

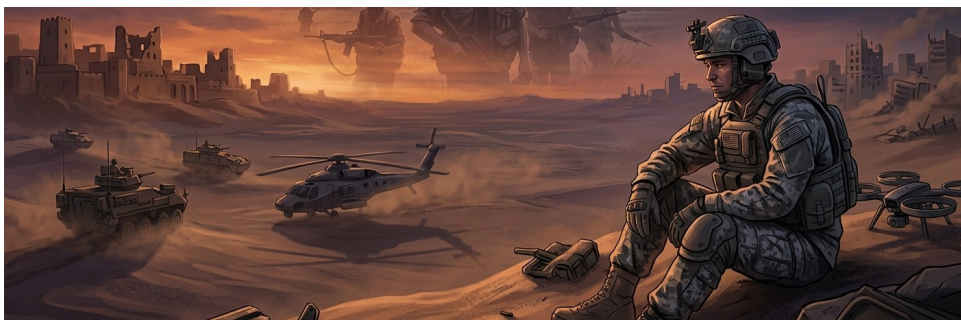
The South Asian Insider

Independent Voice of South Asians in North America

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The Forever Friction: Is the U.S. trapped in a Middle East stalemate?

The war on Iran has repeated the failures of past US conflicts defined by hubris and ignorance.



(TSAI BUREAU) After threatening on Tuesday that a “whole civilisation will die tonight”, US President Donald Trump had to backtrack and announce a two-week delay in making good his threat. During this stand-down the US and Iran, along with Israel in the wings, will attempt to negotiate peace. Ironically, while the US maintains an overwhelming military advantage, Iran holds the strategic cards by controlling the Strait of Hormuz and hence retaining great influence on the price of gasoline and diesel fuel and the state of global stock markets. On the current trajectory, the Iran war will repeat past failures of the US to win or to achieve successful outcomes in the wars it has fought.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the Vietnam War was lost not on the battlefields which the US military always won, but in American TV and dining rooms, where the succession of lies told about the conflict and the 58,000 body bags of American soldiers finally took their toll.

In Afghanistan, the US also had military superiority, but that was not enough “to win”. Two decades of failed “nation-building” that sucked in billions of dollars produced weak pro-US institutions that could not outlast the Taliban’s resolve.

In Iraq after the 2003 invasion, the US was successful in removing Saddam Hussein’s regime. But that plunged the country into chaos, fuelling instability across the region for the following two decades – to the detriment of the US and its regional allies.

(Contd. on page 2)

A new regional order for the Strait of Hormuz

(TSAI BUREAU) The ongoing war of choice launched by the United States and Israel against Iran has shattered the geopolitical status quo in our region. As Washington finds itself entangled in another Middle Eastern quagmire, reports suggest that US President Donald Trump’s administration is increasingly in need of a political off-ramp. The Hormuz littoral states possess a rare, collective opportunity to provide the American president with an exit strategy. By taking the initiative to establish a new, locally managed security architecture for the Strait of Hormuz, our nations can further elevate their strategic significance in regional geopolitics and the global economy. The alternative to this win-win scenario is prolonged conflict that would ensure that a new regional order is eventually imposed unilaterally by Tehran. Seeking to balance their positions, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states appear trapped between two bad options. Confronting Trump, especially in the middle of a war, would undoubtedly carry significant costs and unpredictable reactions from an increasingly unpredictable leader.

At the same time, their inability to avoid being seen by Iran as at least passive participants in the aggression against the country makes them legitimate targets under its increasingly assertive military doctrine, which seeks to prevent the repetition of such wars for the foreseeable future.

(Contd. on page 2)

Adani moves US court seeking dismissal of SEC fraud case, says lawsuit lacks jurisdiction

(TSAI BUREAU) Billionaire Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar Adani have asked a US court to dismiss a securities fraud lawsuit brought by the US Securities and Exchange Commission, arguing the case falls outside the US jurisdiction and fails to establish any wrongdoing. In a pre-motion letter filed ahead of a planned April 30 motion seeking dismissal of the lawsuit, Adanis through their lawyers said the SEC’s claims over a 2021 bond sale by the group’s renewable energy arm, Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) are legally flawed on multiple grounds. The SEC had sued the Adanis in November 2024, alleging they misled investors by failing to disclose an alleged bribery scheme tied to Indian state officials, framing the case under US securities laws. Adanis argued that the court lacks personal jurisdiction, saying neither had sufficient contacts with the US or direct involvement in the bond offering.

(Contd. on page 4)

Middle East on fire again: A bilateral ceasefire in multilateral war falls apart

(TSAI BUREAU) Hours after the ceasefire between the US and Iran was announced, several airstrikes have been reported from the Middle East. From Iran to the UAE to Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, several energy sites are in flames. A bilateral ceasefire cannot help in a multilateral war.

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The Forever Friction: Is the U.S. trapped in a Middle East stalemate?

One of the reasons for these failures is that successive US presidents have been unprepared for the rigours of their office when it came to matters of war and peace. They have suffered from a profound lack of knowledge and understanding of the conditions for using force; failure to challenge the assumptions for going to war; hubris in which American intellectual and military superiority was taken for granted; groupthink; and bureaucratic ineptness in not testing all likely outcomes no matter how proficient the US military was. All this led to flawed strategic judgement.

It now appears that these past failures infected the war in Iran. In every war game and exercise played in the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz was shut. Did no one advise Trump of that contingency or did he not listen? And why did he elect to go to war or in his terms launch an "excursion" into Iran, repeating Russian President Vladimir Putin's colossal misjudgement that Kyiv would fall in a few days?

The most plausible explanation came from Secretary of State Marco Rubio when he first admitted and then reversed his statement that because Israel was about to strike Iran first, the US had no option other than to join the attack. Preemption is a specious reason for declaring war. The US could have told Israel either to proceed or not. But the hubris and complete lack of



understanding were apparent even before the Israelis rushed Trump to make a decision. His prime negotiators, Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, lacked technical knowledge on nuclear weapons, which made them ineffective in negotiations with the Iranians. The White House misjudged and grossly exaggerated the time it would take for Iran to field a nuclear weapon and advanced long-range missiles.

Furthermore, the success of the Venezuelan operation and the exaggerated expectation of US military prowess blinded Trump, who readily believed Israel's narrative that the regime in Tehran was about to collapse.

Now, reality has taken hold. Winning every battle does not win the war. As with

the North Vietnamese and the Taliban, Iran's strategy of winning by not losing bit. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz proved to be the most formidable weapon the Iranians wielded. With 20 percent of global energy, much of the phosphates required for fertilisers, and helium needed for chip manufacturing sealed in the Gulf, the consequences of a drawn-out conflict were clear: economic disaster.

Iran's metric for success was not the number of US fighter jets downed or US military bases hit. It was the price of gasoline in the US and the dismal state of stock markets. Even at its start, the war was highly unpopular, with nearly two-thirds of Americans opposing it. High gasoline prices and the risk of surging inflation meant

increasing social discontent ahead of a key midterm election in the US.

Now Trump is faced with two unsatisfactory choices. As with President Lyndon Johnson during the Vietnam war, Trump can either accept Iran's conditions to end the war or continue to escalate and get bogged down in a drawn-out conflict – a "forever war".

For the time being, the US president has opted for British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's notion that "jaw-jaw is better than war-war". Whichever way Trump decides to go, given that he has trapped himself with no good options, the Iran war will prove to be the most catastrophic decision he will have made as president.

A new regional order for the Strait of Hormuz

The GCC and Iran can come up with a new security architecture for the Strait of Hormuz that can give Trump an off-ramp.



Yet, this reality also demonstrates the limits of the United States' security patronage. These limits—especially during what appears to be a historically unconditional alliance with Israel in which Israeli interests increasingly trump American interests in the region—suggest that the status quo is unsustainable.

A new order will inevitably replace the existing one, as conditions for all regional states will further deteriorate if the conflict continues to escalate. There is no longer any scenario in which Iran remains a target while the GCC carries on as usual, as was the case during the 12-day war in June 2025.

Iran's ability to choke the flow

of maritime traffic with \$20,000 drones that can be produced underground and launched from anywhere in the country suggests that it possesses immense leverage. Iranian officials have clearly stated that it will now be utilised to forge a new order for Hormuz.

Relations between Iran and the GCC states have seen ups and downs since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The relationship was defined by hostility for a long time until it underwent a radical, positive transformation in the past few years.

