without tearing down

the house. The critical next steps for the Trump White House must involve three key components:

1. A Unified "Day After" Plan The greatest risk of the current escalation is a chaotic collapse of the Venezuelan state that mirrors the failures of past interventions. If Maduro falls, who picks up the pieces? The U.S. must be coordinating deeply with the Venezuelan opposition to ensure a transitional government is ready to govern immediately. We cannot afford a power vacuum that allows criminal gangs or rival military factions to turn Venezuela into a Somalia-on-the-Caribbean.

2. An Ultimatum, Not Just a Threat Military posturing is effective only if it forces a diplomatic capitulation. The administration should present a final, non-negotiable off-ramp for Maduro and his inner circle: exile and immunity in a third country in exchange for an immediate transition of power. This is distasteful, yes, but preferable to a bloody civil war. The pressure is the stick; the exit ramp is the carrot. Both must be visible.

3. Regional Buy-In While Trump is right to lead, the U.S. cannot be the sole actor. The "Vietnam-style" conflict warned of by critics becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy if this is viewed solely as Yankee Imperialism. The administration must work aggressively to get key Latin American players—even reluctant ones like Brazil and Colombia—to understand that a destabilized, drug-running Venezuela is a greater threat to them than it is to Washington.

The stakes could not be higher. A retreat now would validate Maduro's survival strategy and permanently entrench a hostile, criminal regime in our backyard. But an escalation that lacks strategic precision could ignite a regional conflagration. President Trump has correctly identified that the time for patience is over. He has pulled the pin on the grenade. The success of his presidency—and the future of Venezuela—now depends entirely on where he throws it.

By Sharanjit Singh Thind

America must expose the left's dangerous falsehoods about Israel

Surging antisemitism is among the most disturbing trends in our national life and around the world. But where is the corresponding defense of the truth about the Jewish people and the Jewish State of Israel? There is an urgent need for elected officials on the left and right to confront antisemitic falsehoods and declare without fear that America is right to stand with Israel for the sake of our own national security and theirs.

I saw antisemitism every day when I was at the United Nations. I also saw how antisemitic lies quickly spread when leaders don't regularly fight back with the truth. This is how the Democratic Party has become a hotbed of hatred toward Israel. Today, the default position of leftist politicians and candidates is that Israel is an occupying colonizer perpetrating genocide in Gaza.

The newly elected socialist mayor of New York City, Zohran Mamdani, built his campaign around such lies. Clearly, the lies struck a chord with leftist voters. The truth isn't said nearly enough. Enemies of Israel loudly shout about its "occupation." In fact, not a single Israeli soldier or civilian was in Gaza after 2005. That's nearly 20 years of Palestinian governance with zero Israeli presence. Similarly, leftists denounce Israel's actions in the Gaza War as genocide.

In fact, in the history of modern warfare, no army has taken more steps to avoid civilian casualties than Israel's has, often to the detriment of its own soldiers and war goals. Its troops have been killed because Israel has painstakingly tried to save the civilians whom the terrorists hide behind. Here's another truth. Worldwide protests against Israel began on Oct. 8, 2023. That's one day after Hamas invaded Israel and massacred over 1,200 innocent men, women and children, including 46 Americans, and took 254 hostages, including 12 Americans. It was also weeks before Israel took any military actions in response. Obviously, these protests weren't in response to Israeli

actions in Gaza. There hadn't been any yet. In reality, the cries of "occupation" aren't about Gaza. They're about the entirety of Israel, the Jewish people who live there, and the antisemitic belief that there should be no Jewish State whatsoever. And the cries of "genocide" aren't about human rights. If that were so, the outrage would be directed not at Israel but at Russia and China.

They are the world's worst human rights violators, both of which are engaged in actual genocide. The criticism of Israel is a plain attempt to defame and delegitimize the country to promote its extinction. Yet the left's leaders either repeat this hateful language or allow it to continue unchecked. Democrats' turn toward antisemitism is disturbing enough. But the same evil is now creeping into the right, though it's not yet as widespread as it is on the left. It's also heartening that many conservatives are vigorously pushing back.

But there's still an urgent need for every leader on the right to unequivocally state that standing with Israel is in America's interests. Israel is a military and intelligence juggernaut in a strategically vital region of the world. When America supports Israel, we are directly investing in the protection of our own citizens. Israel is fighting enemies that seek our destruction too. When we sell weapons to the Israeli military, we spare our own troops from being sent into harm's way. In the last two years, America hasn't sent a single soldier into battle against Hamas or Hezbollah, though both are committed to America's destruction. If America abandoned Israel, it wouldn't be long before we had to send our sons and daughters into battle against the same terrorists and tyrants. These truths are the best antidote to the lies of antisemitism. History shows where those lies lead: to the actual genocide of the Jewish people. Preventing that tragedy is a moral imperative and a national necessity.

By NIKKI HALEY

INSIDER
The South Asian
Voice of South Asian Community

ISSN No. 1554 06X

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Universal Human Rights Form Bedrock of a Just, Equitable and Compassionate Society: President Murmu

Jag Mohan Thaken – India

Addressing the Human Rights Day celebration, organised by the National Human Rights Commission, in New Delhi on Wednesday, the President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu said that Human Rights Day is an occasion to remind us that the universal human rights are inalienable and they form the bedrock of a just, equitable, and compassionate society. Seventy-seven years ago, the world came together to articulate a simple yet revolutionary truth: that every human being is born free and equal in dignity and rights. India played an important role in shaping a global framework of human rights. Our freedom fighters envisioned a world rooted in human dignity, equality, and justice.

The President emphasised that human rights must be ensured for all, including the person in the last mile, in keeping with the philosophy of Antyodaya. She stated that each and every citizen should be an active participant in the nation's development journey towards building a Viksit Bharat by 2047. Only then can development be called inclusive in the real sense.

President Murmu said that human rights are contained in the vision of our Constitution. Human rights promote social democracy. Human rights encompass the right to live without fear, to learn without barriers, to work without exploitation and to age with dignity. We have reminded the world that human rights cannot be divorced from development. Also, India has always adhered to the timeless truth: 'There is no peace without justice and there is no justice without peace.'

Our commitment is clear: to build a nation where every individual can live with freedom, respect, and equality, and where human



rights are not only protected, but celebrated. Human rights are contained in the vision of our Constitution. Highlighting our Constitutional objectives, Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar had said, "We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well." Human rights promote social democracy. Human rights encompass the right to live without fear, to learn without barriers, to work without exploitation and to age with dignity. We have reminded the world that human rights cannot be divorced from development.

She highlighted that India embraced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a co-creator of a universal moral covenant which resonated deeply with our civilizational ethos. Our ancient value of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which means that the world is one family, is reflected in the idea of universal human rights. It is only apt that India's sustained commitment to the human-rights principles has been recognized globally. It is evidenced by our unopposed election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for a three-year term commencing in 2026 for the

seventh time.

The President was happy to note that the National Human Rights Commission, the State Human Rights Commissions, along with the judiciary and civil society, have functioned as alert sentinels of our Constitutional conscience. She noted that over the past few years, the National Human Rights Commission has taken Suo motu cognizance of numerous issues concerning people from the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe communities, as well as women and children. She also noted that the Human Rights Commission held extensive discussions on the subject of Human Rights of Prison Inmates during its Foundation Day celebrations this year. She expressed confidence that the discussions will yield useful results.

The President said that women's empowerment and their welfare are key pillars of human rights. She was happy to note that NHRC has organized a conference on women's safety in public places and workplaces. She stated that the conclusions drawn from such conferences can prove crucial in ensuring women's safety and empowerment.

Underlining the role of women leaders in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, President Murmu said, "Hansa Mehta, one of the fifteen women members of our Constituent Assembly was also a member of the group engaged in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She suggested a foundational change to the draft. She ensured that the rights enshrined in that global charter were expressed, not in terms of the 'rights of man', but in the inclusive and universal expression, 'rights of all human beings.' That such a historic shift was brought about by the expansive vision of an Indian woman is a matter of enduring pride for every Indian".

The President said that the NHRC gives expression to certain ideals of the State and the society. The Government of India has been translating such expressions into action on a scale never seen before. Over the last decade, we have witnessed our Nation move ahead with a different approach - from entitlement to empowerment and from charity to rights. The Govern-

ment has been working to ensure that every-day essential services like clean water, electricity, cooking gas, healthcare, banking services, education, and improved sanitation become available to all. This uplifts every household and secures dignity. The President said that recently, the Government has notified the implementation of a major reform through the four Labour Codes related to wages, industrial relations, social security and occupational safety, health and working conditions. This transformative change lays the foundation for a future-ready workforce and more resilient industries.

The President called upon every citizen to recognize that human rights are not the sole responsibility of governments, the NHRC, civil society organizations and such other institutions. She said that protecting the rights and dignity of our fellow citizens is a shared duty. This duty rests with all of us as members of a compassionate and responsible society.

Putin's Visit Wasn't All Fireworks. But It Still Matterred

The biggest visit of the year is now over. Russia President Vladimir Putin, after all, is no ordinary head of state. Few leaders have had an arrest warrant against them from the International Criminal Court; fewer still have held their own against the rest of the West in a dangerously escalatory war. For Delhi, however, he is, primarily, the President of a country that has been steadfast in its support to India for decades. But the visit proved that this is not just about bilateral relations. This is political theatre with an international audience watching. And here's what all this translated into for everyone involved.

That Joint Statement

First, the joint statement itself, which, while being all of 70 paragraphs, mostly just lauded existing cooperation in various areas. Despite excitement around 'massive' defence deals and possibly the purchase of the Su-57, the section on military cooperation is the shortest, though a separate read-out from the meeting between Defence Ministers Rajnath Singh and Andrei Belousov seems to have borne fruit. The main joint statement agreed to 'encourage' joint manufacturing in India of spare parts through transfer of technology and setting up of joint ventures for meeting the needs of the Indian armed forces as well as for subsequent export to mutually friendly countries. Sure, those are not the fireworks that many were expecting. But if this arrangement goes through, it will fill a long-persisting gap for the Indian forces, the army in particular. Though Russia has always been upfront in terms of emergency supplies, the need to get spares made in the country has been felt for a long time. This requires private investment, given the now-reinvented Ordnance Factories are yet to find their feet. Meanwhile, it is as well to remember that there is already a deal in place for the S-400s, of which two more batteries are awaited. Buying more of these will, in all probability, merely require an extension of the existing deal. The interest in Su-57 fighters, on the other hand, has always been uncertain. The Air Force had rejected these years ago for a far larger radar signalling system it has developed indigenously. Besides, given that a trade deal with the US, the largest trading partner, remains imperative, a great defence deal with Russia always seemed a bit improb-

able. The Real Issue Of Trade Fortunately, the longest section is on trade. A country that accounts for only 2% of its trade volume is not the healthiest of relationships. This section lists one significant commitment, "to continue their consultations on enabling the interoperability of the national payment systems, financial messaging systems, as well as central bank digital currency platforms". That's something, given that neither side wants to pile up their currencies with each other. This need to bone up trade is a direct factor driving the discussions with the Eurasian Economic Union on a Free Trade Agreement.

All that is nice. But remember that Russia's own bilateral trade with Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan is in the low millions. Indian companies would thus much rather target Europe, if they turn to actual manufacturing there. Meanwhile, ventures in consumer goods will benefit from an impressive internet penetration of 92% in Russia and the exit of prominent brands. Meanwhile, the Russian enterprise software sector is growing fast, with domestic solutions falling short of meeting demand. This opens up an opportunity for vendors from friendly countries, especially India, to fill this promising niche. And the beauty of it is that it doesn't need a physical trade route.

Improving Trade Routes

Even so, given the \$59 billion trade deficit between India and Russia, a good route is indeed necessary. There have been many positive reports about the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which point to a rapid growth in imports through this route. However, this apparent 'rise' has yet to reflect in total figures. That, in turn, will depend heavily on whether Washington lifts its sanctions on Iran or not (a temporary waiver has been in place for Chahbahar, which limits it to trade with only Afghanistan). Then there is the remaining Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, which reduces shipping time between India's East Coast and Russia's Far East from 40 to 24 days. So far, that hasn't really led Indian businesses to increase trade with the Far North, given its sparse population. But there is enough potential for mineral wealth, including rare earths, especially since Moscow has thrown

the market open to all. India needs to move quickly to get into this market before the Ukraine war ends and American and European companies troop in. There is also the Northern Sea Route, which ties into a 2024 deal to develop icebreaker vessels at Mumbai's Mazagaon Docks and other shipyards. Nothing seems to have come of this, too, so far. There is, however, an agreement for 'Training of Specialists' for 'Ships Operating in Polar Waters'. These are highly tricky areas. But there is potentially more to all of this. The recently ratified Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support (RELOS), which will grant Indian naval and commercial vessels access to all Russian ports, all of which lie now towards the Arctic for refuelling and repairs and request Russian icebreaker escorts through icy passages. Russian officials have said that the pact may eventually give India access to more than 40 Russian naval and air bases, all the way from Arctic waters to the Pacific. Sure, that's in the future, but, if materialised, it could certainly make a difference.

Energy Gets Short Shrift

The much awaited 'energy' package is short and to the point, though it rather defiantly, notes 'current and potential' cooperation in the entire range of oil and oil products, including oil refining. Also, notwithstanding a 30% drop in imports of oil from Russia - mostly because profit margins have dropped due in part to use of 'ghost ships' in transport - it seems both sides have an eye to the future. The good news, meanwhile, is that Russia is going to expand nuclear energy in India. The country perhaps has the largest pie of nuclear reactors. India, under its 'Viksit Bharat' vision, aims to generate a total of 100 GW of power from nuclear sources, a tenfold increase from its current capacity of 8.8GW, with the Russian collaboration on the Kudankulam nuclear reactor being just the beginning. There's clearly more where that comes from, and other countries are likely to join the race. This is big business, especially with India's quest for Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), for which Rs 20,000 crore have been allocated in this year's Union Budget. France, Japan, South Korea and, of course, the United States, are in fray. In sum, Putin's visit may be pegged as an ordinary - though not unsuccessful - bilateral sum-

mit, with its significance derived from the sheer unease of the West and from the fact that Delhi chose to emphasise that it was not 'neutral' on the Ukraine war and wanted peace. That phrasing was clearly for the rest of the world. While no verbal eruptions occurred in Washington, a controversy was fuelled by an entirely different set of people. A joint article in an Indian daily by the German, French and British ambassadors to India delivered a diatribe against the Russian President, accusing him, among other things, of a total disregard for human life. India's Ministry of External Affairs was understandably annoyed at what it called an unacceptable diplomatic practice. While each of these countries have strong relations with India, their sheer lack of presence in terms of ending the Ukraine war has never been more obvious. A meeting of NATO foreign ministers on December 3 had already reiterated not only their decision to continue supporting Ukraine - ironically through US defence equipment - but also to raise the defence expenditure by 5%. The US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, did not attend this meeting even as his parleys with both Ukraine and Russia continue. All this is European politics as usual. But here's the bottom line. Peace between Russia and Ukraine is necessary to give the much-needed spur to India's trade with Russia, including for defence supplies. Delays are now rampant, and the necessity of getting more of the S-400s imminent. The deadline for the deal, which was 2023 originally, has now been pushed. The S-500, while a formidable weapon, reportedly has just one unit in operation as of now. In the final analysis, disappointed observers should look at the 2018 joint statement. It's almost the same, except that it has one line welcoming the S-400 deal. Russia-India official documents have always been long in text, and quietly substantive when it comes to actual cooperation. The underlying trust between the two is the real clincher. This is not an advantage that either side would want to lose. But neither India nor Russia can run only on sentiment in the perilous geopolitical climate of the day. For both, it'll have to be about the actual numbers, too.