Iranian attacks against the military and economic infrastructure in the GCC states, along with the recent expulsion of Iranian diplomats from some GCC capitals, undoubtedly constitute a severe setback and a regression toward the past.

However, this crisis has also demonstrated that security is a collective good; the current war proves how one state's insecurity renders all states in the region insecure. A security architecture built at the expense of a neighbour is no longer viable. Iran has already begun dismantling

the former order, but the new order does not need to be exclusively Iranian in its design. For a path forward, we can look to Europe's successful historical experiences in achieving a regional order. From the Congress of Vienna, which stabilised Europe following Napoleon's wars of aggression, to the gradual economic, political, and security integration that followed World War II, these milestones should not serve as templates, but as sources of inspiration for our region.

The Strait of Hormuz suffers from a legal anomaly, as it remains one of the few critical maritime arteries of its kind lacking a dedicated international regulatory treaty. Unlike Türkiye, whose sovereign control and regional stability are in part anchored in the Montreux Convention regulating the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Hormuz operates without a codified maritime framework, which has made it uniquely vulnerable to superpower impositions throughout history. The current war can thus, to some extent, be understood as a product of this unregulated

environment.

Convening a "Congress for Hormuz" could help regional states collectively design a security architecture, fill this legal vacuum, and ensure the stability of not only our own region but the global economy as well.

The ultimate goal of such a platform should be the codification of a treaty that formalises the status of the strait and provides the legal certainty currently absent, while also elevating the strategic weight of regional states in the global economy by ensuring that the management of Hormuz remains a local prerogative.

In the short term, this framework can serve to reopen the strait, providing Trump with a way out of the quagmire by claiming that his regional allies have helped reopen it. In the long term, this framework would protect GCC countries from a patron willing to sacrifice international law and regional stability for the benefit of its principal ally, Israel, an ally that none of us will ever be able to replace or compete with.

Middle East on fire again: A bilateral ceasefire in multilateral war falls apart

Hours after the ceasefire between the US and Iran was announced, several airstrikes have been reported from the Middle East. From Iran to the UAE to Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, several energy sites are in flames. A bilateral ceasefire cannot help in a multilateral war.



The ceasefire in the Middle East war was never foolproof. But its fragility was on display within hours of its announcement on Wednesday. The narrow deal between the US and Iran was never meant to hold. While the ceasefire paused direct military hostilities between Washington DC and Tehran for two weeks, the American ally in the war, Israel, never complied.

Hours after the ceasefire's announcement, the Middle East is ablaze again. Israel made it clear that its ground operations in Lebanon would continue. The war in the Middle East began as a three-way confrontation between the US, Israel and Iran on February 28. The three-way war became a wider regional conflict as Iran targeted Gulf and regional states with barrages of missiles and drones. Half a dozen countries — the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Turkey came under Iranian fire. The Gulf nations, although they did not fire back at Iran, were sucked into the conflict. Then, a bilateral ceasefire between the US and Iran was reached. But to address what? A multi-player war with a bunch of state and non-state actors.

Now, with Israeli forces continuing strikes in Lebanon and even on Iran's Lavan Island, it only strengthens the argument that a bilateral ceasefire cannot hold in a multilateral war.

The US has the safety of distance from Iran, but Israel doesn't. Israel knows that leaving Iran with any firepower would be risky for it. Its goal in the war might not have been achieved yet. The strike on Iran's Lavan Island is a sign of that.

Meanwhile, Iran on Wednesday warned that it would bomb Israel's financial capital Tel Aviv if attacks on it did not stop. The ceasefire is in tatters on the first day itself.

WHAT EXACTLY DID THE US-IRAN CEASEFIRE COVER?

US President Donald Trump on Wednesday (India time) announced a

two-week ceasefire with Iran. Under the deal, Iran was expected to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and stop attacks on US targets, Israel and Gulf countries. In return, the US agreed to suspend strikes on Iran.

Pakistan, Egypt and Turkey helped mediate the arrangement, it was reported.

Israel backed the pause in fighting with Iran. But it immediately clarified that the truce would not apply to Lebanon, where Israeli forces have intensified a ground offensive in recent weeks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that the ceasefire "does not include Lebanon".

Analysts say that Israel could intensify its offensive against Lebanon's Hezbollah, which is an Iranian proxy.

That statement by Netanyahu exposed the weakness of the deal. It was not a regional ceasefire, at least in effect. It was only a temporary pause between the US and Iran, it seems.

Even from the Iranian side, media reports suggest, missile and drone interceptions continued in the Gulf nations, even after the ceasefire was announced. These reports came even as the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan, which was one of the mediators of the ceasefire, said that the two-week suspension of hostilities would extend to Lebanon.

But within hours of the ceasefire announcement, Israeli strikes resumed in southern Lebanon.

Airstrikes hit Sidon, Tyre and Nabatieh. Drone strikes and artillery shelling continued across the south. Israel also issued fresh evacuation orders for parts of Beirut and areas south of the Zahrani River, reported news agency Reuters.

Israel argued that Hezbollah is a separate threat and the Lebanon front is independent of the Iranian front. Hezbollah, meanwhile, has hinted that it would stop the fire only if Israel fully stopped first.

HAVE IRANIAN ATTACKS ON GULF STATES REALLY STOPPED?

Reports from Gulf countries suggest that missile and drone interceptions continued even after the ceasefire was announced by Trump. The UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait all reported fresh projectiles targeting oil and energy infrastructure. Gulf countries said the scale of attacks had been reduced, but not stopped entirely.

Kuwait's army reported intercepting a wave of Iranian drones/missiles since 8 am on Wednesday, targeting vital oil facilities, power stations, and water desalination plants. These caused some infrastructure damage, reported The Jerusalem Post. The UAE Ministry of Defence confirmed its air defences were engaging Iranian missile and drone attacks originating from Iran, news agency Associated Press reported. Additionally, Saudi Arabia's crucial East-West oil pipeline, which is currently its only outlet for crude exports, was hit in an Iranian attack, Reuters reported on Wednesday. Explosions were also reported in Bahrain's capital Manama. Civil defence extinguished a fire at a building attributed to Iranian aggression, according to Bahrain's home ministry.

This reveals the fighting in Lebanon has become the biggest loophole in the ceasefire. Even if Iran paused direct attacks, Hezbollah and Israel could still drag the region back into a larger war.

WHY DOES A BILATERAL CEASEFIRE NOT WORK IN A MULTILATERAL WAR?

A ceasefire between two countries works only when those two countries control the entire war. That's not true in the month-long Middle East.

Iran has non-state allies and proxy groups across the region. Israel is fighting not just Iran, but also Tehran's proxy,

Hezbollah in Lebanon. Gulf countries have become direct targets. Iraq, Jordan and even Oman have been drawn in.

Therefore, a pause between Washington and Tehran might buy time. But it could not stop the wider fire. Unless provisions for the Hezbollah front, the Gulf states being Iran's targets and an Israeli offensive in Lebanon are included in a ceasefire pact, it would remain fragile.

The Middle East war is not one war. With multiple fronts and players, there are multiple wars. And that is why a bilateral ceasefire between the US and Iran in a multilateral war does not hold.

Fearless Voice of the Community

The South Asian Insider

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Adani moves US court seeking dismissal of SEC fraud case, says lawsuit lacks jurisdiction

In a pre-motion letter filed ahead of a planned April 30 motion seeking dismissal of the lawsuit, Adanis through their lawyers said the SEC's claims over a 2021 bond sale by the group's renewable energy arm, Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL) are legally flawed on multiple grounds.

The USD 750 million bond sale was conducted outside the United States under Rule 144A and Regulation S exemptions, with securities sold to non-US underwriters and only later resold in part to qualified institutional buyers, they said. Lawyers added the complaint does not allege that Gautam Adani approved the issuance, attended key meetings, or directed any activity at US investors.

The filing also contends the SEC's case is impermissibly extraterritorial, noting the securities were not listed in the US, the issuer is Indian, and the alleged misconduct occurred entirely in India. Citing US Supreme Court

precedent, the defendants said the SEC failed to show any "domestic transaction", a requirement for applying US securities laws. They went on to state that SEC does not allege any investor losses, adding that the bonds matured and were fully repaid with interest in 2024.

They also disputed the underlying bribery allegations, saying there is no credible evidence supporting



such claims.

The filing argues that statements cited by the SEC -- relating to ESG

commitments, anti-corruption practices, and corporate reputation -- amount to non-actionable "puffery", or general corporate optimism that investors cannot reasonably rely on. It further said the SEC failed to link either defendant to specific misleading statements or demonstrate intent to defraud. The defendants are seeking dismissal of the case in full and said they are prepared to appear for a pre-motion conference if required.