(Dr Tara Kartha is a former Director, National Security Council Secretariat)

"Silicon Valley's New Hub: Inside the \$67 Billion Push to Build India's Digital Backbone"



By :Rahul Shivshanka

"Put your money where your mouth is." It is an adage. It simply means this: show by actions and not just words that you support or believe in something. For long, the world's top CEOs have expressed confidence in India's growth prospects. But they never quite bet on India by putting down money. But that's changing. And fast. Unlike anytime in its history, India is now being scoped out by Amazon, Microsoft, and Google, who have in the past few weeks collectively committed over \$67 billion. In effect, they've made India their biggest digital investment destination outside the United States. What explains this shift?

Here are some reasons. Perhaps this record and unprecedented investment push is because India is adding more new internet

users than any other country. Second, a vast, young, English-speaking workforce continues to anchor global engineering teams. Third, a rapidly rising digital middle class is shopping, streaming, and paying online. Fourth, Indian companies, from tiny retailers to the largest banks, are moving their operations to the cloud at record speed. For Big Tech, this expanding digital consumer and enterprise market is too large to ignore.

But some experts believe that the real story lies beyond consumer growth. The global race for AI has unleashed an unprecedented need for computing power. India, it is being said, offers the right mix of scale, land availability, electricity cost, and policy stability to build hyperscale data centres.

Experts believe that even what once looked like a

regulatory hurdle, such as data localisation, now works in India's favour. If tech giants must store and process Indian data inside the country, they prefer to build that infrastructure themselves. And once built, these data centres become profitable regional hubs serving South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

But above and beyond, does it also have something to do with governance?

It's hard to sometimes see the obvious, especially when the air is poor, the rivers are unclear, and lakhs of air passengers were abandoned to their fate. But somewhere it is becoming increasingly clear that India today offers continuity of governance, faster clearances, incentives for high-tech infrastructure, and the world's most advanced digital public architecture through UPI, Aadhaar, and ONDC. For companies making multibillion-

dollar, multi-decade commitments, India's democracy and relative policy predictability carry enormous weight.

When crackdowns, censorship, and regulatory uncertainty are becoming the norm around the world, India represents stability and an open democracy. And these are also strategic assets.

This prompts the China question. India is not replacing China as the world's manufacturing base. But in the digital economy, India is emerging as the main alternative. It is most underestimated, but a lot of credit must go to India's diversity. An article in a financial daily, the Economic Times, points out that with hundreds of "languages, countless accents, diverse transaction patterns, and a wide spectrum of socio-economic realities, India presents challenges that push

AI systems to their limits".

If an AI model can understand India, it can operate anywhere in the world. In effect, India is a natural AI test laboratory.

What does all this add up to?

First, India is moving from the world's IT back office to the AI front office. Second, India is rising as the anchor of a new non-Chinese digital ecosystem. Third, India has a real shot at becoming an AI-first economy.

The big tech "Gold Rush" is not only about investment. It is a vote of confidence.

First, India is moving from the world's IT back office to the AI front office. Second, India is rising as the anchor of a new non-Chinese digital ecosystem. Third, India has a real shot at becoming an AI-first economy. The big tech "Gold Rush" is not only about investment. It is a vote of confidence.

Why Putin's India Visit Was Bigger Than Just 'Deals'



After a hiatus of four years, Russian President Vladimir Putin's landmark visit to New Delhi was viewed as a significant development in the India-Russia relationship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to receive Putin personally on the tarmac of Palam Airport underscored Moscow's continued relevance in India's strategic calculus. Its significance was further amplified in light of strong geopolitical headwinds, particularly against the backdrop of Washington's punitive actions aimed at constraining the development of India-Russia relations.

The theme of the 23rd annual India-Russia summit further signalled an evolution of the longstanding partnership, with the economic pillar of the bilateral partnership being increasingly prioritised. Ultimately, the significance of the 27-hour-long visit lies less in the agreements concluded and more in the strategic message it conveyed, that the bilateral partnership retains its own momentum, largely insulated from external constraints.

Economic Ties in Pole Position During the summit, the leaders examined the

broad contours of the partnership encompassing political, military, trade and investment, energy, connectivity, space, cultural, and education aspects. The discussions reflected a growing impetus to strengthen cooperation.

Building on this momentum, the discussion on the economic dimension assumed particular prominence. The recent uptick in economic engagement, catalysed by the vacuum created following the exit of Western businesses from Russia, has seen an enhanced focus on the economic aspect of the bilateral partnership. During the summit, both countries adopted the programme for the Development of Strategic Areas of India-Russia Economic Cooperation till 2030. The asymmetry in bilateral trade, favouring Moscow, was a point of discussion during the summit; the Russian delegation identified comparative advantages in the Indian export basket, which included consumer goods, food, agricultural products, pharmaceutical products, and telecom equipment.

In light of Russia's growing

demand for skilled labour, both sides concluded an agreement on labour mobility. They also reiterated their commitment to enhancing trade facilitation, including the establishment of smoother payment mechanisms. The removal of bottlenecks in logistics and addressing tariffs and non-tariff barriers remained central on the agenda.

There was a mutual understanding that addressing these concerns would remain a priority for meeting the trade target of \$100 billion by 2030. Further, both leaders expressed interest in the early conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Strengthening energy relations emerged as a considerable priority given New Delhi's interest in securing its energy security needs. Along with the existing projects, the prospect of Indian investments in new projects, including oil refining, petrochemical technologies, oilfield services, and scaling up nuclear energy, was discussed. Both sides further deliberated on strengthening the bilateral partnership in the realms of science and technology, as well as space cooperation.

Military Technical Partnership

Leading up to the summit, the Indian government expressed interest in purchasing additional batteries of the S-400 missile defence system and jointly producing the recent S-500 system. However, the government's position reflected that these deals would not be concluded at the summit. Russia's stance on supporting India's bid for indigenising production through technology transfers and co-production remains unchanged. Crucially, Russia's offer of platforms such as the Su-57, with the possibility of joint manufacturing, suggests that its growing alignment with China has not eroded its strategic space for India. For New Delhi, this is both reassuring and strategically useful, providing further impetus to sustain and deepen the defence partnership.

Arctic and Far East

This visit further signalled the continued relevance of strategic areas of cooperation, such as the Arctic and the Russian Far East. New Delhi has expressed interest in enhancing cooperation in the

region's political economy, given its access to critical minerals, rare earths, and hydrocarbons. Moscow welcomes India's interest in the Arctic and views New Delhi as a key player in Arctic affairs. What Does it Mean for India-Russia relations? In sum, these developments are indicative of a sustained convergence of interests between the two countries. The visit is rooted in symbolism and reflects the primacy of Russia in India's calculus as a reliable partner. Subsequently, for Moscow, its ability to sustain its partnership with an influential non-Western power such as India, amidst fighting an almost four-year-long conflict in Ukraine, increases Russia's clout in the World Order. At the same time, certain concerns will persist in the bilateral partnership in the near future, such as on the status of the existing deliverables or questions of trade parity. What remains clear is that under the current geopolitical matrix, New Delhi is less likely to be risk-averse in deepening its relationship with Moscow.

(Harsh V Pant is Vice President, ORF. Rajoli Siddharth Jayaprakash is Junior Fellow, Eurasia, at ORF.)

A New Era of Immigration: The Supreme Court Must Prioritize America First



SCOTUS & THE BORDER

By Andy Mukherjee

The most consequential immigration decision of the 21st century is no longer just a campaign promise—it is now on the docket. By agreeing last week to review *Barbara v. Trump*, the Supreme Court has done more than just add a case to its calendar. It has signaled that the constitutional error that has fueled decades of unchecked illegal immigration—birthright citizenship for the children of illegal aliens—is finally vulnerable. For the first time in over a century, the United States is poised to correct a misinterpretation of the 14th Amendment that has put the interests of foreign nationals above the sovereignty of the American people.

President Trump's detractors are already predicting chaos. They claim that Executive Order 14160, which restricts automatic citizenship for children born to parents unlawfully present in the U.S., violates the 1898 *Wong Kim Ark* precedent. But for too long, legal elites have treated a specific, narrow ruling from the 19th century as a suicide pact for the 21st. The 14th Amendment was ratified to ensure citizenship for former slaves, not to create a global loophole where breaking our laws yields a permanent reward in the form of a U.S. passport.

The Supreme Court's decision to hear this case comes on the heels of other crucial victories for

the administration. In September, the Court sided with the Department of Homeland Security on mandatory detention, effectively ending the "catch and release" policies that turned our border into a turnstile. Now, with the birthright citizenship question

finally in play, the judiciary is clearing the brush for the President's "America First" agenda to take full root.

This opening could not come at a more critical time. The administration is already moving at breakneck speed to operationalize its mandate. The recent DHS contract to acquire a dedicated fleet of Boeing 737s for removal operations shows that the White House is serious about the logistics of mass repatriation. But logistics mean nothing without the legal authority to act decisively.

If the Court rules as the text of the Constitution demands, the magnet that draws millions to cross our borders illegally will be unplugged. The message to the world will shift overnight from "come and stay" to "respect our laws or leave."

Of course, the Left will scream about "stripping people

rights." But we must ask: Whose rights? The American citizen's right to a secure homeland, a protected labor market, and a stable social safety net must take precedence. A system that prioritizes the comfort of those who break our laws over the well-being of those who follow them is not an immigration system—it is a surrender. President Trump has done his part by signing the order. The Supreme Court has done its part by agreeing to hear the argument. Now, the rest of the government must prepare for the paradigm shift. We are witnessing the end of the era where American citizenship was treated as a participation trophy for merely stepping onto our soil. It is time to treat it as what it truly is: a privilege defined by the consent of the American people.

How Chuck Schumer finally reaped the whirlwind

By DAVID MARCUS

In 2020, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer unleashed a threat against the Supreme Court's conservative justices in the wake of their decision to overturn *Roe vs Wade's* national protection for abortion. "You have released the whirlwind, and you will pay the price," he bellowed. "You won't know what hit you if you go forward with these awful decisions."

Although Schumer's bellicose words may have contributed to an attempt on Justice Brett Kavanaugh's life back then, five years later it is not the men and women in robes suffering a whirlwind, but rather Schumer himself, and it is one of his own making. This week, Schumer is facing calls to step down from his leadership position from multiple House Democrats including Squad member Rep. Rashida Tlaib, D-Mich., and neo-centrist Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., after his shambolic performance during the government shutdown.

It is likely only a matter of time before such calls for Schumer's ouster echo in the upper chamber as well.

In the end, Christ had an easier 40 days in the desert than Schumer had during this shutdown, where he went from swearing not just that Democrats would never back down, but that they were winning the fight politically, to watching Democrats capitulate with nothing in return. As former Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy pointed out, this was the 'Seinfeld shutdown,' a

shutdown about nothing, and Schumer was decidedly George. Tellingly, Chuck himself did not sign on to the deal to open the government, start paying out SNAP benefits and unchoke our airports, which only makes him appear weaker, because he can't control his caucus.

Schumer is now facing the first true crisis of his five decades in politics, and it doesn't seem like he knows what hit him. The scuttlebut in Washington, D.C., and the Empire State is that, by hook or by crook, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez will take Schumer's Senate seat in 2028, just like she took Rep. Joe Crowley's House seat seven years ago. AOC is not being particularly shy about it, saying this week, "We have several Senate primaries this cycle. I know I'm being asked about New York, [but] that is years from now. I have to remind my own constituents because they think that this election is this year."

This is a long way from, "Chuck is doing a great job and I have no plans to run against him." In the recent mayor's race in New York City, in which AOC was democrat socialist Zohran Mamdani's most important surrogate, Schumer bravely declined, even on Election Day itself, to disclose whether he had cast a ballot for Zany Zohran. It was actually quite amazing: Schumer is the highest-ranking elected Democrat in the United States of America and he decided not to weigh in on whether his party should embrace communism. Schumer couldn't reject Mamdani

because he and his ilk are obviously the future of the party, but he couldn't embrace him because his pro-capitalism and pro-Israel donors won't have it. Schumer wasn't sitting on the fence in the mayor's race, he was impaled on it.

Right now, whether fairly or not, Schumer is the avatar for the old establishment Democrat Party that shuffled off the stage with former President Joe Biden. He is the political version of the Washington Generals, being dunked on over and over by the more talented socialist Globetrotters.

In fact, this whirlwind that Schumer has reaped is entirely his own fault. At any point, he could have shown courage, acted like an adult and tried to work in good faith with Republicans and the Trump administration. Instead, he decided to curse on TikTok like the radical kids who want his job.

It was Schumer who helped to oust former Democrat senators Kyrsten Sinema and Joe Manchin for opposing the party's push to nuke the filibuster in 2021. Where did he think his support was going to come from once he tossed out the moderates?

In the end, Schumer's career will be a cautionary tale, lacking the courage to rein in the radical elements in his caucus and party. He instead opened the door for them and hastened his own exile from power.

Chuck Schumer has well and truly reaped the whirlwind, and in very short order he will most likely be paying the price.

India's 12-Hour Workday Is The Wrong Kind of Capitalism

While the rest of the world frets over artificial intelligence and how it could hollow out demand for human effort, a zeitgeist-defying idea is taking hold in India. Several corporate bosses have publicly said that at India's stage of development, a 70- or even 90-hour workweek is a national imperative.

It's a relief that the four new labour laws that have been brought in haven't gone that far. But they're still helping legitimise the view that an eight-hour day is too lax. While sticking for now to the century-old global consensus that a workweek shouldn't stretch beyond 48 hours, the revised regulations have allowed the option of four 12-hour shifts alongside the standard schedule of six eight-hour days.

It isn't just the federal government that's moving in this direction. Gujarat, Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, states where the bulk of large factories are located, have made similar changes recently, according to labour researcher Bhargav Oza. Political parties of all hues seem to agree that a pro-employer tilt would bring in investments and usher in a Chinese-style manufacturing revolution.

Restrictive labour laws aren't the reason why the share of manufacturing in gross domestic product fell from 18 per cent in 1995 to 12.5 per cent last year, the lowest since at least 1960. A better explanation for why the most populous nation, with its vast army of mostly young workers, is failing to industrialise has come from Ha-Joon Chang, a London-based South Korean economist at the School of Oriental and African Studies. "Your business elites do not want serious industrialisation," he told the Indian magazine Frontline.

That's because the elites are mostly in the financial sector, he says. Even when they are industrialists, their mercantile family background and strong ties



with finance makes them obsessed with short-term returns. As a recent International Monetary Fund analysis shows, when it comes to firms investing in research and development, introducing a new product, or improving a process, India is lagging behind not just developed nations but even low-income developing countries. The failure to innovate can't be pinned on labour.

Beneath the gloss of finance and digitisation, capitalism in India is an unfinished – and perhaps unfinishable – project: 79 per cent of small, family-run manufacturing units in cities (and 94 per cent of rural ones) are single-person ventures, meaning there is no way to separate profits from wages or capital from labour. Unincorporated establishments that do hire outside staff pay employees less than 150,000 rupees (\$1,700) a year, on average.

With such low incomes, what can the working class afford that larger firms will

make – with or without the flexibility of longer workdays? Chinese workers have also been known to put in longer hours than the country's legal limits, but their working conditions and living standards have improved steadily. High-speed trains have allowed migrant workers to visit their homes more frequently.

Like in China, Indian factories, too, can produce for exports, but those are getting squeezed by President Donald Trump's prohibitive 50 per cent tariffs. In a red-hot market for corporate fundraising, companies are investing very little in plant and machinery. It beggars belief that a 12-hour workday will suddenly open the floodgates to new projects.

Besides, there is a difference between what's written in the statutes and what's actually enforced. Even when eight-hour shifts were the maximum permissible, textile factories in Surat routinely extracted 12 hours of work or more.

That went unnoticed until the pandemic snatched away the lifeline – and sent millions of jobless blue-collar workers, unable to afford food or rent, on arduous treks to their villages hundreds of miles away. Many died on the way.

The shadow of that scarring is visible in the revamped labour code. It acknowledges that the state needs to know more about internal migrants and help them with portable access to ration shops and social security. Among other welcome features of the new laws, it's now mandatory for employers to give out appointment letters. The principal employer will be responsible for any unpaid wages of contract labour. Assurance of health and life insurance to gig workers reflects a more realistic reassessment of a digitised urban economy.

Yet it's also important to moderate expectations from what the government is describing as a "historic reform". To have 29 different labour laws consolidated

into four may raise manufacturers' hopes, but will they get a breather from harassment? The notorious "inspector raj" will latch on to other infractions to first shut down factories – and then demand bribes for reopening them. Likewise, while it's a progressive idea to let women work night shifts in factories, will employers put in place the safeguards that the new laws require of them?

India's finance-obsessed capitalists want to deflect attention from their own failures to invest in new technologies and develop new markets. Now that advances in AI have sped up the innovation cycle, and Trump is squeezing India on trade, they want to extract more juice out of labour. Ultimately, though, no country is going to get rich in the 21st century by taking away more hours of the day from working-class families. India is no exception.

By Andy Mukherjee

IndiGo Crisis Is What Happens When Market Power Becomes Market Arrogance

Captain GR Gopinath

Three days ago, I received a call late at night from an old friend, saying that he was in a crisis and needed urgent help. He was in Kolkata. His IndiGo flight early next morning to Bangalore was cancelled, and he was stranded along with his wife and daughter at the airport. His daughter was to get married the next day. No one from the airline had a clue when the next flight would be available.

Seeing his desperation and imagining the plight of his daughter, I immediately called someone in the senior management at IndiGo, who had served in Air Deccan years ago. I requested him to try to put the distraught girl on any flight along with her parents. The IndiGo official admitted there was an unmanageable crisis in the rostering of pilots due to the new policy on Flight Duty Time Limitations - 'FDTL' in aviation parlance - imposed by the Directorate-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which restricted many pilots from undertaking flying as it would exceed the prescribed limit. He said the crisis had snowballed and it was difficult to predict which flight would operate or get cancelled. Still, he assured me he would help. The girl was lucky: after a slew of cancellations, she made it to Bangalore just a few hours before the ceremony.

That made me recall an incident some decades ago from my Army days. My regiment was at a high altitude on the Chinese border. Due to heavy snowfall and landslides, a jawan from my regiment travelling to his village in Uttar Pradesh for his wedding could not reach Siliguri in time and missed his train. The parents of the bride and groom were told by the priest that it would be inauspicious to postpone the wedding ceremony, and thus, the marriage rites were performed with the jawan's photograph.

I narrate the foregoing because in the deluge of statistics, we don't realise the gravity of human suffering and anxiety when travel plans are upended. While the avalanche was an act of nature or God that

prevented the armyman from being present at his wedding, the IndiGo crisis, going by reports and Aviation Ministry circulars, including the press note by the airline, is self-made.

An Unprecedented, Embarrassing Meltdown

A tsunami hit IndiGo on December 2 and reached gargantuan proportions over the next three days, leaving thousands of passengers across the nation in lurch as nearly 1,300 flights were cancelled. On January 5 alone, more than a thousand IndiGo flights were cancelled, with a staggering two???lakh passengers stressed and stranded, and a nation left hostage to a single aviation company. The disruption and distress was unprecedented in the history of aviation in the world and caught the nation unawares. It was also an acute embarrassment given it coincided with the state visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Just to clear the fog, the FDTL, or maximum flight duty period (FDP), is a set of regulatory rules that define the maximum time pilots and cabin crew are allowed to work, fly and be on duty. Aimed at preventing fatigue and maintaining flight safety, the rules, for example, may specify that a pilot can fly 900 hours in a year but not more than 100 hours in 28 days. Or, not exceed eight hours at a stretch with two pilots, or 13-16 hrs with three to four pilots on a single day, with not more than five to six stopovers, and fewer landings at nights. Duty time starts when a pilot reports an hour before flight time, till the aircraft comes to a complete stop at the destination.

How The FDTL Came Into Being

The International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is an apex body that defines global standards, which are then adapted by member countries. The world's two main regulatory bodies, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), which together operate the largest number of airliners in the world, follow ICAO guidelines. They strictly

comply when new rules and regulations are introduced, something that has been happening over the years.

However, India's DGCA did not follow FDTL guidelines in complete consonance with the ICAO, or the FAA and the EASA. For a few years, there had been pressure from the Indian Pilots Association to bring the FDTL on par with ICAO guidelines. They were unhappy that airline managements were exploitative, forcing pilots to fly flouting international norms, making their jobs unsafe and stressful. Thereafter, the DGCA held wide-ranging consultations with airlines' managements, pilot bodies and other stakeholders, and considering safety paramount, notified the new FDTL rules in May 2024. The implementation was in two stages: July 1 was when the first phase came into effect, and the second phase was completed on November 1. Which implies that airlines and pilots had nearly 20 months in total to comply with the new regulations. Clearly, IndiGo did not care.

IndiGo, Interrupted

First a tribute to the devil where it's due. IndiGo has grown to a colossal size, with its fleet size having grown to 420 aircraft in the 19 years since its inception, an unmatched track record of efficient and near flawless execution, on-time operations, young and sparkling aeroplanes, well turned-out cabin crew, zero fatal accidents, incredible growth in revenue and profitability, and a meteoric rise in market capitalisation reaching about USD 22 billion. It is a global airline in size and reputation. No mean achievement.

But along the way, it metamorphosed into a monstrous and arrogant behemoth. With eyes on the stock market, it lost empathy for passengers. Kingfisher's collapse, Jet Airways and GoAir going bankrupt in quick succession, the exit of some 300 planes, the shrinking of SpiceJet from 100 to some 20-odd aircraft, and the decrepit Air India floundering even after the

Tatas bought it and merged their two other loss making airlines, AirAsia and Vistara with it, led everyone to flock to IndiGo. One expected that with the Tatas stepping in, Air India would be able to give a robust competition to IndiGo. However, given its never-ending travails, recurring unsavoury incidents, frequent flight disruptions and the ghastly Ahmedabad to London crash, IndiGo now is a de-facto monopoly. And what comes with monopolies is conceit and extortion through high fares.

Airlines in India face a daunting twin challenge, one seemingly irreconcilable: safety and profit. With less flying, too many aircraft stuck in hangars for maintenance and extra aircrafts kept as back up for flight cancellations, an airline would go belly up. Airlines need to sweat all assets to the hilt - including people and all resources - and fly the maximum hours in a day to make profits. But if you are greedy, reckless, cut corners and compromise with safety, the product simply ceases to exist. You go bankrupt.

Time Wasted

IndiGo, like other airlines, had 20 whole months to prepare for compliance with the new regulations. This required recruitment of more co-pilots, captains and cabin crew. Induction of new pilots requires having foresight and thorough planning. IndiGo reportedly was already facing a huge shortfall of pilots, and with new FDTL policy kicking in, it surely couldn't have expected itself to keep up. Moreover, while full-service carriers like Air India need 11 pilots per plane as they fly fewer hours, low-cost airlines that fly more hours require 13-14 pilots a plane under the new guidelines. It is widely believed that IndiGo's senior management thought that it would be able to convince the Civil Aviation ministry, by dint of their sheer market size, to postpone the enforcement of the new FDTL rules. Fewer pilots flying more hours meant higher profits and a boost to stock. The management at IndiGo should have listened to flight operations and rostering departments, as well as line pilots, and conducted a

town hall. Good leaders encourage feedback without reprisals. While Air India, Akasa Air and SpiceJet diligently recruited, trained and absorbed pilots, IndiGo, by all indications seemed impervious to its own pilots' demands. Pilot recruitment and induction takes time and diligence, as does updating crew rostering software and data integration of flight times of 5,000-6000 pilots and calculating route flying hours. This is outsourced to global companies like Sabre-CAE and airlines software supplier AIMS. With increased winter schedules, technical glitches and what IndiGo's statement termed "multitude of other unforeseen operational challenges" with the new restrictions, the system collapsed. Separately, IndiGo's aggressive expansion, with wet leasing of wide-bodied Boeing 787 Dreamliners and Boeing 777s, ordering Airbus 350s, and launching new international routes, may also have distracted its management from looking into these rather 'boring' nitty-gritties. Blame Where Due The IndiGo Board must now introspect as the buck stops at its door. It must take responsibility for its lapses, and heads must roll. The mayhem also holds a lesson for the government. The DGCA issued a new notification yesterday relaxing some restrictions on FDTL for two months in consideration of the trauma of passengers and fear of more cancellations in the offing. The pilot bodies have already protested. Was this a prudent move by the government? Won't it be setting a wrong precedent and demoralising the airlines that complied? This also lays the government open to charges of succumbing to pressure from bullying by a dominant airline. A country cannot grow robustly and vibrantly with duopolies, or rapacious monopolies, however efficient, in any sector. We inherited some part of this from the Jawaharlal Nehru years - when we had only Ambassador cars, or Bajaj Scooters or the Air India of JRD Tatas, an iconic airline that was ultimately nationalised and became a moribund monopoly. Let's not turn the clock back now.

Invoked When Needed, Ignored When Not: How A New US Doctrine Sees India

Syed Akbaruddin

The 2025 US National Security Strategy (NSS) was released just as Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded his first visit to India since the war in Ukraine began. While Delhi and Moscow were seeking to expand their strategic canvas, Washington was unveiling its own strategic calculus. It involves narrowing the US's own global map, elevating geoeconomics as the main tool of statecraft, hardening its economic rivalry with China, and viewing partnerships as instruments to preserve American primacy in that contest. This is not just an update. It is a redrawing, and India should take notice.

The 33-page document declares that the United States will no longer pretend to be equally responsible for every problem, everywhere. It puts the Western Hemisphere first and sketches a "Trump corollary", a 21st-century extension of the Monroe Doctrine: a hemisphere that Washington intends to secure, while it manages only select risks beyond.

The 2022 NSS welded values and interests into its strategic story, emphasising democracy, climate, and public health as part of the global agenda. The new version disdains that framing. Instead, it speaks the transactional language of leverage: reciprocal tariffs, technology standards, supply chain control, critical mineral alliances and migration enforcement.