Community Affairs

Aneet Padda to play double role in Aditya Sarpotdar's Shakti Shalini: Report

Actor Aneet Padda is set to take on a double role in Shakti Shalini, which will mark a shift from her previous on-screen image. Directed by Aditya Sarpotdar, the upcoming film is slated for a December release.

According to a Mid-Day report, the story centres on a vengeful female ghost who punishes men after being betrayed and brutally killed. The character Shakti represents the goddess Kali, revered in Bengal as the ultimate form of Shakti, who battles against this spirit.

Last year, Aneet was confirmed as the lead for Shakti Shalini, a key addition to the Maddock Horror Comedy Universe. Her character was introduced in a post-credits scene of the film Thamma, released on October 21, 2025. She was described as "the creator, the destroyer, and the mother of all." The film is

scheduled for release on December 24 this year.

Vishal Jethwa has reportedly also joined the cast, playing the love interest opposite Aneet. His role is expected to add depth to the narrative, moving beyond a traditional romantic storyline.

Shakti Shalini is described as a female-led action drama with strong emotional elements. It blends mythological themes with contemporary storytelling.

The film aims to explore themes of resilience, power, and agency through its

combination of stylised action and a strong dramatic core, Shakti Shalini is anticipated to be a major release in the coming year.

Aneet's previous work

Aneet gained recognition with Saiyaara, where she played Vaani, a shy journalist and poet who falls in love with musician Krish Kapur, played by Ahaan Panday. The story follows their relationship and challenges, including Vaani's diagnosis with Alzheimer's disease. Before that, she had appeared in the 2022 film Salaam Venky and the 2025 series Big Girls Don't Cry.



lead character's journey. With its

Called auntie by a co-worker, Indian-origin NHS worker in UK wins £1,425 payout

An Indian-origin woman in the UK serving as a healthcare assistant with the National Health Service (NHS), has received £1,425 (Rs 1.77 lakh) as remuneration after being called an "auntie" by a colleague, reported the UK-based news outlet, The Independent.

Ida Esteves, a 64-year-old healthcare employee, had been a part of the West London NHS Trust as a healthcare assistant in the Women's Forensic Services department since September 2022. According to Esteves, she had been called "auntie" multiple times by her colleague and team leader, Charles Oppong, who was based at St Bernard's

hospital, part of the West London NHS Trust headquarters. This continued despite Esteves having made multiple requests to use her proper name instead. Oppong had justified his actions by explaining the values of Ghanaian culture, claiming that the word "auntie" is used to respect older women as well as a signal of good manners. In June 2023, Charles Oppong commented on Esteves' choice of lipstick, saying that she would be a good match for a member of staff named George.

In September 2023, Esteves formally complained about Oppong's conduct through an email expressing her

concern. According to The Independent report, she had complained that "A staff member called me 'auntie' multiple times despite me telling him to call me by my name." According to Esteves' complaint, on asking Oppong to use her proper name, he reacted by saying that "You want to be young then!" Esteves subsequently filed a harassment claim against the NHS with the Employment Tribunal (a judicial body with responsibility for workplace justice, being the main forum for deciding disputes between workers and employers). She asserted that she had indeed been subjected to harassment on the basis of

her age and sex. While Oppong admitted to the tribunal of having called Esteves "auntie" on at least one occasion, he argued that the word is used as a mark of high respect in Ghanaian culture, which he belongs to. Employment Judge Alliot acknowledged that the term "auntie" is considered a term of respect for older people in Ghanaian culture. However, he made it clear that once Esteves had objected, continuing to use the term became unacceptable. "Nevertheless, since it was against her wishes, it would have been offensive to her," the judge was quoted as stating by the Independent.

Vance Heads to Pakistan for Iran Ceasefire Talks

(TSAI BUREAU)

US Vice President JD Vance departed for Islamabad on Friday to lead high-level negotiations with Iranian officials aimed at securing a lasting end to the ongoing conflict involving Iran, the US, and Israel. Vance warned Iran against attempting to "play" the United States while signalling openness to dialogue. "If the Iranians are willing to negotiate in good faith, we're certainly willing to extend the open hand," he told reporters before boarding Air Force Two. The South Asian community in the US monitors developments closely, given Pakistan's mediating role and the broader implications for regional stability.

New Consular Services in LA Ease Life for Indian Diaspora Across Four US States

(TSAI BUREAU)

From April 6, 2026, the Consulate General of India in Los Angeles has resumed direct visa and Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) services for residents of Southern California, Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico. Applicants now submit cases through VFS Global's LA centre, cutting travel and wait times previously tied to the busier San Francisco consulate. A revamped OCI portal with real-time tracking and AI-assisted validation promises faster processing and fewer rejections.

For professionals in tech, aerospace, and healthcare hubs across these states, this means quicker emergency visas and smoother family mobility. The Indian diaspora — nearly 800,000 strong in the region — finally gets the local lifeline it long needed.

Indian-Origin Suspects Arrested in Multi-State Elder Fraud Probe

(TSAI BUREAU)

Two Indian nationals — Simranjeet Singh, 22, and Vaibhav Sharma, 23, both of Bakersfield, California — have been arrested in connection with a multi-state elder fraud investigation. Authorities allege the pair targeted an elderly Wisconsin woman through a scam accusing her of accessing child pornography, then extorted a substantial sum before an undercover operation led to their arrests. Both face charges of attempted theft by false representation involving an elder victim and are held in Columbia County Jail subject to ICE detainers. Law enforcement agencies continue to expand multi-state investigations into scam networks targeting vulnerable seniors across the country.

The \$500 Billion Vision: Inside the India-US Trade Facilitation Portal

(TSAI BUREAU)

Behind the diplomatic language of "bilateral trade targets" lies a practical tool. The India-US Trade Facilitation Portal, launched during Foreign Secretary Misri's Washington visit, uses AI-driven matchmaking to connect Indian exporters — including small and medium enterprises — directly with American buyers. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's description of it as a "forward-looking engine" understates its potential: for the South Asian diaspora with business interests on both continents, it digitises what trade delegations once provided — warm introductions and vetted commercial connections — making them accessible at the click of a button.

NASA's Artemis II Crew Breaks Apollo-Era Distance Record

(TSAI BUREAU)

Four astronauts aboard NASA's Artemis II mission surpassed the 1970 Apollo 13 record for farthest distance from Earth. On April 6, Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch, and Canada's Jeremy Hansen reached 252,756 miles from Earth during their lunar flyby — beating Apollo 13 by over 4,100 miles. The milestone, part of a daring lunar loop gathering data for future crewed landings, reignites wonder for the global Indian scientific community and the next generation of space aspirants.

Sitharaman Skips US Visit for Women's Quota Special Session

(TSAI BUREAU)

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is expected to forgo her planned visit to the United States — including the World Bank and IMF spring meetings — as Parliament reconvenes for a special session on April 16–18. The session will fast-track the 33% women's reservation in Lok Sabha and state assemblies, alongside steps to establish a delimitation commission. Domestic priorities have taken clear precedence over international engagements. For the South Asian diaspora — many of whom champion women's leadership globally — this signals India's determination to translate legislative gains into real political representation.

Microsoft's India Bet: Why the Puri Appointment Signals a Deeper Shift

(TSAI BUREAU)

When Microsoft appointed Aparajita Puri as Managing Director for India and South Asia, it was more than a leadership hire — it was a statement. Puri's background bridging management consulting and enterprise technology positions her at the intersection where the next decade of India's digital economy will be built. Her mandate to lead the Strategic Pursuits Team comes as Indian enterprises accelerate AI adoption across manufacturing, finance, and healthcare.

Puri joins a growing list of South Asian executives leading major global technology divisions, underscoring the community's outsized influence in the sector.

India's Forex Reserves Climb to \$697 Billion

(TSAI BUREAU)

India's foreign exchange reserves rose \$9.06 billion to \$697.12 billion for the week ended April 3, the Reserve Bank of India reported. Gold reserves alone jumped \$7.22 billion, reflecting New Delhi's pragmatic diversification away from dollar-denominated assets. For the Indian diaspora — from London boardrooms to Silicon Valley startups — strong reserves signal economic resilience at home, bolstering confidence in remittances and rupee stability.