'India-Pakistan', Again

India features only selectively, and differently from the 2022 version. It appears first in the introduction, alongside Pakistan, as part of President Trump's self-described peacemaking efforts. Then, as a functional node in a system designed to outcompete China: a Quad security contributor, a partner in critical-minerals and infrastructure coalitions, including in Africa, and a sea-lane partner from the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea. On China, at first glance there is convergence. The NSS describes it as a coercive, revisionist power that distorts markets, steals intellectual property and uses control over minerals and manufacturing for leverage. These concerns mirror India's own de-risking and diversification strategies. On maritime security and sea-lane resilience, interests clearly align. Alignment, however, is not equivalence. The NSS is focused on Taiwan and the First Island Chain. India's China challenge remains primarily continental, from the unresolved Line of Actual Control (LAC) and salami slicing in the Himalayas to growing Chinese influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Delhi has no interest in being



Image tweeted by @USAandIndia

drawn into Taiwan-related contingencies or entangled in East Asian war-gaming scenarios. Another shift is cartographic. South Asia barely registers as a distinct theatre. Unlike the 2017 NSS, which discussed Pakistan-based militancy and the Indo-Pak nuclear risk, the 2025 document recasts India as purely an Indo-Pacific actor. US activity in the subcontinent or the Indian Ocean will be driven by its competition with China, not by a broader concern for regional balance. •The Recalibration With Europe Across other regions, the pattern is similar. Europe is cast as a standards and supply-chain partner. Russia is effectively regionalised and treated as a danger in Europe to be managed through sanctions and strategic stability talks, with Europe expected to bear the main burden, including the long grind over Ukraine. Africa is viewed as a source of critical minerals, the Middle East as an energy corridor to be stabilised at minimum cost, and Latin America through the lens of migration and narcotics control. The old global policeman is being replaced by a hemispheric custodian with carefully chosen external commitments. For India, this American minimalism offers both opportunity and risk. It creates space to shape outcomes in its own neighbourhood in South Asia, the Gulf, ASEAN, and parts of Africa. These rising, resource-rich and strategically fluid regions are areas where India's partnerships can grow. But it also signals a world where Washington engages selectively, uses partners instrumentally and may expect

alignment without offering proportional political capital. India could become a convenience partner, invoked when useful and ignored when inconvenient. The India-US partnership could become a negotiation over deliverables: maritime presence, standards alignment, export-control coordination and defence interoperability. The risk is that US expectations may rise faster than Washington's willingness to respect Indian red lines on China, Russia or the wider Global South. How India Should Respond India's partnership with the United States is too consequential to ignore this recalibration. Hoping that language will not translate into practice is not a sustainable approach. The question then is how India should respond to this American strategy. First, while the NSS is already drawing heat in Europe, India has no reason to panic, but every reason to study it closely. It could treat the NSS as a menu of convergences, not a blueprint for behaviour. Cooperation could focus on the global commons: maritime domain awareness, Indian Ocean security, humanitarian assistance, anti-piracy and illegal fishing. These are areas of high alignment and low entanglement, where India's support is natural and visible. Second, India must elevate the economic terms of engagement. If the United States wants to use commercial ties to elicit strategic cooperation, India could insist on concrete outcomes: co-development and co-production in defence, predictable technology flows, serious investment in Indian manufacturing and digital ecosystems,

and reliable access to American and allied markets. Don't Fight Other's Third, India must enforce theatre separability. Deterrence on the Line of Actual Control is not a bargaining chip for Taiwan contingencies. Taiwan is not India's war. This must be communicated quietly to Washington. India must be clear: alignment is not obligation. Fourth, India must shape the coalitions it joins, especially in Africa and the wider Global South. It must not act as a subcontractor in a US-led resource race. Any unilateral platform must reflect Indian priorities, such as local value addition, debt sustainability and respect for national agency. Fifth, India must sharpen and widen its partnerships with Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, seeking multiple technology channels and diplomatic avenues, while continuing its engagement with Russia. The objective is that no single relationship reaches a level of dependency that constrains sovereign choices. Clarity of national purpose need not be confrontational. The NSS makes no apology for American interests and India does not see that posture as hostile. In a world of shifting coalitions and selective commitments, the United States is playing the new game with clarity. India must play it too - on its own terms, and unapologetically. That means engaging Washington, managing Beijing, courting Brussels, and keeping Moscow in the conversation, even as India steps forward as a leadership voice in the Global South.

India shouldn't be in delusion...: Asim Munir in 1st address as tri-services chief

(News Agency) In his first speech after being appointed Pakistan's first Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), Field Marshal Asim Munir issued yet another warning to India, claiming that Islamabad's response would be even more "swift, severe, and intense" in the event of any future aggression. In his address to officers following a guard of honour, Munir said, "India should not be in any delusion [as] Pakistan's response [in case of any aggression] will be even more swift and intense." Munir described the establishment of the newly-formed Defence Forces Headquarters as "historic," explaining that it aims to enhance multi-domain operations through the unified system of the army, air force, and navy, reported Pakistani news channel Geo News. Highlighting "growing and changing threats", Munir said

In his first address after becoming Pakistan's inaugural Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), Field Marshal Asim Munir warned India once again, asserting that any future act of aggression would be met with an even more "swift, severe, and intense" response from Islamabad.



that it was the need of the hour to intergrate all three services under the aegis of the newly-launched Defence Forces Headquarters. "The Defence Forces' Headquarters will integrate the operations of the

[three] services and will make them compatible. With the synergy of the high command, the three services will maintain their [individual] autonomy and organisational structure," he further said. Highlighting the

evolution of modern warfare, Munir praised the resilience of the Pakistani people and the military's performance during Operation Sindoor, calling it a "case study" for future conflicts. "Wars have now

expanded to cyberspace, electromagnetic spectrum, space, information operations, AI, quantum computing; [therefore], the armed forces will have to adapt to new requirements of war," he said. The ceremony was attended by senior officers from all three services, including Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu and Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Naveed Ashraf. Munir will now hold the CDF post concurrently with his five-year term as Chief of Army Staff. Munir, who was promoted to field marshal after India inflicted heavy losses on the Pakistani security establishment during Operation Sindoor, is the country's second field marshal and the first in over six decades. The creation of the CDF post followed President Zardari's approval of the Pakistan Army, Air Force, and Navy (Amendment) Bills 2025.

Pak to take back sex grooming gang members from UK, wants political rebels too

Islamabad has reportedly floated a proposal to London to accept the return of convicted members of Pakistani grooming gangs from the UK in exchange for Britain extraditing two high-profile anti-Asim Munir political dissidents. The two are former PM Imran Khan's aide Shahzad Akbar, and a Pakistani army dissident, Adil Raja.

(News Agency) In a quid pro quo move, Pakistan has reportedly floated a proposal to the UK to accept Pakistani-origin convicted sex offenders from Britain, but wants Britain to hand over some rebels of the regime too. Islamabad said it would accept the return of convicted members of the Pakistani grooming gang, like Qari Abdul Rauf and Adil Khan, in exchange for Britain extraditing two high-profile anti-Asim Munir political dissidents. The two dissidents are Shahzad Akbar, the special assistant to former PM Imran Khan, and Adil Raja, a Pakistani army officer-turner-whistleblower, reported US-based independent outlet, Drop Site News, citing sources. Both, Shahzad Akbar and Adil Raja have been living in exile in the UK since around April 2022, and are critics of the hybrid regime of Asim Munir-led military and PM Shehbaz Sharif. Grooming gangs in the UK were networks of predominantly

Pakistani men who targeted mostly white minor girls, "groomed" and gang-raped them. These girls were threatened by the Pakistani men and passed on among themselves. The extent of the sex racket shocked the world. One girl was sexually assaulted by 30-40 men in one night. The Drop Site News report comes just days after Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi held a meeting with the UK High Commissioner, and weeks after a wave of rumours involving jailed former PM Imran Khan prompted the government to aggressively denounce "fake news" circulating overseas. The report is also significant as British PM Keir Starmer's government have continued to push for the deportation of Rochdale grooming gang members like Qari Abdul Rauf and Adil Khan to Pakistan. It was an issue amplified over the past two years by tech tycoon Elon Musk, who claimed that "a quarter of a million" children in the UK were

victims. Until now, progress has been blocked by Pakistan's longstanding refusal to take the men back and by the convicts' attempts to renounce their nationality to avoid repatriation. However, the reported quid pro quo suggests Islamabad might now be willing to break the deadlock only if it gets its hands on the two dissidents it has long tried to silence. But so far, no mainstream outlet or government source has confirmed the alleged quid pro quo.

A UK-PAK DUAL DEAL THAT CRITICS SAY, 'PAK WEAPONISING GROOMING GANG MEMBERS'

The alleged proposal emerged after a December 4 meeting in Islamabad between Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and UK High Commissioner Jane Marriott. Official statements described the talks as focused on "security cooperation", tackling "fake news", and repatriating

undocumented Pakistanis. While the Karachi-based Dawn reported that both parties "discussed the return of Pakistanis illegally residing in the UK", nothing in the public readouts mentioned grooming gang offenders. Drop Site News, citing unnamed sources, claimed that Naqvi framed the deportation of Rauf and Khan under the broad category of "Pakistanis illegally residing in the UK". Naqvi, according to the Dawn report, also stressed that Pakistan could not allow "slander and defamation against state institutions from those sitting abroad," referring to Akbar and Raja. In return for the extradition of Akbar and Raja, Pakistan would issue travel documents for the convicted offenders; the men were stripped of their UK citizenship in 2018 and rendered effectively stateless after renouncing their Pakistani nationality. Their deportation has been stuck ever since in

the loophole. Reacting to Naqvi's formal submission to the UK High Commissioner, former Imran Khan aide Akbar wrote on X, "It has become increasingly clear that my publications, broadcasts, and political commentary on human rights abuses in Pakistan, the rise of authoritarianism, unconstitutional amendments, and the current impasse over military appointments have deeply angered the regime." New York City-based journalist, Waqas Ahmed, who contributed to the report on Drop Site News, said on X, "Normal people do not think like this, but the Pakistani government does. They have finally figured out a way to weaponise British grooming gangs against overseas activists. A Lahore-based person, Faraz, on X, said, "The Pakistani Government now uses grooming gangs as diplomatic leverage".

"No President Has Worked Harder": Trump Rebuts Claims of Declining Health

Trump's post comes after an NYT report noted fewer public events, reduced domestic travel, and a moment when he appeared to doze during an Oval Office meeting. At 79, Trump remains the oldest elected US president, with questions about age and stamina continuing to draw public attention.

(News Agency) US President Donald Trump on Wednesday issued an extended rebuttal to any suggestion that he is slowing down, declaring himself in "perfect" physical and cognitive health and accusing The New York Times of spreading "fake" reports about his age and stamina. In a lengthy post on Truth Social, Trump said, "There has never been a President that has worked as hard as me," adding that his hours were "the longest" and his results "among the best." He listed what he claimed were his major achievements, including ending "Eight Wars," creating the "Greatest Economy in the History of our Country," rebuilding the military, enacting the "Largest Tax Cuts and Regulation Cuts, EVER,"

closing the southern border, and cultivating global respect for the United States. In addition to these achievements, Trump stressed his medical and cognitive examinations. Trump said he regularly undergoes "long, thorough, and very boring Medical Examinations" at Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre and claimed doctors had given him "PERFECT Marks." He also said he had taken three cognitive tests, including one recently, and had "aced" all of them "in front of large numbers of doctors and experts."

STORIES YOU MAY LIKE

Foreign woman breaks down in tears after 'traumatising' concert experience in Guwahati drank soaked methi water every night for

30 days. **attention** me Imagine if Trump married his sister: US President ramps up attacks on Ilhan Omar Trump said that few people could perform similarly and said previous presidents had declined to take such tests, adding, "I will know when I am slowing up, but it's not now." Trump said that few people could perform similarly and said previous presidents had declined to take such tests, adding, "I will know when I am slowing up, but it's not now."

PAST PROCEDURES AND PUBLIC SCRUTINY

Trump has previously shared limited information about medical procedures, prompting questions about his health. During a recent

trip to Asia, he revealed that he had undergone magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) at Walter Reed in early October. Asked about it, Trump told reporters he did not know exactly what was analysed, but insisted the results were "as good as they've ever seen." Observers have noted other physical indicators, including a bruise on the back of his right hand – which aides and his physician attribute to taking aspirin and frequent handshakes – as well as swollen ankles. Speculation about his health circulated widely online in September because of these visible signs. Trump reportedly does not exercise regularly, citing a belief that people have a finite energy reserve. He continues to

consume red meat and fast food and frequently comments on weight-loss drugs, though it is unclear whether he uses them himself.

NYT REPORT QUESTIONS TRUMP'S PUBLIC SCHEDULE

Trump's post comes after a November 25 New York Times article noting that his public schedule has narrowed during his second term. The paper said most appearances fall between noon and 5 pm, domestic travel has decreased, and at a November 6 Oval Office event, Trump appeared to doze off while seated as executives discussed weight-loss drugs. domestic and international engagements.

Australia is trying to enforce the first teen Social media ban Governments worldwide are watching

(News Agency) Australia on Wednesday became the first country to formally bar users under the age of 16 from accessing major social media platforms, a move expected to be closely monitored by global tech companies and policymakers around the world. Canberra's ban, which came into effect from midnight local time, targets 10 major services, including Alphabet's YouTube, Meta's Instagram, ByteDance's TikTok, Reddit, Snapchat and Elon Musk's X. The controversial rule requires these platforms to take "reasonable steps" to prevent underage access, using age-verification methods such as inference from online activity, facial estimation via selfies, uploaded IDs, or linked bank details. All targeted platforms had agreed to comply with the policy to some extent. Elon Musk's X had been one of the last holdouts, but signaled on Wednesday that it would comply. The policy means millions of Australian children are expected to have lost access to their social accounts. However, the impact of the policy could be even wider, as it will set a benchmark for other governments considering teen

social media bans, including Denmark, Norway, France, Spain, Malaysia and New Zealand. Controversial rollout Ahead of the legislation's passage last year, a YouGov survey found that 77% of Australians backed the under-16 social media ban. Still, the rollout has faced some resistance since becoming law. Supporters of the

bill have argued it safeguards children from social media-linked harms, including cyberbullying, mental health issues, and exposure to predators and pornography. Among those welcoming the official ban on Wednesday was Jonathan Haidt, social psychologist and author of *The Anxious Generation*, a 2024

best-selling book that linked a growing mental health crisis to smartphone and social media usage, especially for the young. In a post on social media platform X, Haidt commended policymakers in Australia for "freeing kids under 16 from the social media trap." "There will surely be difficulties in the early months, but the world is rooting for

your success, and many other nations will follow," he added. On the other hand, opponents contend that the ban infringes on freedoms of expression and access to information, raises privacy concerns through invasive age verification, and represents excessive government intervention that undermines parental responsibility.

Inside India's secret ganja retreat

(News Agency) Nikhil Khosla (name changed) stood at a crossroads in Manali, Himachal Pradesh, following the coordinates he had been given for a retreat he had been anticipating for months. It was in the middle of nowhere, and he had travelled without knowing his exact destination. A stranger soon appeared, and led Khosla to an isolated property in the middle of a forested area where people kept arriving. This was no ordinary retreat. Imagine the vibe of arriving at a property in HBO's *The White Lotus*, except here, everyone knew why they had come. It was a three-day getaway for "functional cannabis users", where they smoked marijuana freely within a closed circle, trekked, practised yoga, tried aura cleansing, and even worked remotely if they wanted to—all this, while being high. Participants must sign a non-disclosure agreement after being vetted and selected, agreeing not to post photos or reveal the organisers' names or the retreat's location. It must be noted that the retreat is designed for functional stoners, which means people who can work while being high. Guests

bring their laptops, handle work tasks remotely, while doing group activities. It's an argument stoners have long made, that productivity is possible even when one is high. Since 2022, Khosla has been on two such trips in the Himalayas and is already planning a third. This time too, he has no idea where it will take place. But the participants at the event are growing year after year. In 2022, 10 people attended the event. This year, 25 people are being "selected". These aren't open events. Much like in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, where attendees of the infamous masked orgy are carefully selected and invited. Khosla, and nine others, were picked after submitting copies of official documents like Aadhaar, and an interview. These events are aimed at startup founders, entrepreneurs and young executives, and cost anywhere between Rs 1.25 lakh to 1.5 lakh. Looking for sources for this story was also much like scoring pot, as people were hesitant to speak about ganja, especially to a journalist. It was only after assurances to protect their identity did they

There are few things in India that enjoy religious and cultural sanctions as much as the use of cannabis does. And yet, it's consumption is illegal.

agree to share what happens at such retreats, in a closed community of like-minded stoners. The organisers of the event India Today Digital spoke to are based in New Delhi and Amsterdam, Netherlands. And despite the illegality, they manage to pass the joint in their secret commune with much ease and almost full anonymity, despite their presence on social media. Yet, there could be serious repercussions, say a lawyer and a police officer, India Today Digital spoke to. "It must be noted that smoking ganja is a criminal offence under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

Don't travel to India: Attorneys warn H-1B visa holders amid interview rescheduling

Immigration attorneys have urged H-1B visa holders not to travel to India after the mass postponement of visa interviews from December to March and April 2026. They are suggesting that H-1B visa holders be in the US.