Indian Americans Recognised in New York Power List

(TSAI BUREAU)

Three Indian Americans feature in City & State New York's 2026 Trailblazers in Transportation list. Bhairavi Desai, founder of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, is recognised for long-standing advocacy on behalf of taxi drivers. The list also includes Jeremy Cooney and Kovid Saxena for contributions to transportation policy and innovation. Desai's inclusion underscores the vital

role of immigrant-led labour organisations in the gig economy — a cause resonant across the South Asian diaspora.

India Strengthens Cybercrime Fight with New FIU-IND and I4C MoU

(TSAI BUREAU)

India's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU-IND) and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) have signed a landmark MoU to sharpen coordination on cyber fraud and financial crime. The pact improves intelligence sharing, fraud detection protocols, and investigative support — safeguarding India's booming digital payment ecosystem and enabling faster asset recovery.

With cyber threats touching every South Asian household — from UPI scams to phishing rings — this collaboration signals a more joined-up national response. For the diaspora sending remittances home, New Delhi is hardening its digital defences.

Air India CEO Campbell Wilson Steps Down Amid Transition

(TSAI BUREAU)

Air India has announced the resignation of CEO and Managing Director Campbell Wilson, who will step down once a successor is appointed. Wilson, who joined in 2022 after a long career at Singapore Airlines, had signalled his departure to Tata Group Chairman N. Chandrasekaran in 2024. The move comes as the airline navigates ongoing losses, post-crash regulatory scrutiny, and a massive fleet expansion ahead of 2027. For the Indian diaspora that relies on Air India for intercontinental travel, leadership stability during this transition will be closely watched. The flag carrier's transformation journey continues under new hands.

Aparajita Puri Appointed Microsoft MD for India & South Asia

(TSAI BUREAU)

Aparajita Puri — a former McKinsey & Company Partner — has joined Microsoft as Managing Director for India and South Asia. Puri will lead the Strategic Pursuits Team, focusing on large-scale enterprise transformations powered by AI, data, and cloud technologies. The appointment underscores Microsoft's push to deepen engagement with Indian corporations and startups amid rapid regional digital adoption. For South Asian tech professionals and entrepreneurs, this elevation of an Indian-origin leader at one of the world's biggest tech firms highlights growing opportunities at the intersection of consulting expertise and cutting-edge innovation.

Protect Your Elders: Lessons from the Wisconsin Fraud Arrests

(TSAI BUREAU)

The arrests of two Indian nationals in connection with a multi-state elder fraud scheme are a reminder that such networks cause grave harm — to elderly victims, and to the broader reputation of the South Asian community. The Wisconsin case, in which an elderly woman was extorted through a fabricated child-pornography accusation, illustrates the cruelty of tech-enabled scams targeting isolated seniors. Elder fraud is a growing federal priority. Community vigilance, early education, and active reporting are the most effective deterrents.

Trump not first: The history of 'Stone Age' threats

US President Donald Trump has vowed to bomb Iran hard enough to send 'them back to the Stone Ages' if Tehran does not agree to a peace deal. However, Trump does not hold exclusivity or copyright over threatening a sovereign state in the 21st century with Stone Age consequences.



Earlier this month, US President Donald Trump, in a national address, vowed to bomb Iran hard enough to send "them back to the Stone Ages where they belong". The imperious proclamation brought back a tidal wave of memories.

In 2007, when I was Commandant of the National Defence College, I led a delegation to China. During the call on the Deputy Chief of General Staff (Dy CGS), People's Liberation Army (PLA), I prefaced my opening remarks with these lines, "While admiring the nearly 10% growth rate averaged by China over three decades, we are watching with great professional concern the massive funding allocations being made to the PLA in general and to PLA Navy in particular". The PLA official responded, "Insofar as funding of the PLA is concerned, at first glance it may appear to be somewhat large, but we have neglected quality of life issues for a very long time. So a lot of expenditure is being incurred on that account".

A couple of days later, when visiting the Army General Staff College at Nanjing, the commandant there very proudly took us around the living accommodations of the trainees. The quality of construction, layout, furniture, and facilities provided was easily "five-star+" standards. While thanking the commandant, I complimented him on the very impressive infrastructure and casually asked him to confirm if such high-standard accommodation was being provided to each PLA trainee.

The good General vigorously shook his head and emphatically said, "No, no, no. These are exclusively for our foreign trainees". It was now obvious to me that the Deputy Chief of General Staff's order, to put on display the veracity of his remark, had been passed down the line without elaborating its context.

So, it was only left for me to request the commandant that my question and his answer may please be reported up the line "because the Dy CGS appears to be under a somewhat different impression". I also requested our Dy Military Attache, who was accompanying me, to simultaneously convey the gist of this conversation to the Dy CGS, PLA, through the proper channel.

In 2009, well after my retirement, I represented the United Services Institute at a symposium in Beijing on 'Water Security: China and the World'. In my presentation, I had criticised the reported Chinese plans to divert the River Brahmaputra northwards at the bend where it forms the world's longest and deepest canyon just before entering India.

China's former minister for water resources, Wang Shucheng, who was present at the symposium, sought to rebut the reports. "China does not need to divert Brahmaputra waters; it was not feasible, it was not scientific, and it would take 600 years," Shucheng said.

But since the Director of the Yellow River Water Conservancy Committee was already on public record as having stated that the mega plan enjoyed official sanction, I asked Shucheng point-blank whether he was denying the plans only because Brahmaputra was planned to be diverted far upstream in Tibet, where it was called Yarlung Tsangpo? There was a fair bit of back and forth between him and the interpreter, but no comprehensible response.

WHEN US GAVE PAKISTAN 'STONE AGE' THREAT

It so happened that in 2011, I met Richard Armitage, former US Deputy Secretary of State, at a Track 1.5 dialogue in Washington. During an informal interlude, I said that I would like to ask him a question "from one

naval officer to another".

He smiled and asked if it was about his remark, "bomb back to the Stone Age", referring to President Pervez Musharraf's allegation that the US had threatened to bomb Pakistan back to the Stone Age in 2001 if it did not cooperate in the US-led war on terror. I said that my question did not relate to it, and he said, "Good, because I have denied it."

My question was, "How do you deal with the Chinese, as they brazenly lie between their teeth with a straight face and, when caught out, seek refuge in language and translation gaps?"

He shot back, "You mean, if their lips are moving, they are lying?" Amused, I said that it was a good description and I should remember it. He continued with a smile, "We used to say that for the Pakistanis." I smiled wider and remarked, "This is brilliant, and I must quote you." He laughed and said, "Go right ahead, I will deny it!" So, there we were — or so I thought.

Come 2016, and the language of political discourse assumed new hues. This, however, remained largely confined within the US for the next four years, and the rest of the world watched with some amusement and not a little trepidation.

January 2025, however, changed the very tone and tenor of international dialogue, as the established norms of diplomatic exchanges and international parleys in public view were reset. The contemporary, unrestrained recourse to muscular lexicon — making no distinction between alliance partners and sworn enemies when name-calling, whimsically suspending

operative parts of treaty clauses, mutual agreements and tacit understandings and then reversing them, taking one's nation to war without parliamentary sanction, and globally expanding its scope without United Nations Security Council authorisation — is all now par for the course. Embedded deep is the chicanery from north and west of us, even as the world is fast-moving towards a 21st-century global order where the alliances and partnerships of yore will no longer be operative, and artificially propped power centres will go with them. When the dust settles on the ongoing 'shamal' (sandstorm) in West Asia, and the haze clears, nations will forge flexible nodes of convenience driven not by ideologies or colour of skin or religion, but by sheer economic sense. Partners in one field will compete in another, all for the betterment of their people. Artificial intelligence, natural stupidity, natural resources, artificial islands — every conceivable asset and all perceived liabilities will be leveraged as never before. Like it or not, the knife has been dug in too deeply not to come out with a bleeding sore, hopefully only to heal thereafter. Meanwhile, it is clear that Donald Trump does not hold exclusivity or copyright over threatening a sovereign state in the 21st century with Stone Age consequences; Richard Armitage has it. Ironically, the latter denies it while the former gloats in it. Historians in the distant future will objectively judge and compare the dignity, self-respect and conduct in the face of extreme adversity by the two intended target nations — Pakistan, with its fractured history of less than a century, and Iran, with a civilisational history of thousands of years.

(By Pradeep Kaushiva, India Today)

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Iran Scorecard: A List Of Winners, Losers, And Those Who Rigged The Game

Iran is the clearest winner. America absorbed a lasting blow. Trump got what he wanted. Netanyahu is exposed. The Gulf is vulnerable. All these realities are true, and that is the paradox of this war 'of choice'.