Those travelling could risk losing jobs and being separated from families.

(Our Staff Reporter) Immigration attorneys have advised Indian H-1B visa holders to avoid travelling to India after a mass postponement of visa interviews in the country. With a last-minute message, the US put off interviews in India, scheduled for December, to March and April 2026. Immigration experts said travelling by H-1B visa holders could cost them their jobs as several American companies cannot legally allow prolonged work from home from outside the US. Hundreds of H-1B visa holders reportedly travelled to India to appear for their interviews scheduled in December at consular offices, but they have now received last-minute emails that their appointment dates have been rescheduled to March, April, or May 2026, causing chaos among visa applicants. The postponing of interviews was announced a week after the US

State Department stated it would begin social media screening of H-1B applicants and family members on dependent visas, expanding the review of online profiles that initially began with student visa holders earlier this year. Immigration expert Rahul Reddy warned that travelling now could leave H-1B workers jobless and separated from their families. "Do not travel internationally for visa stamping unless you already have a valid visa in your passport," he advised H-1B visa holders. H-1B role vacant for half a year. Many cannot legally allow remote work from outside the United States due to export-control, payroll, and tax restrictions. This reality means one thing: if an H-1B worker travels now, they may return not

to their job but to unemployment," Rahul Reddy, the founding partner of US-based immigration firm Reddy



Neumann Brown PC, said.

H-1B VISA HOLDERS ALREADY IN INDIA HAVE TO WAIT: EXPERT

Another immigration attorney from the same firm, Rebecca Chen, advised that even those who have not received an email should postpone travel to India for now. People who are already in India and need visa stamping before they

can return to the US now have no choice but to wait, according to Rebecca Chen. According to immigration attorneys, one needs a visa stamp to re-enter the US. So, if a visa holder is already in the US, the person should avoid travelling for visa stamping. Do not travel to India for stamping even if your appointment date has not been rescheduled, as the stamping is to enter the US and does not determine your legal status in the US, according to a report in The Times of India. Applicants who travelled to India for their visa appointments, only to have their dates pushed to 2026, have no choice but to wait in India.

US POSTPONED H-1B VISA INTERVIEWS IN INDIA AMID SOCIAL MEDIA

VETTING RULE

The US postponed H-1B visa interviews in India at the last minute, causing chaos. The development comes days after the US State Department asked H-1B and H-4 visa applicants to make their social media accounts public. The State Department last week announced that it would begin social media screening of H-1B applicants and family members on dependent visas, expanding review of online profiles that initially began with student visa holders earlier this year. Interviews scheduled between mid- and late-December are being pushed back as late as next summer, multiple attorneys told Bloomberg. This will affect many Indians working in the US, as those seeking to renew their visa stamps could face months-long delays in returning while they wait for new appointments.

NATO's Rutte: Prepare for Coming World War

(Our Staff Reporter) NATO chief Mark Rutte on Thursday warned allies to prepare for another world war, saying Europe is "Russia's next target." Speaking at a security event in Berlin, the secretary general painted a stark picture of the continent's future, saying Russia could be ready to use force against NATO "within five years" and urging Europeans to "shift to a wartime mindset." He said allies must prepare for conflict on the scale their "grandparents or great-grandparents endured," including mass mobilization and widespread destruction. Rutte argued that Moscow's full-scale war on Ukraine, backed by Chinese technology and Iranian and North Korean arms, proves the Kremlin is rebuilding an "empire" and sees free European societies as a threat. He warned that if Russian President Vladimir Putin crushes Ukraine and reaches NATO's borders, alliance members would face "a truly gargantuan" surge in defense costs and a far higher

risk of direct attack. Rutte hailed this year's NATO summit in The Hague, where leaders agreed to drive total defense-related spending to 5% of GDP by 2035 — including 3.5% on core military outlays, far above the long-standing 2% benchmark. Germany alone is planning to reach 3.5% by 2029, which Rutte called "staggering," and he pressed other European governments to follow. At the same time, NATO is launching new operations such as "Eastern Sentry" and "Baltic Sentry" to reinforce the alliance's eastern flank and protect critical infrastructure after Russian drones violated Polish airspace and undersea cables were cut in the Baltic. Rutte also touted a NATO program known as PURL (Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List), which funnels U.S.-made Patriot missiles and other air-defense munitions to Ukraine using allied money. More than two-thirds of member states have signed on, with around \$4 billion pledged so



far. But while the NATO chief insists "the time for action is now," his rhetoric will raise eyebrows among conservatives who see Europe's elites again reaching for American firepower while asking voters at home to accept higher taxes, inflation and what Rutte openly calls "emergency budgets." In his speech, he acknowledged that such a buildup would mean painful trade-offs across

domestic programs. In February, Rutte tried to reassure Washington that Europe is finally shouldering more of the burden and he gave credit to President Donald Trump. The secretary-general noted it was the president, "when he was Trump 45 and now Trump 47," who consistently demanded that European allies and Canada spend more on defense, and

argued that the new 5% target is exactly what Trump has been asking for since his first term. Rutte also conceded in other Berlin remarks that "President Trump wants to end the bloodshed now, and he's the only one who can get Putin to the negotiating table," effectively acknowledging that any serious peace push will have to run through Washington and Trump's White House.

When Dhurandhar Star Akshaye Khanna Opened Up About Going Bald At 19: "It's Devastating, Can Mentally Kill You"

(Our Staff Reporter)

Akshaye Khanna may be earning widespread acclaim today for his power-packed performance in Dhurandhar, but a resurfaced interview has brought attention back to an emotional chapter from his past. Long before he became one of Bollywood's most nuanced actors, Akshaye faced an unexpected struggle, one that shaped his early adulthood and challenged his confidence at a time when appearances mattered the most.

Facing Premature Baldness At 19

In an old conversation with Mid-Day, Akshaye Khanna opened up about the shock and pain of losing his hair as a teenager. "It started happening at such a young age, and it was like a pianist losing his fingers. It almost felt like that in those days. I mean, until you truly come to terms with it, it keeps bothering you. When you wake up in the morning, looking at the papers, and you realise, 'I can't read that. What's written? I need glasses.' It would affect you, right?" he shared. Akshaye went on to describe how physical changes can deeply impact people in different professions. "You might be a sportsman, a cricketer or a footballer, and realise that you might need knee surgery. So it's heartbreaking, you might lose a year or two years of your career. So, as I said, it's like a pianist losing his fingers, because the way you look, as an actor, is very important," the actor said. For him, hair loss wasn't just about vanity, it was about identity. As a young actor preparing to enter films, he feared the loss of opportunities and the pressure of public perception. A Struggle No 19-Year-Old Is Prepared For Sharing how deeply it affected him, Akshaye added, "Especially this part (face). I mean, this part (body) you can still cover it

"It started happening at such a young age, and it was like a pianist losing his fingers," said Akshaye



up or whatever. At 19-20, it's Akshaye's honesty sheds light on the emotional reality caused by genetics, hormonal imbalance, or autoimmune conditions-can begin as early as the late teens. For men in particular, early hair loss can deeply affect self-esteem, body image, and mental health

Beyonce, Venus Williams And Nicole Kidman Join Anna Wintour As Met Gala Co-Chairs

(Our Staff Reporter)

The new Met Gala co-chairs have been announced, and it's a high-powered quartet: Beyoncé, Venus Williams and Nicole Kidman will join Vogue's Anna Wintour in hosting the star-studded event next May. Williams, who has never hosted before, takes on the role seven years after her younger sister and fellow tennis champion, Serena, served as co-chair. Beyoncé was an honorary chair in 2013, and Kidman co-chaired in 2003 and 2005. Wintour, of course, oversees the annual event - a fundraiser that last year brought a record \$31 million to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute. The museum on Wednesday also announced a gala host committee, chaired by designer Anthony Vaccarello and filmmaker Zoe Kravitz, and including musicians Sabrina Carpenter, Doja Cat, LISA, Sam Smith and Yseult; dancer Misty Copeland; actors Teyana Taylor, Elizabeth Debicki, Gwendoline Christie and Lena Dunham; basketball player A'ja Wilson; models Alex Consani, Paloma Elsesser and Lauren Wasser; Vogue editor Chloe Malle; and artist Anna Weyant. Yet to be announced is the dress code for the May 4 gala, though it will dovetail with the

theme of "Costume Art," revealed last month as the institute's next spring exhibition. •The exhibition aims to celebrate "the dressed body" as it appears in art across the centuries. It will do this by pairing garments with objects from across the museum to show how fashion has long been intertwined with a variety of

traditional themes such as the "Pregnant Body" and the "Aging Body". The new exhibition will also have a striking new home. "Costume Art" will inaugurate new gallery space occupying some 12,000 square feet (1,115 square metres), just off the museum's Great Hall - giving fashion a prominent space in the museum while also helping to ease



congestion at the heavily attended exhibitions. The new Conde M. Nast Galleries - created from what was formerly the museum's retail store - will house not only all spring Costume Institute exhibitions but also other shows from different departments of the museum. Bolton has said the gallery space "will mark a pivotal moment for the department, one that acknowledges the critical role fashion plays not only within art history but also within contemporary culture."

art forms."It's a show that can really live in fascinating ways at the museum and can pull from all different areas of our collection - paintings, sculpture, drawings," the museum's CEO and director, Max Hollein, said in an interview last month. The show, overseen as always by the Costume Institute's curator in charge, Andrew Bolton, will be organised thematically by different body types. It will include the "Naked Body" and the "Classical Body", as well as less

Venus Williams returned to competition in July at the age of 45 after nearly a year and a half away from the tour, though she had never formally retired. She became the oldest player to compete in singles at the US Open since 1981. Serena Williams, meanwhile, recently dismissed speculation that she might be preparing for a return to tennis. "Costume Art" opens to the public on May 10, 2026, and runs until January 10, 2027.

Soulful Christmas Escapes For A Meaningful Winter Getaway

(News Agency) This Christmas, trade the tinsel for transcendence without losing the festive cheer. We've curated a collection of boutique havens that promise not just luxury, but a deeper connection to self, nature, and culture. These are not mere holidays; they are transformational journeys designed to quiet the mind, nourish the spirit, and leave you truly rejuvenated for a season centred on joy, kindness, and meaningful connection. Each destination has been thoughtfully chosen for its experiences and for weather that is just right for winter wanderings. Wake up to acres of swaying coconut palms that open out to soft golden sands,

a sea so perfectly tempered it tempts you in, and the rhythmic pull of Kerala's iconic fishing nets. At Marari Beach, part of the CGH Earth collection, guests are invited to join local fishermen at dawn, participating in the age-old ritual of the morning catch and engaging in quiet conversations. This is not a staged experience, it is an unfiltered immersion into coastal life, fostering appreciation for nature's abundance and the enduring spirit of community. It's Christmas as a gentle dance with the sea and its people, grounded in authenticity and effortless serenity. Spread across 55 acres of biodiverse greenery, Marari Beach's earthy luxuries and bespoke services have recently earned it a place among India's top 10 luxury resorts.

Tamil Nadu's Artisan Heart: Weaving Stories Through Threads and Architecture Journey into the textile-rich world of Tamil Nadu, where heritage thrives in every thread. Spend unhurried hours with local weavers, listening to the rhythmic whir of the loom and perhaps even attempting this intricate craft yourself. Whether it's the soft Chettinad cottons, the mesmerising techniques of Kumbakonam's silk weavers, or the detailed artistry of Kalamkari creators near Tanjore, Christmas becomes a quiet celebration of skill, patience, and tradition. For immersive, insightful interactions rooted in centuries-old craftsmanship as well as

Netra Mantena and Vamsi Gadiraju's Udaipur wedding was a fashion extravaganza. From the bride's regal Sabyasachi lehenga to Jennifer Lopez's stunning cut-work saree, here are the looks you can't miss.



architecture, cuisine, and spiritual history, we recommend staying at the heritage home Visalam in Chettinad or the riverside, village-style retreat Mantra Koodam near Kumbakonam. Goa's Unhurried

Rhythms: The True Sussegad Experience Step away from Goa's familiar party narrative and into its soulful, lesser-explored heart. Mansao Curtorim, a beautifully restored 200-year-old Indo-Portuguese bungalow,

offers an intimate window into the authentic sussegad lifestyle, unhurried, serene, deeply rooted. Winter here is perfect for cycling through emerald paddy fields, learning the age-old art of traditional pao

making from community bakers, or simply reading in the mansion's expansive lawn overlooking a tranquil lake. In true CGH style, curated experiences beyond the property offer deeper insights into South Goa's cultural heritage, including the region's little-known Buddhist connections. Himalayan Zen: A Sanctuary of Ancient Wellness Step away from Goa's familiar party narrative and into its soulful, lesser-explored heart. Mansao Curtorim, a beautifully restored 200-year-old Indo-Portuguese bungalow, offers an intimate window into the authentic sussegad lifestyle, unhurried, serene, deeply rooted.

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Where Dhurandhar Was Shot: The Cities And Hidden Corners Behind The Ranveer Singh Starrer

(News Agency) Few films in recent years have blended scale, secrecy, and global movement quite like Dhurandhar. The political-action spectacle, directed by Aditya Dhar, doesn't simply unfold across borders – it feels like a journey, shifting climates, cultures, and geographies as quickly as its protagonists navigate moral grey zones. While the plot follows covert operatives navigating high-risk intelligence missions, the production mirrors that very intrigue, hopping between countries, guarded sets, and culturally dense Indian cities that lend the film its smoky realism. For travellers and cinephiles alike, Dhurandhar offers a fascinating map – a behind-the-scenes itinerary tracing where its most explosive, emotional and atmospheric scenes were built.