The ceasefire in West Asia does not end the conflict. It reveals who was fighting it, and who was winning around it. This scorecard starts with a simple observation: the fighting involved three principals, the United States, Iran, and Israel, but the ceasefire was shaped by others. Who fought and who mediated tells you almost everything about who won.

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Iran: Victor by Any Meaningful Measure

Iran is the clearest winner of this conflict. The military outcome was a stalemate, and against the world's most powerful military, a stalemate is a victory. Its missile forces remain functional, its A2/AD architecture was tested and held, and the Strait of Hormuz stayed under effective Iranian control throughout. Every day the strait remained contested, oil prices spiked and global shipping paid a premium, transferring real economic leverage to Tehran. Hormuz control is both a military and a financial instrument, and Iran has now proved it can wield both simultaneously.

Above all, the Axis of Resistance survives intact. Hezbollah, the Houthis, the Iraqi factions, the network Iran has spent decades building, emerged functional and emboldened. Tehran can point to a battle-tested proxy network and a demonstrated deterrence capability against two nuclear-armed adversaries. That is regional primacy.

The United States and Trump: Two Different Ledgers

The United States, as a strategic actor, absorbed a serious and potentially lasting blow. Washington's inability to achieve its objectives against a sanctioned, regionally isolated middle power will reverberate. Partners in the Gulf, in East Asia, in Eastern Europe will recalibrate. The arms-for-security model that has underpinned American regional influence, the implicit bargain of "buy our weapons, host our bases and we will guarantee your survival", is harder to sell after a ceasefire in which the guarantor accepted terms brokered by others. And a financially rejuvenated Iran will be even more difficult in the months and years ahead.

Donald Trump is a different accounting entity entirely. He is not invested in long-term American influence architecture. He is invested in his domestic political position as a peacemaker and ender of wars. On that narrow measure, the ceasefire is defensible. No flag-draped coffins. No open-ended commitment. A deal he can brand and a base that reads ending wars as strength rather than retreat. Trump extracted the outcome his political coalition rewarded him for, and the long-term costs, the credibility erosion, the alliance fraying, the emboldened adversaries, will accrue to institutions and successors he has no interest in protecting. The president and the presidency point in different directions. That divergence is itself a strategic vulnerability.

Netanyahu: A Personal Reckoning

Israel as a state endures. Benjamin Netanyahu as a political figure does not obviously survive this outcome. The war was partly a mechanism for his political survival; the total victory promise that kept his coalition intact and his legal troubles at bay. The ceasefire without victory removes that cover. The hostage families are furious. Coalition partners are sensing blood. The ICC exposure remains unresolved. A highly personal vendetta against Hamas and Iran, pursued with a ferocity that alienated Israel's closest ally

at critical moments, has produced a pause rather than a conclusion. Netanyahu is domestically weakened, judicially vulnerable, and increasingly likely to be removed before the next phase of this conflict begins.

The Gulf: Exposed and Divided

The implications for the Gulf are severe and poorly understood outside the region. The GCC is not a monolith, and the ceasefire has made that abundantly clear.

Saudi Arabia is the most exposed. Iranian strikes on Saudi infrastructure during the conflict were pointedly strategic and a demonstration. Riyadh's oil facilities, its air defence architecture, its economic lifelines were shown to be within Iran's effective reach. The ceasefire ends the bombardment. It does not end the vulnerability. Saudi Arabia now lives permanently adjacent to a battle-hardened, narratively victorious, regionally hegemonic Iran, with the American security guarantee visibly diminished and no credible tripwire between them.

The UAE paid a different kind of price. Abu Dhabi aligned itself openly with the US war effort, betting that the world's most powerful military would deliver a decisive outcome. It did not. Iran does not forget who cheered from the sidelines, and the UAE's financial and trade hub ambitions depend on a regional environment that Tehran can now complicate at will. The ceasefire preserves the UAE's immediate position; it does not repair its strategic exposure.

Qatar fares better, protected by its studied neutrality and its gas interdependence with Iran, which created mutual incentives for restraint. But even Doha cannot escape the fundamental reality now visible to every Gulf capital: the American security umbrella has limits, and Iran has just demonstrated where those limits are.

The Brokers and the Quiet Gainers
Pakistan's role deserves

acknowledgement precisely because it was unexpected. The Islamabad Accord represents Pakistan's most consequential diplomatic moment in a decade, a return to global relevance that Islamabad will press hard to consolidate. Some Gulf capitals may view Pakistan's brokerage dimly, reading it as a tilt toward Tehran. That displeasure is real but limited: Pakistan's nuclear deterrence, its labour exports, and its Islamic solidarity credentials give it equities in the Gulf that limit any lasting rupture.

China's gains are quieter, more durable and systemic. Beijing leveraged its economic relationship with Tehran to ensure the ceasefire was accepted, secured its energy flows, and emerged with its responsible great power narrative substantially reinforced. It policed nothing and gained structurally.

India benefits economically, with lower oil volatility, restored shipping lanes and fiscal targets intact, while preserving its strategic autonomy. The unwelcome development for New Delhi is a diplomatically emboldened Pakistan pressing its newfound relevance on India's western flank. This is a manageable irritant, not an existential shift, but it is real.

The Palestinians: Both Vectors Are Live

The Palestinian position is genuinely ambiguous. Iran's elevation as a regional hegemon means its most powerful sponsor just got considerably stronger, which is potentially convertible into future leverage. But Israel exits this ceasefire frustrated, humiliated, and domestically cornered, and that fury must land somewhere. Gaza remains the most available target. A stronger Iran is a stronger patron; a cornered Israel is a more dangerous neighbour. Both vectors are live simultaneously, and which one dominates will define the next phase.

The Bottom Line

The ceasefire does not resolve the underlying contest between the United States and Iran, between Israel and Hezbollah, between the regional order Washington built and the one China and Russia have been quietly constructing. What it has done is clarify the distribution of power. Iran demonstrated hegemony. Saudi Arabia discovered vulnerability. The United States revealed limits. Trump declared victory. All four statements can simultaneously be true. That is the world the pause - or the end, if it really is one - has produced.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Is Trump The President Who Lost Asia To China?

For at least a decade, developing countries across Asia and Africa have worried about growing dependent on China. They're concerned about debt traps, coercive policies, and hidden costs that might push their economies toward crisis.

Crisis has come, and that logic has been turned on its head. After six weeks of the US and Israel's war on Iran and its ensuing counterattacks, it is the countries that bet on Chinese supply chains that are faring better than the ones that trusted Pax Americana.

Consider Pakistan. By now it should have been in the middle of yet another economic and social implosion. It has always been vulnerable to energy price shocks, given that it imports almost all of its energy, much of it through the Strait of Hormuz. The country has \$130 billion in external debt and a persistent current account deficit, and so the slightest nudge should have tipped it over into a familiar spiral: Emergency requests to the International Monetary Fund, 18-hour power blackouts, unrest on the streets.

None of that is visible. There are signs of stress, certainly: Islamabad has hiked fuel prices and is planning to shut off electricity for two to three hours each day.

A sustained shortage of liquid natural gas will make it hard to keep power plants running. But, compared to the situation just a few years ago - when, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the economy had a full-scale meltdown - it's showing remarkable resilience.

What's the difference? Chinese-made solar panels. Pakistanis have gleefully transitioned to solar power, importing about 17 gigawatts a year of photovoltaics since 2024. A quarter of households have installed solar panels for their own use.

Islamabad didn't even have to spend too much money subsidizing the renewables rollout. They just had to ride Chinese overcapacity instead of fighting it, and make it work for their own citizens by keeping tariffs low. The price of imported solar panels dropped by almost 60% in 2024-25; Beijing's subsidies kept their factories humming, but also financed the electrification of millions of households across Pakistan.

Many other countries made the opposite choice, in order to insulate domestic production or minimize political risk. Those that tried to keep cheap photovoltaic cells out have seen much slower rates of uptake - and are, in consequence, far more exposed to the

chaos in the Gulf.

Nor are solar panels the only way in which cheap Chinese goods are turning out to be sources of resilience rather than disruption. Nepal has a higher proportion of electric vehicles than any other country in the world, barring Norway. Its huge imported fleet of cheap EVs mean that it is far less worried about gasoline prices than most of its Asian neighbors. And they run on clean electricity, emerging from a hydropower infrastructure that is financed in part by Beijing.