Bangkok: Dhurandhar's First Mission Base

The journey begins in Bangkok. Chosen for its chameleon-like cityscape, the Thai capital stands in for multiple narrative settings, including sequences originally meant to depict Pakistan's intelligence corridors. Narrow alleys, neon-lit streets, bustling markets, and waterfront edges all come together to reflect the film's gritty

espionage universe. Thailand's controlled environment and cinematic flexibility allowed Dhar to capture fast-paced chase scenes and covert operations without relying on heavy CGI – anchoring Dhurandhar in tangible reality.

Amritsar: The Cultural Heartbeat

From Southeast Asia, the crew travelled to Amritsar. Filming near the Golden Temple offered a spiritual counterpoint to the film's tense narrative. The city, with its devotional soundscape and radiant gold architecture, lent emotional grounding to sequences exploring the protagonist's early life and formative moments. For travellers, this is where Dhurandhar becomes almost meditative: Punjab's warmth contrasts with the protagonist's turbulent internal journey. Mumbai: Studios, Streets, And High-Intensity Set Pieces Tahe production also shifted to Mumbai's Filmistan Studios, a space steeped in Hindi cinema history. Built in 1943, its vintage soundstages hosted elaborate indoor sequences, dramatic interrogations, and large-scale sets designed to mimic international safehouses. The travel trail extends to: Madh Island: A cluster of fishing villages and farmlands north

of the city, Madh Island offered isolation and raw landscapes ideal for dramatic outdoor stunts. Several high-intensity moments were completed here, making it an unassuming but crucial backdrop. Dombivli-Mankoli Bridge: The production filmed some of the film's biggest action sequences on this industrial bridge linking Dombivli and Bhiwandi. The stark structure doubled as the perfect setting for confrontations, ambushes, and chase shots. Golden Tobacco Factory, Vile Parle: The abandoned factory, with its cavernous architecture and historic decay, hosted a stylised dance sequence in July 2025 – adding an unexpected layer of retro-industrial charm to the film's visual palette. A viral behind-the-scenes clip revealed that Dhurandhar filming in Khera village transformed into a Pakistani neighbourhood. Mud homes, narrow terraces and local textures created an eerily authentic environment. What Dhurandhar ultimately offers is not just a high-stakes narrative but a travel diary stitched into every frame. From Bangkok's frenetic edges to Punjab's sacred calm, from Mumbai's industrial bones to coastal isolation, every location amplifies the story.

Winter Diet According To Ayurveda: Foods That Warm, Nourish And Heal

(News Agency) Winter is a season when the body naturally turns inward, seeking warmth, nourishment and stability. In Ayurveda, this period is considered a powerful window for strengthening digestion, immunity and overall vitality provided we align our choices with nature's rhythm. Dr Kitthu Suresh, Consultant Physician, Apollo AyurVAID, explains that winter is "one of the best seasons to build resilience when our diet supports the body's natural intelligence." According to Dr Suresh, the cold, dry qualities of winter can aggravate Vata and influence Kapha, which makes warm, freshly cooked meals essential. He notes that "simple additions like ginger, black pepper, cinnamon or turmeric can ignite Agni, the digestive fire and improve circulation." These spices help the body stay energised rather than sluggish, countering winter heaviness.

Midday Meals for Strength and Nourishment

Dr. Suresh emphasises that winter is also an excellent time to build strength because Agni peaks at midday. Eating a wholesome lunch whether khichdi, millet porridge, root vegetables or lentils cooked in ghee, "supports tissue nourishment, joint health and sustained energy levels," he says. He also recommends including fermented foods in moderation, as they "enhance gut function, which is central to immunity during colder months." Herbs and Fruits That Support Winter Wellness Ayurveda places strong emphasis on seasonal herbs and fruits, and Dr Suresh highlights Amla, Guduchi, Ashwagandha, oranges, figs and dates as winter allies. "These ingredients help the body adapt to seasonal stressors and maintain respiratory and immune resilience," he explains. Daily Rituals That Anchor the Body and Mind Beyond food, Dr Suresh reminds us that winter wellness is also shaped by small daily practices. Consistent mealtimes, warm clothing, gentle oil massage, exposure to



morning sunlight and adequate rest "help stabilise Vata and optimise the benefits of a winter-aligned diet." Living in Rhythm

With Nature Ultimately, Dr Suresh says that Ayurveda teaches wellness as a result of deep alignment with natural

cycles. When we choose foods and habits that complement the winter becomes a season of nourishment, restoration and greater strength, immunity and profound resilience.

Is cheese secretly fueling your nightmares? Science weighs in

(News Agency) If you find eating some foods makes you sleep badly, you're not alone — and there may be a physical cause for your bad dreams. Scientists investigating links between diet, sleep problems, and cultural beliefs about diet and sleep have found that healthier evening eating habits lead to better sleep and better recall of dreams, while the consumption of dairy products is associated with nightmares. This is thought to be because lactose intolerance causes overnight digestive upsets which then affect people's dreams. Scientists have found that eating too much dairy could ruin your sleep. Researchers questioned more than 1,000 students about the quality of their sleep, their eating habits, and any perceived link between the two, and found a strong association between nightmares and lactose intolerance — potentially because gas or stomach pain during the night affects people's dreams. Nightmare severity is robustly associated with lactose intolerance and other food allergies," said Dr Tore Nielsen of Université de Montréal, lead author of the article in *Frontiers in Psychology*. "These new findings imply that changing eating habits for people with some food sensitivities could alleviate nightmares.

They could also explain why people so often blame dairy for bad dreams!"

Sweet dreams?

Although folk beliefs have long held that what you eat affects how you sleep, there's very little evidence to prove or disprove them. To investigate, researchers surveyed 1,082 students at MacEwan University. They asked about sleep time and quality, dreams and nightmares, and any perceived association between different kinds of dreams and different foods. They also asked about participants' mental and physical health and their relationship with food. About a third of respondents reported regular nightmares. Women were more likely to remember their dreams and to report poor sleep and nightmares, and nearly twice as likely as men to report a food intolerance or allergy. About 40% of participants said that they thought eating late at night or specific foods affected their sleep; roughly 25% thought particular foods could make their sleep worse. People who ate less healthily were more likely to have negative dreams and less likely to remember dreams. "We are routinely asked whether food affects dreaming — especially by journalists on food-centric holidays," said Nielsen. "Now we have some answers."

Cheesy culprits

Most participants who blamed their bad sleep on food thought sweets, spicy foods, or dairy were responsible. Only a comparatively small proportion — 5.5% of respondents — felt that what they ate affected the tone of their dreams, but many of these people said they thought sweets or dairy made their dreams more disturbing or bizarre. When the authors compared reports of food intolerances to reports of bad dreams and poor sleep, they found that lactose intolerance was associated with gastrointestinal symptoms, nightmares, and low sleep quality. It's possible that eating dairy activates gastrointestinal disturbance, and the resulting discomfort affects people's dreams and the quality of their rest. "Nightmares are worse for lactose intolerant people who suffer severe gastrointestinal symptoms and whose sleep is disrupted," said Nielsen. "This makes sense, because we know that other bodily sensations can affect dreaming. Nightmares can be very disruptive, especially if they occur often, because they tend to awaken people from sleep in a dysphoric state. They might also produce sleep avoidance behaviors. Both symptoms can rob you of restful sleep."

Books to read this winter

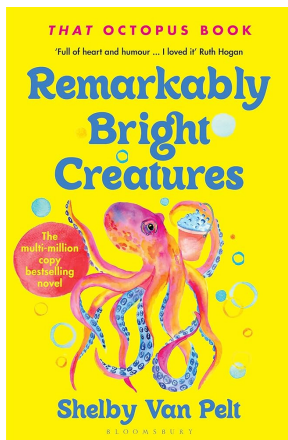
These were some of my favorite books from 2025.

The holidays are almost here. I always love taking advantage of this time of year to catch up on reading, and I know a lot of people feel the same way. There's something about the quieter days around the holidays that makes it easier to sit down with a good book. So I'm sharing a few recent favorites.

Each of these books pulls back the curtain on how something important really works: how people find purpose later in life, how we should think about climate change, how creative industries evolve, how humans communicate, and how America lost its capacity to build big things—and how to get it back.

I hope you find something here that sparks your curiosity. And I hope your holiday season is filled with happy loved ones, good food, and great conversation.

Remarkably Bright Creatures by Shelby Van Pelt.



I don't read fiction often, but when I do, I want to read about interesting characters who help me see the world in a new way. Remarkably Bright Creatures delivered on that front. I loved this terrific novel about Tova, a 70-year-old woman who works night shifts cleaning an aquarium and finds fulfillment caring for a clever octopus. Tova struggles to find meaning in her life, which is something a lot of people deal with as they get older. Van Pelt's story made me think about the challenge of filling the days after you stop working—and what



communities can do to help older people find purpose.

Clearing the Air by Hannah Ritchie.

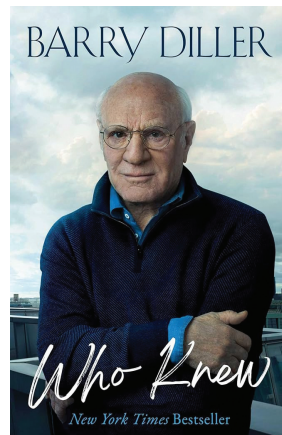
Sunday Times bestselling author of *Not the End of the World*



I've followed Hannah's work at Our World in Data for years, and her new book is one of the clearest explanations of the climate challenge I've read. She structures it around 50 big questions—like whether it's too late to act, whether nuclear power is dangerous, and whether renewables really are affordable—and answers each one in concise, accessible language. She's realistic about the risks but grounded in data that shows real progress: Solar and wind are growing at record speed,

electric cars are getting cheaper, and innovation is accelerating across areas like steel, cement, and clean fuels. If you want a hopeful, fact-driven overview of where climate solutions stand, this is a great pick.

Who Knew by Barry Diller.



I've known Barry for decades, but his memoir still surprised and taught me a lot. He's one of the most influential figures in modern media. He invented the made-for-TV movie, helped create the TV miniseries, built Paramount into the #1 film studio, launched the Fox broadcast network, and later assembled an internet empire. He's spent his life betting on ideas before

they were obvious, and the industries he's transformed show how much those bets can pay off.

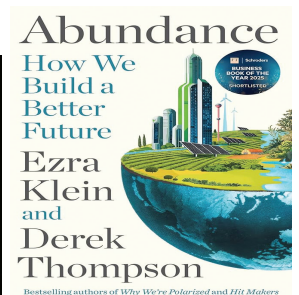
When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows by Steven Pinker.



Few people explain the mysteries of human behavior better than Steven Pinker, and his latest book is a must-read for anyone who wants to learn more about how people communicate. When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows shows how "common knowledge" lets people coordinate: When we know what others know, indirect signals become clear. Although the topic itself is pretty complicated, the book is readable and practical, and

it made me see everyday social interactions in a new light.

Abundance by Ezra Klein and Derek Thompson.



This book is a sharp look at why America seems to struggle to build things and what it will take to fix that. Klein and Thompson argue that progress depends not just on good ideas but on the systems that help ideas spread. Today, these systems often slow things down instead—from housing and infrastructure to clean energy and scientific breakthroughs. I recognized many of the bottlenecks they describe from my own work in global health and climate. Abundance doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but it asks the right questions about how the U.S. can rebuild our capacity to get big things done.

A Hyderabad architect opened the Chanel show in New York. Her story

In a moment fashion lovers are calling "straight out of a movie," 25-year-old Bhavitha Mandava from Hyderabad opened the Chanel show in New York, just a year after being discovered on a subway platform in the city. A little over a year ago, Bhavitha was a student navigating the New York City subway system, completely unaware that a single ride in October 2024 would change the course of her life. She was scouted on that very subway by a talent representative, setting off a whirlwind modelling journey that has now brought her to some of fashion's most iconic runways. Earlier this month, French luxury fashion house Chanel presented its Mtiars d'Art 2025–26 show in New York City. The event marked the label's return to the city since 2018. For the occasion, creative director Matthieu Blazy staged the show on a subway platform. It became a full circle moment for Bhavitha, who opened the show and became the first Indian model to do so for Chanel. But Blazy did not just

cast her; he remembered her story. By choosing Bhavitha to open the show, he honoured the moment their paths first crossed. He knew she had been scouted on a subway, and with the show taking place on a subway platform, the moment felt complete. even recreated her original subway look: a simple beige quarter-zip sweater and classic denim jeans. Bhavitha later shared how surreal it felt to walk out in an outfit that so closely mirrored the day she was discovered. Her first major breakthrough was walking in Matthieu Blazy's final Bottega Veneta show for Spring/Summer 2025. The two worked together again in Bottega campaigns and other projects, and when Blazy moved to Chanel, Bhavitha naturally became part of his debut at the French house. Bhavitha, by the way, had no plans to become a model. She completed her degree in architecture in Hyderabad and is a licensed architect. Her modelling career began almost by accident. "When I first started, I did not know much

Bhavitha Mandava hails from Hyderabad and moved to New York City to pursue a master's degree at New York



about the brands I worked with," she told Harper's Bazaar India. "This world was completely new to me." Yet within a year, she has worked with Matthieu Blazy at two major houses, walked key Paris shows, and opened Chanel's most significant cultural moment of the season. Balancing a fast-rising modelling career while studying for her postgraduate degree has

been challenging. "A surgery, a heartbreak, juggling my campus job, modelling abroad, and back-to-back classes and still, I made it. I graduated from NYU and now have two degrees with a heart full of gratitude," she wrote in an Instagram post while sharing pictures from her convocation. After the Chanel show, Bhavitha posted an emotional video of her parents reacting to the news,

tearfully cheering as they watched their daughter step onto the runway. The clip went viral, with people celebrating the rise of a new supermodel from India in the comments. The video has now crossed 18 million views and received more than 1.4 million likes on Instagram. Sometimes, the most extraordinary paths begin in the most ordinary places.