It's not hard to imagine policymakers from across the developing world looking at examples like these and concluding that betting on Beijing isn't actually the riskier option. Some may already have taken that chance; imports of Chinese solar panels have shot up in the past couple of years across sub-Saharan Africa in particular. If the only options are dependence on predictably mercantilist Beijing and on an erratic, self-centered and disruptive US, the choice is obvious.

That may turn out to be the wrong call. It isn't wise to imagine that relying upon Beijing's goodwill is any safer. In just the past year, China has shown the

willingness to weaponize control over supply chains, such as the production of magnets and rare earths.

But right now, the contrast is glaring. Countries that believed that the open trading order, underpinned by American hegemony, would protect them from shocks are struggling; those who chose to run the risk of dependence upon Chinese imports and infrastructure are showing unexpected resilience.

This will only get worse if Trump withdraws from the Gulf without making an effort to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Then the lesson the world learns is even harsher: America will make decisions about your energy supply, take no responsibility for the consequences, and then leave. China will sell you the technology that allows you to stop caring about what the US does. This is a far greater geopolitical setback to the US than any loss of face in the Iran war might be. Trump may have thought that he would be remembered as the president who restored American greatness by solving long-running problems - Venezuela, Iran, perhaps Cuba. Instead, it looks like he will be remembered as the president who lost Asia to China.

By Mihir Sharma

War Ally To Mere Bystander: Is This The Loneliest Day For Netanyahu?

In the early hours of April 9, a few moments after US President Donald Trump took to social media and proclaimed that "a whole civilisation will die tonight, never to be brought back again", Iran and the US agreed to a two-week ceasefire arrangement via mediation of Pakistan. This arrangement seems to be the off-ramp the American leader was looking for, an escape from a potential 'forever war', something he has spent a vast amount of time deriding former US presidents for during his campaigns.

It is difficult to deny that Trump was in a quagmire. The war was not only escalating but also entrenching into a protracted conflict. Long-standing regional fault-lines, which were actively being managed over the past years, were renewed and pulled back into a situation heading towards a global economic abyss. Trump, once again, took to social media to announce the ceasefire, and Iran's Foreign Minister, Syed Abbas Araghchi, also released a statement, in broad acceptance of the two-week timeline, but with more leverage than the White House in play.

A New Middle East

As the global economy, markets, and oil and gas supply chains took a sigh of relief, staring at the brink of an international energy crisis, the Middle East geopolitically is looking at a reorientation that it did not order, but now must deal with. The ceasefire agreement, as per available information, is designed for a US off-ramp and not regional stability. Talks to take forward the ceasefire understanding are slated to take place in Pakistan on Friday (April 10) without direct

Israel, the US's closest partner in the region and which lured Trump to take on Iran, was ultimately a mere spectator to the ceasefire agreement.

intervention or participation of either Israel or any of the Gulf states, while demands for an end to the warfare in countries like Lebanon have been put forward by Tehran.

The non-participation of Israel and the Gulf states opens a Pandora's box on how the region moves forward in the coming months. Iran, maintaining tight control over the critical Strait of Hormuz and doubling down on its assertion about its armed forces having the right to decide the waterways' operationality, seems to have come out with the upper hand despite suffering immense damage over the 40-day-long bombing operation. However, the regime has survived, despite the assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a US-Israeli strike in February, and questions over the ability of his son and successor, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei.

Bibi Out In The Cold?

Israel, the US's closest partner in the region and which lured Trump to take on Iran, was a spectator to the ceasefire agreement and was forced to halt strikes against Iran (but has said it will continue its campaign against Hezbollah in Lebanon). From saying Iran was close to making a few nuclear warheads back in the summer of 2025 to highlighting that an uprising from within the Iranian population was inevitable following an aerial campaign against the regime, Netanyahu has seen Trump as a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fundamentally degrade Iran, whatever the cost.

However, while the military campaign

has certainly dealt a mighty blow to Iranian capacities, it has also solidified the idea that any future security construct of the region, specifically with relation to the Strait of Hormuz, cannot be put together without Iranian say.

For Israel, the ceasefire may be a bitter pill to swallow, with its strategic aims remaining in suspension. Its strategy of 'mowing the grass', or short bursts of military campaigns to keep a threat degraded, may work in Gaza and Lebanon, but conducting these operations against Iran consistently will not be possible without the US. Israel's opposition leader, Yair Lapid, who supported these actions against Iran, called the ceasefire deal a "political disaster" due to Israel not being at the table during the ceasefire talks.

Rumbblings Within Gulf

Meanwhile, the likes of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are now looking at an emboldened Iran that will exert its weight in the Persian Gulf with limited securitisation options. They may now have to make sure that US firepower remains a constant in the region, challenging their own aims of building long-term strategic autonomy. More quietly, Gulf states may have to align more with Israel as far as Iranian threat perceptions moving forward are concerned. This is a less-than-ideal situation, considering Israel's unpopular war in Gaza, but it may become a strategic necessity moving forward. The only country in the Gulf with explicit support

for the ceasefire till now is Oman, which previously has also said that the war was thrust upon Iran, and was not the latter's choice.

How the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran takes this detente arrangement is also worth keeping an eye on. The killing of the Ayatollah, along with a slew of the country and the corps' top leadership, means that the military may chase vendettas. Over the past month, a level of decentralisation has been orchestrated in operational tactics, meaning IRGC commanders may not necessarily wait for a chain of command to deliver orders. They are able and capable of doing so themselves. Countries like the UAE are still reporting projectile launches from Iran, highlighting that implementation of such a deal is much more complex than a few announcements on TruthSocial.

Finally, the longevity of this ceasefire will have Iran as the biggest stakeholder, along with the US. That automatically elevates its geopolitical standing in the region up many notches, a new reality very few others will be comfortable with. Over the next two weeks, the US will press for its exit, Iran will press for its institutional embedment in all things security for the region, while Israel and Gulf states reorient on how to navigate a 'new Middle East' that no one had asked for.

(Kabir Taneja is Executive Director of the Observer Research Foundation Middle East)

Beyond the Stone Age Rhetoric: A Recurring Pattern in Great-Power Brinkmanship

US President Donald Trump's recent vow to bomb Iran "back to the Stone Ages" if Tehran refuses a peace deal has ignited fierce debate. In a prime-time address, Trump warned that without cooperation—particularly on reopening the Strait of Hormuz—the United States would target Iran's bridges, power plants, and infrastructure over two to three weeks, reducing the country to a pre-modern state "where they belong." Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth echoed the sentiment bluntly on social media.

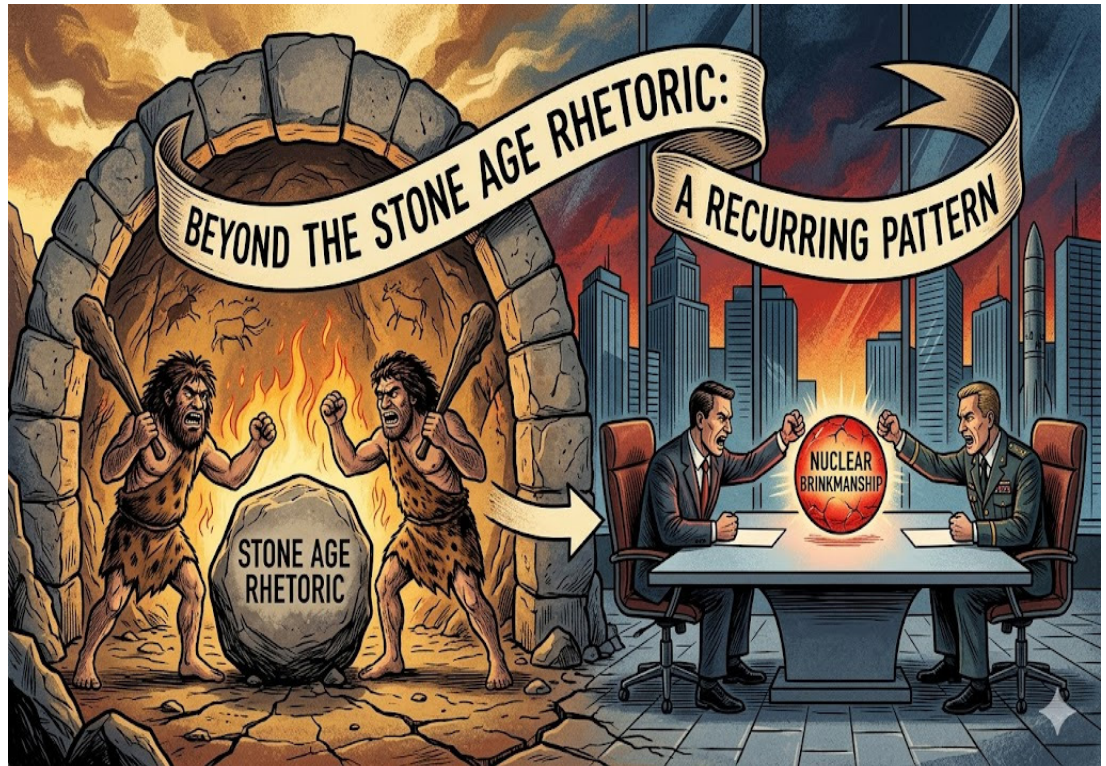
Trump is not the first leader—or even the first American—to deploy this vivid, prehistoric imagery as a threat. The phrase taps into a long tradition of hyperbolic military rhetoric that reveals more about the psychology of power than about strategy. Far from an original outburst, it recycles a cliché that has surfaced in conflicts from Vietnam to the Gulf War and beyond, often signaling frustration with asymmetric warfare where overwhelming conventional force meets determined resistance.

The expression is most famously linked to US Air Force General Curtis LeMay, the architect of the devastating firebombing campaigns against Japan in World War II and later a key figure in Vietnam strategy debates. In his 1965 book *Mission with LeMay*, LeMay reportedly declared that North Vietnam must "draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we're going to bomb them back into the Stone Age." He later clarified in interviews that he emphasized capability rather than intent, but the quote stuck as shorthand for total aerial dominance.

During the Vietnam era, similar language appeared in discussions around Operation Rolling Thunder and proposals for escalated bombing. US commanders, facing guerrilla tactics and political limits on ground troops, floated ideas of using airpower to pulverize infrastructure and force Hanoi to the table. William Westmoreland, commander of US forces in Vietnam, was also associated with blunt talk of blasting enemies "back into the stone ages." The rhetoric reflected a belief that modern industrial societies could be reverted to subsistence levels through sustained bombardment—ignoring the resilience of populations and the political costs of civilian suffering.

The threat resurfaced in the 1991 Gulf War. According to accounts, US Secretary of State James Baker reportedly warned Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz that if Iraq did not withdraw from Kuwait, the coalition would bomb Iraq "back to the Stone Age." The ultimatum underscored the coalition's intent to cripple Saddam Hussein's military machine while avoiding a prolonged occupation at that stage.

Post-9/11, the cliché entered diplomatic lore again. Pakistani



President Pervez Musharraf claimed in his memoir that then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage threatened to bomb Pakistan "back to the Stone Age" unless Islamabad fully supported the US invasion of Afghanistan. Armitage denied the exact wording but acknowledged delivering a stark message about consequences. President George W. Bush later admitted being "taken aback by the harshness" of the language used in those tense days.

Even outside US circles, the imagery persists. In 2023, Israel's Defence Minister Yoav Gallant warned that escalation with Hezbollah could return Lebanon to the Stone Age; Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah fired back that Israel would suffer the same fate. An unnamed Israeli minister was once quoted threatening Syria with the same prehistoric rollback. These exchanges show how the phrase has become a global shorthand for existential military pressure.

What does this recurring rhetoric reveal? First, it exposes the temptation of technological hubris. Advanced militaries, possessing precision-guided munitions, drones, and overwhelming air superiority, often imagine they can "reset" an adversary's civilization by destroying power grids, bridges, and factories. Targeting dual-use infrastructure—power plants that serve both military and civilian needs—skirts the edge of international humanitarian law, which prohibits disproportionate attacks on civilian objects. Critics, including analysts citing

the laws of war, argue that deliberate reduction of a society to pre-industrial conditions constitutes collective punishment and could qualify as a war crime.

Second, the "Stone Age" trope betrays a misunderstanding of history and human resilience. Iran, like Vietnam or Iraq before it, possesses deep civilizational roots, adaptive societies, and experience with sanctions and isolation. Carpet bombing or infrastructure demolition rarely produces quick capitulation; it often hardens resolve, fuels insurgency, and creates long-term humanitarian crises that burden the aggressor with reconstruction costs or refugee flows. LeMay himself eventually reflected on the limits of such strategies.

Third, in the information age, such threats amplify globally and risk escalation. Trump's comments, delivered amid an ongoing conflict involving strikes on Iranian facilities, have already prompted Iranian vows of retaliation and international condemnation. They complicate diplomacy, as seen in the recent two-week ceasefire brokered with Pakistani mediation. Bellicose language may rally domestic audiences, but it narrows off-ramps and invites accusations of recklessness from allies and adversaries alike.

In my view, this pattern underscores a deeper failure in strategic imagination. Great powers repeatedly reach for the same blunt rhetorical hammer when facing complex, non-existential threats. Modern conflicts demand precision—not just in

weaponry but in objectives. Destroying a nation's infrastructure to force compliance may yield short-term tactical gains, but it plants seeds of future instability, radicalization, and economic blowback that undermine long-term interests. Energy markets shudder at disruptions to the Strait of Hormuz; global opinion recoils at visions of civilian populations thrust into darkness and deprivation.

Trump's threat, while consistent with his deal-making style of maximum pressure, joins a lineage that should prompt reflection rather than repetition. History shows these phrases often precede either de-escalation through backchannels or prolonged quagmires. True strength lies not in promising prehistoric regression but in crafting durable incentives for peace—combining credible deterrence with realistic diplomacy that respects sovereignty and avoids turning entire populations into collateral damage. The "Stone Age" cliché has aged poorly because civilizations do not stay primitive; they adapt, remember grievances, and eventually rebuild stronger or more defiant. Policymakers would do well to retire the phrase and the mindset it represents. In an interconnected world, sending any nation "back" carries costs that boomerang. Sustainable security comes from forward-looking strategies, not nostalgic threats of regression. The sooner leaders recognize this, the better for global stability—and for avoiding the very barbarism such rhetoric evokes.

(TSAI BUREAU)

Sidelined in the Spotlight: Netanyahu's Isolation Amid Trump's Iran Ceasefire Gamble

As Washington brokered a surprise truce with Tehran, Jerusalem was left watching from the margins-raising urgent questions about the limits of even the closest alliances.



In the high-stakes theater of Middle East power politics, few alliances have seemed as ironclad as the one between US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Yet on April 7–8, 2026, as Trump abruptly pivoted from apocalyptic threats to a two-week ceasefire with Iran — brokered by Pakistan and centered on reopening the Strait of Hormuz — Israel found itself abruptly demoted from indispensable war partner to frustrated onlooker. Netanyahu, who had lobbied aggressively for joint US-Israeli strikes to cripple Iran's nuclear program, missile capabilities, and regime stability, watched as Washington cut a deal with Tehran while leaving Jerusalem's broader objectives unresolved. The question looms: Is this Netanyahu's loneliest moment on the global stage?

The sequence is telling. For weeks, Netanyahu portrayed the campaign — launched in tandem with US forces — as existential. Israel struck Iranian nuclear sites, leadership targets, and infrastructure, claiming significant degradation of Tehran's threats. Netanyahu publicly hailed Trump as the partner who would finally confront the ayatollahs head-on. But when Trump issued his "Stone Age" ultimatum and then, mere hours before a self-imposed deadline, announced the truce on social media, coordination with Israel was minimal. Reports indicate Israeli officials received

late notice, limited to a brief call from Trump just before the public rollout. Netanyahu's office issued a muted acknowledgment, stressing the decision was Trump's alone and explicitly declaring that the ceasefire "does not include Lebanon."

Within hours, Israel escalated strikes on Hezbollah in Lebanon — killing over 300 in one of the war's deadliest days — prompting Iranian fury and accusations that the truce was being violated. Trump, facing a fragile deal, phoned Netanyahu in what sources described as a "tense" conversation and urged him to "low-key it." Netanyahu complied partially by announcing direct talks with Lebanon aimed at disarming Hezbollah and normalizing relations, yet he insisted operations would continue "with full force" until security was restored. Iran and some European leaders demanded Lebanon's inclusion; Washington and Jerusalem pushed back, framing it as a "separate skirmish." The optics were unmistakable: the US had secured an off-ramp with its adversary, while its closest regional partner scrambled to salvage face. Critics at home were merciless. Opposition leader Yair Lapid called it a "diplomatic disaster," accusing Netanyahu of arrogance, negligence, and failure to achieve a single stated goal — despite the IDF's battlefield efforts. Analysts noted Netanyahu had overestimated the campaign's potential to topple or fundamentally alter Iran's regime. The result? A weakened but intact

Islamic Republic, unresolved nuclear ambiguities, and Israel diplomatically isolated from the very negotiations shaping its security. For a leader who bet heavily on Trump's maximum-pressure instincts, the ceasefire felt like abandonment.