Why Sunny Leone Wore A Skirt With Condoms To The Runway

Sunny Leone delivered one of the most talked-about moments at Ashley Rebello's Manforce-supported World AIDS Day showcase, using fashion as both spectacle and symbolism. Her appearance wasn't just about glamour; it was designed as a visual narrative that aligned with the campaign's message. Sunny stepped onto the runway in a gleaming silver mini dress that made an immediate impact under the lights. The dress, built with reflective crystal work and mirror-like panels, created a moving shimmer-almost like a shifting disco orb. The neckline featured layered metallic chains woven into the bodice, giving the outfit a sculptural quality. What truly elevated the moment was the dramatic overskirt she wore for her opening look. The piece, a vivid hot-pink train, wrapped around the mini to



create the illusion of a high-slit evening gown from the front. Halfway down the ramp, Sunny transformed the narrative. With grace, she

slipped off the pink overskirt, revealing the silver mini in its full form. This "reveal moment" wasn't merely a costume change—it was the

heart of the campaign. Once the overskirt dropped, the detailing on the mini became visible, including the strategically placed condom

packets. The symbolism was clear: beneath the shine and spectacle, protection matters. Talking about the outfit, designer Ashley Rebello said, "She wore this so that there is awareness and fashion." Meanwhile, Sunny's silver headpiece, draping like a cascade of metallic beads, reinforced the theme of cohesion and control. It framed her face, matched the architectural lines of the dress, and added an edge to her look. Malaika Arora Walks The Ramp Malaika Arora made her own powerful statement in a vivid red creation crafted by Rebello. The fitted mini dress, moulded with a sculpted bustier and sharp side cut-outs, was paired with a dramatic robe that floated behind her as she walked. Her walk quickly gained attention online, with fans celebrating the silhouette, the fluidity of the robe and her command over the striking shade.

Eli Lilly to build \$6 billion manufacturing plant in Alabama to help make upcoming obesity pill, other drugs

(News Agency) on Tuesday said it will spend \$6 billion to build a manufacturing plant in Huntsville, Alabama, to help boost production of its closely watched experimental obesity pill and other drugs. It is the third facility in a string of new planned U.S. investments by the drugmaker. Eli Lilly announced in February that it would spend at least \$27 billion to build four new domestic manufacturing plants, adding to \$23 billion in previous investments since 2020. The company said it expects construction of the Alabama plant to start in 2026 and for it to be completed in 2032. "Today's investment continues the onshoring of active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) production, strengthening supply chain resilience and reliable access to medicines for patients in the U.S.," said Eli Lilly CEO David Ricks in a release. That added production capacity for Eli Lilly's obesity pill, orforglipron, is crucial as the company races to file for its approval and tries to maintain its dominance in the booming market

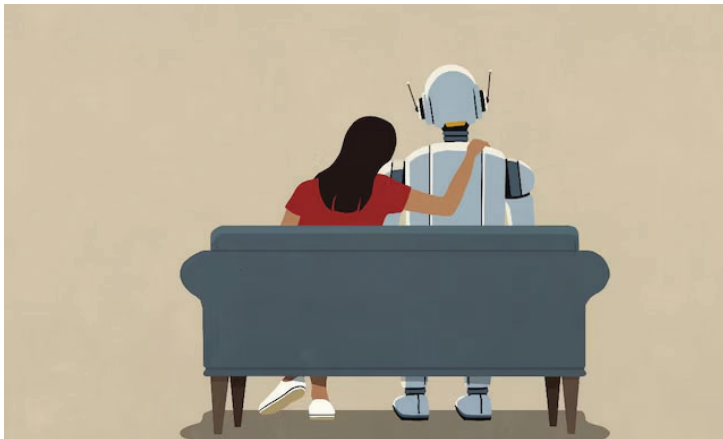


for GLP-1s. The company and its chief rival, Novo Nordisk, faced supply shortages for their existing weekly injections after demand skyrocketed in the U.S. in recent years, though they have managed to alleviate those issues. Eli Lilly's pill in November won a priority review voucher from the Food and Drug

Administration, which will significantly speed up the regulator's assessment of the drug to potentially a few months. Drugmakers have been scrambling to boost their production in the U.S. after threats by President Donald Trump to impose tariffs on pharmaceuticals imported into the U.S. But concerns about

those potential tariffs have eased following recent drug pricing deals with Trump that exempt companies from the levies. Eli Lilly said the Alabama site will bring 450 jobs to the area, including engineers, scientists, operations personnel and lab technicians, as well as 3,000 construction jobs.

54% of singles are okay with their partner bonding with AI: Survey



(News Agency) Artificial intelligence is no longer a distant concept in dating. People around the world are using it in real, personal ways, to flirt, connect, meet partners, and even seek emotional support. Whether you love it or hate it, AI has quietly become part of modern relationships. Interestingly, a recent dating trend report by happn (dating app) highlights a growing shift dubbed "AI Situationship: AI as the Emotional Sidekick, Not Replacement." The idea isn't that AI is stealing your crush, but that it's quietly helping people reflect, regulate, and understand themselves better. The report reveals that 54 per cent of singles wouldn't mind their crush forming an emotional

bond with an AI, pointing to how quickly digital companionship is becoming normalised. At the same time, 41 per cent admit it makes them uneasy, a reminder that while algorithms can guide, soothe, and suggest, real chemistry still belongs to humans. The stats is based on responses from over 2,000 users across India.

Surprising? Honestly, we weren't really surprised.

As technology enables more connections, many users are actually engaging with AI-driven chatbots for companionship, therapy, and even romantic interaction. India's dating market is proliferating, with modern-age daters

investing themselves more and more into the online dating world. And Gen Z is at the helm of it. Earlier this year, a survey by a chatbot app called Joi AI revealed that 83 per cent of Gen Z believe that they can form a deep emotional bond with AI. So, what's really making AI so alluring?

Why are AI situationships on the rise?

When we talk about the emotional side of anything, it is supposed to be something soft, touching, slow, and something every human craves. Whether it's emotional intelligence or the emotional availability of your significant other, the emotional appeal holds weight, especially in a relationship. And AI has got its stronghold in that department too. It's also not unfathomable how machines have become romantic outlets. Speaking with Sonali Acharjee from India Today magazine earlier, Mumbai-based relationship coach Pratik Jain explained how human frustration, fatigue, and exhaustion in finding romantic connections are leading people to seek some kind of solace with these AI models. "I see people adapting psychologically to connect with machines, at least for the non-physical aspects of romance. We may not be able to imagine a friend saying that he or she is in love with some bot behind the screen. But don't forget we have been satisfying our sexual needs through non-human objects for a long time," he said.

What adds to the trend of relying on AI for emotional support is the accessibility, availability, and the 'we see, but we don't judge' vibe of these chatbots. They become companions who make you feel heard, don't demand anything in return, and never complain. further, these bots just know what to say and hit you in the sweet spot. That "perfect answer" to your self-doubt, or the feelings you lay bare, delivers instant gratification. They even learn to adapt to your preferences quickly. Even SIFRA (Kriti Sanon), the robotic girlfriend of Aryan (Shahid Kapoor) in Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya, got accustomed to what he liked, how, and when. Result? The hero got too attached. Well, who doesn't like convenience and comfort available at every beck and call, after all! In fact, experts believe that the convenience of chatting with AI gives a sense of control, which creates a loop of going back to AI for everything. "The advancement of AI has created a different kind of space for people to seek romantic relationships. Most AI algorithms can learn and adapt to your needs in a romantic relationship and provide you with responses that you might feel more connected to. These AI chatbots can not only provide support but can also replicate your moods and preferences, a switch a human partner might not be able to make," Ruchi Ruuh, a Delhi-based relationship counsellor, shared this with us earlier.

Former GitLab CEO raises money for Kilo to compete in crowded AI coding market

(News Agency) Investors are betting there's room for another startup using artificial intelligence to help software engineers write code faster. The difference with Kilo Code is it counts former GitLab CEO Sid Sijbrandij among its founders. On Wednesday, Kilo Code announced \$8 million in seed funding, with backing from Breakers, Cota Capital, General Catalyst, Quiet Capital and Tokyo Black. Sijbrandij is a self-taught developer who helped popularize GitLab's tools for source code collaboration, deployment and testing. GitLab went public in 2021 and is valued at more than \$6 billion. Sijbrandij stepped down as CEO last year to focus on cancer treatment but continued as board chair. Since then, the technology industry has become obsessed with having large language models write and update software, a practice commonly known in Silicon Valley as vibe coding. OpenAI co-founder Andrej Karpathy is credited with coining the term in February. OpenAI looked at buying AI coding

startup Windsurf for around \$3 billion, but scrapped the plan before Google hired senior Windsurf employees in a \$2.4 billion transaction in July. Rival Cursor announced a \$2.3 billion funding round in November at a \$29.3 billion valuation.

At Microsoft

vibe coding already makes up 30% of the company's code, CEO Satya Nadella said in April. Sijbrandij witnessed the action and became fascinated by what AI could do for software development. In September, an acquaintance introduced him to Scott Breitenother, who started and later sold consultancy Brooklyn Data. "I thought we were just kind of having a meet and greet, and then 25 minutes in, Sid's like, 'Hey, can you start next week?'" Breitenother said. Sijbrandij contributed early capital for the startup, which now employs about 34 people across continents. Breitenother is in charge, but he talks with Sijbrandij many times a day. Kilo Code's software plugs in to coding

applications such as Cursor and Microsoft's Visual Studio Code. It's the most widely used service for startup OpenRouter's application programming interface that gives developers access to a variety of AI models, including Grok Code Fast 1 from Elon Musk's xAI. Kilo Code has processed more than 3 trillion tokens in the past month, according to OpenRouter. A single token represents about three-quarters of a word. Daniël Langezaal, a software engineer at Dutch e-commerce startup Plug&Pay, said he has used Kilo Code for months after trying products from Anthropic, Cursor and Microsoft, among others. He said he appreciates Kilo Code's support for both premium and affordable models, and he likes that people publicly contribute to the Kilo Code extension under an open-source license. Langezaal has spread the word. About 80% of Plug&Pay's developers now use Kilo Code, he said. It helped save time for one teammate who recently assembled a complex SQL

query. "With Kilo, it took him a day," Langezaal said. "If he didn't have access to Kilo, it would have taken him a few days to implement." GitLab, which has been testing a platform for AI agents to perform tasks, is paying attention, and was interested in what Kilo was building. "I talked to the board," Sijbrandij said. "We ended up deciding to do it outside of GitLab." GitLab included reference to Kilo in a filing last month. The company said that it paid Kilo \$1,000 in exchange for a right of first refusal for 10 business days should the startup receive an acquisition proposal before August 2026. The market is rapidly evolving. Design software company Figma and a slew of startups now offer vibe coding options for less technical people. It's a category Kilo Code won't be ignoring for much longer. "We also want to be the place for people just getting started with code," Sijbrandij said. "We are working on an app builder that's more like the Lovable or Bolt experience," he said, referring to two popular startups.



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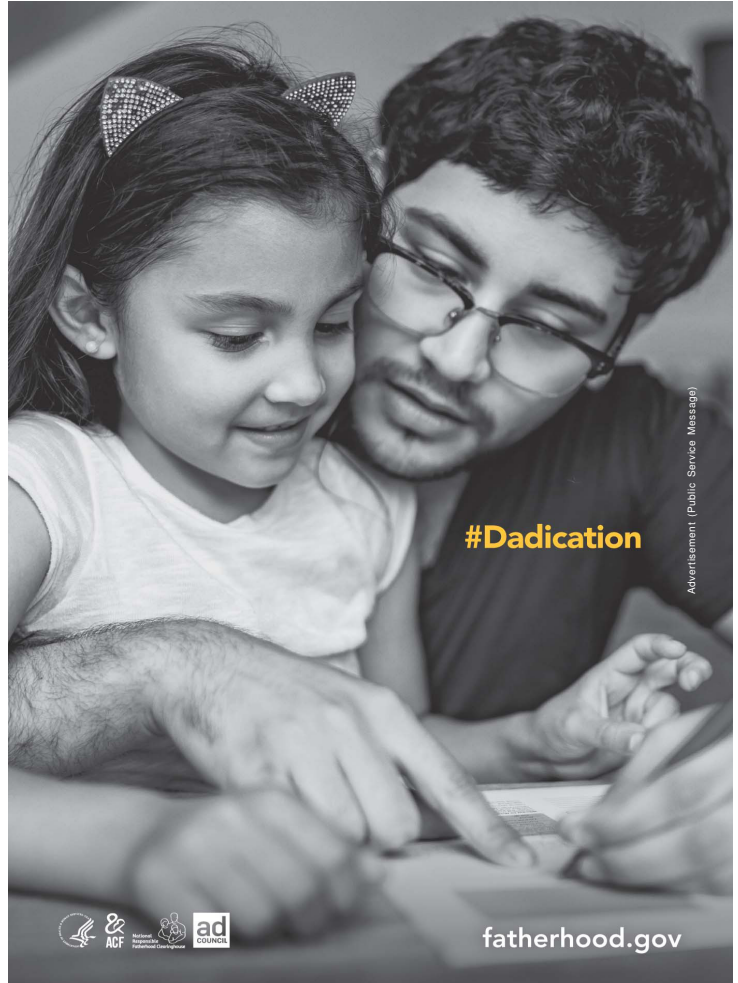
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The Warner Bros Drama With Netflix, Paramount Is About to Get Spicier

(News Agency) It was about time the resurgent deal boom threw up a really watchable hostile bid. Just days after Hollywood studio Warner Bros Discovery Inc. agreed to be bought by Netflix Inc., Paramount Skydance Corp has made a \$108 billion offer straight to the iconic Hollywood studio's shareholders. The counterbid has many attractions. It puts Warner on the spot to explain precisely why it didn't engage with the interloper, backed by the billionaire Ellison family, more assiduously when a friendly deal was being attempted. Things were already getting ugly before Monday's dramatic twist, with Paramount complaining to Warner last week about being shut out of the sale process. You can see why Paramount didn't give up: A combination with Warner would produce the world's largest studio with a franchise list that goes on and on - Harry Potter, Barbie, Top Gun... Crucially, the bids aren't directly comparable. Netflix is offering shareholders \$27.75 per share for Warner's studio and streaming assets. That will be paid mostly in cash but also in \$4.50 per share of Netflix stock. Warner's shareholders would also be left stuck with the cable television assets that



are soon to be spun off. So in sum, they end up with some cash and two stocks, one of which is yet to be valued by the public markets. Analysts at Barclays Plc reckon the cable business is worth around \$4.20 per share. On their math, the Netflix offer overall is worth around \$32 per Warner share. By contrast, Paramount is offering \$30 a share in cash for the whole of Warner. Chief Executive Officer David Ellison - son of Oracle Corp. founder Larry Ellison - reckons this pitch



is worth more than Netflix's. That's because he values Warner's cable stub at just \$1 per share. That seems pretty harsh, but the gloves are off now and bad-mouthing in hostile deals can get a good deal worse. Where Paramount is making a clearly superior proposal is in terms of a speedier and more certain path to completion. Netflix's offer needs heavy discounting for likely antitrust scrutiny, given the sheer scale of the combined streaming platform marrying Netflix with

Warner's HBO. President Donald Trump had already sounded caution on Netflix's enlarged market share. All in all, the Netflix payout looks less certain and further away - and so is worth less in real terms. Ellison's pitch doesn't just pose less serious antitrust concerns. It comes wrapped in a Trumpian bow with financing partly from Affinity Partners, the finance boutique led by the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Combine that with backing from Middle East sovereign wealth funds, and Paramount is mimicking the successful playbook evidenced in the leveraged buyout of Electronic Arts Inc., which involved Silver Lake Management partnering with Affinity and the Saudi Public Investment Fund. As analysts at TD Cowen say, it's very hard to argue that Netflix's offer is better. Time to run the credits? Not so fast. There may be more drama to come. Paramount would surely prefer to reach an agreed deal with Warner. There's always value in the less conflictual option. It has already indicated it's ready to sit down and talk. Getting to a handshake would perhaps need a sweetener, providing a pretext for Warner to switch sides -- and contribute to the

How India turned the dining tables on the US

Amid US President Donald Trump's warning of new tariffs over the dumping of Indian rice, it is worth remembering how dramatically the US-India food dynamic has shifted over the decades. India, which was once reliant on low-grade American wheat, is now the world's largest rice exporter, and has farmers in the US complaining of dumping.



(News Agency) US President Donald Trump warned that he might introduce new tariffs on agricultural imports, especially on rice from India. The accusation was that India, the world's largest rice exporter, was dumping the grain in the US. It is quite a story of tables being turned as the US supplied India with substandard wheat in the 1960s when the country was looking for food aid to feed millions of hungry mouths. The allegations of rice dumping

come even as the US and India are negotiating a trade deal, which experts say is stuck because India has drawn a red line on agriculture and dairy imports. While the US claims India's farm sector is subsidised, it, in fact, is the other way around. Trump's threats of tariffs on rice from India over dumping came as he unveiled a \$12-billion bailout package for American farmers. Dumping refers to countries selling their surplus produce or

products for ridiculously low prices, thereby threatening the importing country. That India could be dumping rice is a turnaround tale for the country and its agriculture sector. It is the very same India that relied on wheat aid from the US in the 1960s. And the US supplied wheat fit for animal feed for human consumption, according to several reports. Just around six decades ago, India depended heavily on America's Public Law 480 "Food for Peace" programme, under which the US shipped millions of tonnes of wheat to India. At its peak, India received over 10 million tonnes annually, which was often low-grade, reddish American wheat, also called lal gehun, and baked into hard, dark chapatis. The food aid the US sent to India was not just low-grade but also contaminated with parthenium weed seeds, which is known as Congress Grass. But soon, India turned the script through comprehensive agricultural transformation and policy changes of the Green Revolution, and went on from being a dependent to a global exporter of wheat and rice. Today it is the world's largest rice exporter, shipping more than 22 million tonnes a year. It must

be noted that through this shift, the consumption pattern has also evolved in America. Rice was once a marginal item in the diet of Americans, but its consumption has doubled since the 1970s. And India, which once received aid from the US, is now one of the biggest suppliers of Indian basmati and non-basmati rice to America.

RICE ON AMERICAN PLATES: HOW THE PATTERN HAS CHANGED

A lot has changed since the 1960s when the US sent wheat aid to India, including how the American plate looks today. The consumption pattern in the US has changed drastically, and the US consumes way more rice per capita than it did back in the day, for various reasons. As of 2025, US per capita rice consumption has more than doubled since the 1970s. It rose from around 5.2 kg per capita annually in 1970 to about 11.8 kg in 2023-24, according to USDA Economic Research Service data. This was seemingly caused by demographic shifts, as Asian and Hispanic populations, which consume more rice traditionally, now comprise larger shares of the US total population.

Yellowstone has been a 'sacred wonderland' of spiritual power and religious activity for centuries – and for different faith groups

Dharmendra delivered hits over three decades, yet never became an epoch-defining superstar like Rajesh Khanna or Amitabh Bachchan, revealing how Bollywood's genre politics shapes stardom

(By Our Staff Reporter) Nearly 5 million travelers come to Wyoming to visit Yellowstone National Park each year, most in the summer months. They come for the geysers, wildlife, scenery and recreational activities such as hiking, fishing and photography. However, few realize that religion has been part of Yellowstone's appeal throughout the park's history. My 2025 book "Sacred Wonderland" documents how people have long found holiness in Yellowstone: how a landscape once sacred to Native Americans later inspired Christians and New Age communities alike.

Native reverence – and removal Long before European Americans "discovered" the Yellowstone region in the 19th century, numerous Indigenous peoples were aware of its unique landscape – particularly geysers, hot springs and other



hydrothermal wonders. Several tribal groups engaged in devotional practices long before it became a park. These included the Tukulika, or Sheep Eaters, a band of mountain Shoshone. They lived year-round within the boundaries of what would become the national

park. Anthropologists know relatively little about the specific beliefs that Native Americans held about Yellowstone during this era. However, it's clear most of the Indigenous groups who frequented Yellowstone considered it, as historian Paul Schullery concludes,

"a place of spiritual power, of communion with natural forces, a place that inspired reverence." After the Civil War, more Euro-Americans entered the region. In 1872, the U.S. government created Yellowstone as the first national park, setting a precedent for others

in the United States and around the world. Yellowstone and other U.S. national parks established in the 19th century were products of manifest destiny: the Christian idea that Americans had a divinely ordained right to expand their country across the continent. The nation's westward expansion included turning supposedly wild, "uncivilized" areas into parks. The park system's creation, though, came at the cost of Indigenous communities. In Yellowstone, the Tukulika were forcibly removed in the 1870s to two reservations in Idaho and Wyoming, as anthropologists Peter Nabokov and Lawrence Loendorf discuss in their book "Restoring a Presence." Christian ministry In addition to the concept of manifest destiny, Christians brought their own religious practices to Yellowstone National Park.

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Dhurandhar review: Ranveer leads, but Akshaye rules this labyrinth of war, politics



(By Our Staff Reporter) There's a particular flavour to Aditya Dhar's filmmaking. It's never exactly shocking, but it's never not stunning either. Dhar loves a war cry, prioritises India above all else, and positions Pakistan as the ever-persistent enemy. Dhurandhar wastes no time laying out its worldview. The mission is crystal clear: infiltrate Pakistan's core - the very machinery that fuels global

terrorism - and stay perpetually two steps ahead. The film's first half is divided into eight chapters, making the narrative easy to follow even as it jumps between real, traumatic events. From the IC-814 Kandahar hijack to the Parliament attack to the horror of Mumbai's 26/11, Dhar strings these tragedies together to argue that India had no choice but to rethink its entire playbook. Enter Operation

Dhurandhar -- a covert strategy built on precision, brutality, and an unfiltered rage that demands retribution. Dhar's recreation of Karachi's Lyari town is especially striking. His world feels textured, and dangerously believable. Dhurandhar forces cerebral investment; Google searches become inevitable. If his Uri: The Surgical Strike (2019) shouted its patriotism from the rooftops, this one

seems more calculative. Front and centre is Ranveer Singh as Hamza Ali Mazhari, but the true scene-stealer is Akshaye Khanna. As Rehman Baloch aka Dakait, Khanna gives a masterclass in simmering intensity. His silences scream, his breakdowns sting, and his presence elevates every frame he occupies. It's one of his most commanding performances in years. Sanjay Dutt brings weight

as Chaudhary Aslam, Arjun Rampal adds steel as the ISI chief, and Rakesh Bedi is pitch-perfect as Jamaal, the crafty politician who breezes in with humour. Ranveer's Hamza remains the story's anchor - a character almost like ash and dust, tiny but capable of blinding or burning you. Singh plays him with conviction, though the abundance of close-ups inevitably offers echoes of his acclaimed Khushi

Sydney Sweeney Shuts Down Plastic Surgery Rumours: "Never Gotten Work Done"

(By Our Staff Reporter) Sydney Sweeney and Amanda Seyfried are busy promoting their upcoming film, The Housemaid, which will release on December 19, 2025, in the US. Amid all the marketing strategies they are keeping up with, the Euphoria star decided to spill the beans on all the rumours regarding cosmetic surgeries she had undergone. Speaking to Allure, Sweeney was given a task to select a 'beauty rumour' that she would like to debunk. She chose to shut down the speculations that she had plastic procedures done on herself. "Let's Debunk Them All," Sydney Sweeney On Plastic Surgery Rumours During the interview, she said, "Let's debunk them all. I mean, I have never gotten work done." "I am so scared of needles, you have no idea," the actor added. Sydney Sweeney started her career as a child actor, and has appeared on shows like Grey's Anatomy, 90210, and Criminal Minds. She debuted in films with ZMD: Zombie of Mass Destruction. Reflecting on the past and the comparison that many self-proclaimed experts on social media make, the Anyone But You actor said, "You cannot compare a photo of me from when I

was 12 to a photo of me at 26 with professional makeup and lighting! Of course, I'm going to look different." "You Don't Need It," Amanda Seyfried Told Sydney Sweeney Amanda Seyfried, who is 40, told



her co-star that cosmetic procedures can be really helpful when a person is older. "When you do," Seyfried was saying, when Sweeney cut her off and said, "I'll call you." "You got to call me, and I'll give you a little bit of Ativan, and you will be so excited," added Seyfried. "But you don't need it," she added. For those who don't know, Ativan is an anxiety medication that helps with disorders and insomnia.

Troll 2 review: A predictable Kaiju drama echoing Kong, Godzilla and Transformers

(News Agency) An action-adventure film with massive monster-like creatures clashing against each other in a visually stunning battle is one of the most entertaining genres of all time - that is, if done right. King Kong, Godzilla, Optimus Prime and his pal Bumblebee will certainly give their nod of approval to this statement, but will they welcome the Norwegian Trolls into their big-beings club? Let's find out! Netflix's Troll 2, which is touted as the largest film production ever in the Nordic countries, starts off with little Nora listening to her father, Tobias Tidemann, telling her the story of the ancient king Olaf the Holy and his massacre of the Trolls, before she is put to sleep by her mum humming the song of the Trolls. From there, we move to the present, set a few years

after the incidents of the first film, with Nora Tidemann living in her father's cabin, mirroring his obsession with the Trolls. Andreas Isaksen seeks her out to show her what he has been working on, along with his team, for the last two years, which turns out to be experimentation on another Troll that has been kept a secret from the public. Before you know it, things go south and we have a Kaiju - sorry, a Troll - wreaking havoc and snacking on humans enjoying the nightlife of Norway, before moving to quench his thirst for revenge against Olaf the Holy. • Can Nora and her gang manage to stop the Troll once again? This Troll seems stronger; will the same solution as the first part be enough to handle him? What other mysteries are going to unravel in their quest to stop the Troll? Will

the whole team make it out of the battle alive once again? Shallow answers to these questions, with stereotypical monster-movie moments, make the plot of this sequel. The plot of Troll 2 is as stereotypical as any monster or Kaiju film, and the makers seem fully aware of it. The sequel even introduces a "Mega-Troll," an obvious nod to Megatron from Transformers. But self-awareness alone isn't enough. Without adding anything fresh to stand apart, Troll 2 ends up being only mildly entertaining. The other references are just as obvious. A hunt for answers straight out of Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen and a big Kaiju clash that mirrors Godzilla vs Kong are only the most noticeable examples. Combined with a few callbacks to the first film and a screenplay that



follows nearly the same beats, the sequel ends up feeling underwhelming when compared to the original. Director Roar Uthaug, who also helmed the first film, returns for the sequel. While the overall story remains underwhelming - including its key emotional beats - certain moments are executed with surprising impact. In fact, it is these quieter, emotional stretches

that work harder to keep the viewer engaged than the big, expected monster showdown. However, the big clash turns out to be the film's biggest disappointment. In a battle that unfolds over two rounds (much like Godzilla vs Kong), the way the first face-off ends is a complete let-down. The climax fight at least lasts a couple of minutes, but it too quickly slips into an underwhelming showdown.

The next wave of layoffs in India might not be in offices but on the streets

(News Agency) Ankur Kumar, a delivery partner with Blinkit in Noida, works a minimum of 12 hours a day, six days a week. On days when he still has energy left, his work stretches to 15 hours. Kumar is unaware though that just 50 km away, in Gurgaon, drones are now delivering the same groceries and medicines he does—faster, and at a much cheaper rate. In most days, the odometer on Kumar's two-wheeler clocks between 100 and 180 km. For each delivery, he earns a base pay of Rs 15 for a trip within a km, and Rs 10-14 for every extra km. Reports suggest drones are doing the same work for just Rs 4 a km. While artificial intelligence (AI) replacing white-collar jobs is widely talked about, what often goes unnoticed is how AI-driven automation threatens workers like Kumar, part of India's 12-million-strong gig workforce, which is also vulnerable. The proverbial



meteor that killed the dinosaurs isn't lurking just in the air for India's unskilled gig workers, 12 million and growing. Amazon has begun automating warehouse operations in the US to reduce staff strength—a shift likely to reach India in over a decade. From delivery partners to dark store workers, millions of low-skill roles are vulnerable. •For Kumar and

others like him, the threat isn't only from machines, but also from people. India's gig workforce is expected to double from 12 million to 23.5 million by 2030, according to Niti Aayog—making every worker more replaceable than before. Ankur Kumar drives as much as 3,000 to 5,400 km per month—roughly the distance from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and

back. The problem is, though Kumar is moving, he isn't going anywhere. He aspires to join the police force but is stuck in a job that offers neither promotion nor growth. Becoming a gig worker takes away from you before it gives back. You sign up on an app, share your Aadhaar, bank details, and pay a sign-up fee of Rs 400–500. Add another Rs

1,500–2,000 for branded clothing, helmet, and delivery bag, which are deducted from future earnings. Economists India Today Digital spoke to described India's gig work as "low-skill and low-pay". Without upskilling, they warned, such workers would be replaceable by machines. And with no comprehensive legal framework ensuring their social security, they remain the most vulnerable to automation-driven displacement. Economists said if low-skill gig jobs collapse under automation, India's growth story will take a hit. The question then is: are we building an economy where millions keep working harder, only to stay in the same place?

WHY INDIA'S GIG BOOM IS ON FRAGILE GROUND

While gig workers elsewhere work just part-time on that job, in India it is full-time work for most.

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Venezuela's Maria Machado dedicates Nobel Prize to Trump
Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who won the Nobel Peace Prize 2022 and visited Donald Trump's office, dedicated the prize to the U.S. President for supporting the Venezuelans working to establish democracy and end President Nicolas Maduro's dictatorship.
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