Yet counterarguments deserve airtime. First, the alliance is not severed — Trump has repeatedly affirmed Israel's right to self-defense and continues to back its Lebanon campaign rhetorically, even if he applied the brakes tactically to protect his Iran deal. Second, the joint operation demonstrably damaged Iran: missile production crippled, nuclear facilities hit, leadership disrupted. Netanyahu can credibly claim partial victory and pivot to Lebanon talks as a potential diplomatic win, potentially neutralizing a key Iranian proxy without full US entanglement. Third, pragmatism may be at play; a prolonged war risked economic fallout — oil spikes, global instability — that Trump's domestic base would not tolerate.

In our assessment, this episode exposes the transactional limits of even the tightest partnerships. Netanyahu lured Trump into confronting Iran, but when American interests — energy security, deal-making optics, avoiding quagmire — diverged, Israel became expendable in the headline narrative. It is a lonely day not because the US-Israel bond is broken, but because it reveals asymmetry: Washington can walk away from escalation;

“Loneliness can breed clarity. Israel must now double down on independent deterrence and regional realignments.”

Jerusalem lives with the neighborhood. The ceasefire buys time, yet leaves core threats simmering. If talks in Islamabad yield sanctions relief or enrichment concessions without ironclad Iranian guarantees, Netanyahu's gamble could haunt him domestically. Still, loneliness can breed clarity. Israel must now double down on independent deterrence and regional realignments — perhaps accelerating normalization with more Arab states wary of Tehran. For Netanyahu, the moment is humbling but not hopeless: a weakened Iran, ongoing Lebanon leverage, and a US partner who still needs Israel as a counterweight. True strength lies in turning spectator status into strategic repositioning. The region's next chapter will test whether this "bystander" phase was a setback or the prelude to a more realistic, self-reliant Israeli posture. History rarely rewards over-reliance on any single ally — even the closest one.

(TSAI BUREAU)

America is too dependent on drugs from China. Worst-case scenario could be disastrous

Chinese companies now dominate drug discovery too, projected to account for 35% of new drug approvals by 2040

America's medical dependency on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does not end there. Chinese companies are now beginning to outpace U.S. competitors in drug discovery, not merely drug production. Consider this warning from the National Security Commission on Emerging Biotechnology: "In just three years, China's biopharmaceutical industry rose from near irrelevance to dominance."

What does that mean practically? Per the commission's findings: "This overall innovation trend is set to accelerate, with Chinese drugs projected to account for 35% of new drug approvals by 2040.

Americans are witnessing the offshoring of our medicine supply chains to a foreign adversary that has already exploited its control over critical minerals. The CCP has threatened to do the same with drugs. During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Chinese state media wire service Xinhua published commentary that threatened to impose export controls on pharmaceuticals to the United States and thus plunge America into a "sea of coronavirus."

America's health infrastructure is dependent on a country with a history of weak intellectual property enforcement, state-backed chemical exports and adversarial trade behavior. The next pandemic or health crisis could be weaponized purposefully through our own medicine cabinets. The threat is concerning, but the risks are not hypothetical. Beijing's lack of quality health standards has materially harmed Americans over the past three decades.

In 1996, an internal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) memo issued a stark warning: "We literally have no control over bulk drugs that enter the U.S." The next year, Congress took steps to address this threat by requiring foreign

pharmaceutical companies to register with the FDA. Ten years later, however, the government had not enforced this requirement. The results were deadly. In 2008, hundreds of Americans were injured or killed by contaminated Heparin, a blood thinner used in dialysis, surgery and care to prevent blood clots.

Again, Congress acted and gave the FDA authorities and funding for foreign inspections by passing the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act of 2012. What has often transpired, however, is a cat-and-mouse game with Chinese producers delaying inspections and hiding potentially concerning products, while Beijing delays granting visas for FDA inspectors.

This history underscores the double-crisis of China's dominance over America's pharmaceuticals. On one hand, poor regulation, cost-cutting measures and evasive behavior have endangered, harmed and in some cases killed Americans who rely on life-saving drugs.

On the other hand, the United States does not have alternative suppliers to tap. At present, we are stuck in the unacceptable position of hoping the CCP does not exploit this vulnerability, as they did with critical minerals. In their 2021 book "China Rx," authors Rosemary Gibson and Janardan Prasad Singh underscore this threat: "A poorly made drug could be the difference between life and death for those who take it. With medicine, there is no room for error. And it better be available when we need it." For these reasons, they warn that "worldwide dependence on a single country for life-saving medicines is breathtaking."

Breathtaking, indeed, yet these concerns persist. In January, Illinois Democrat Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi sent letters to multiple Chinese companies over

concerns of mislabeled and counterfeit GLP-1 drugs. Shortly thereafter, Florida Republican Sen. Rick Scott introduced bipartisan legislation with New York Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand to institute country-of-origin labeling requirements for drugs and APIs. Awareness is growing, but Americans need their governing institutions to act.

Most urgently, President Donald Trump should revisit an executive order from his first administration that required the U.S. government to prioritize domestic pharmaceutical producers for government procurement, with particular attention given to antibiotics. Secondly, the administration should fully enforce the Drug Supply Chain Security Act and ensure real-time digital tracking of pharmaceutical products from point of manufacture to point of sale. Meanwhile, Congress should pass legislation requiring that all APIs used in sterile injectable drugs be sourced exclusively from FDA-registered suppliers, with mandatory independent testing prior to compounding. Congress should also require the FDA and DHS to permanently blacklist foreign entities caught shipping misbranded APIs and penalize U.S. companies that continue to purchase from these sources.

This should be paired with diplomatic pressure on the Chinese government to crackdown on illegal API exporters. It should also include diplomatic initiatives with allies and partners to help track China's exports of compounders transshipping through other markets to the U.S.

Washington also needs a pharmaceutical foreign dependency strategy focused on reshoring API production and incentivizing domestic manufacturing. This could include tax

credits, direct federal contracts and regulatory fast-tracks for companies willing to invest in American API plants. This would not be necessarily aimed at full autonomy, but rather an increased capacity for domestic manufacturing, making us less prone to shocks from foreign sources.

Congress should also increase criminal penalties for domestic distributors and compounders who knowingly use non-compliant APIs, particularly in products labeled for injection. Sanctions should be imposed on PRC entities involved in counterfeit API exports. Patient safety must be treated not just as a medical issue, but as a

national defense priority. Finally, and perhaps most obviously, Congress should implement a blanket ban on the importation of compounds from China within a reasonable timeframe. This should be coupled with increased resources for Customs and Border Protection to adequately inspect de minimis imports from China. The pharmaceutical market cannot be a regulatory afterthought. The integrity of our drug supply is vulnerable to the whims of strategic rivals. Washington must act now to ensure the integrity and independence of our healthcare system. Our health and sovereignty depend on it.

Michael Sobolik



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The Long Goodbye To Gulf Prosperity

The third Gulf war, whether it stops today or in the future, has done its job. A job which only a bloody, messy and inglorious war can do. It has morphed the region into a state of uncertainty and chaos. Unchecked violence has emerged as a driver of the future and the dream of shared prosperity of this region is now nothing but shifting sands.

There are still those nestled in the high-rises of Dubai nurturing the fond hope that with the cessation of hostilities it will be back to business as usual. They refuse to see the new reality that has been uncorked by the war and is now blowing freely in the wind.

Iran, despite being flattened back to the stone age in the words of US War Secretary Pete Hegseth, has shown spine and is hitting back where it really hurts. It has proven to the world that the fate of nations cannot be controlled from 30,000 ft in the air. It can only be done from ground zero. Israel and the United States control the skies above Iran, but what about the ground and waterways like the Strait of Hormuz, where it really matters?

The short answer is that one month after the bombing campaign, Iran can corral the six Gulf monarchies any time and beat them black and blue and incinerate their civilian, military and oil infrastructure at will. And what has been the response of these Gulf monarchies against Iranian attacks? They have dithered and whimpered but mostly pleaded with the United States to prolong the war and finish off the Iranian regime.

Not even one of their fighter jets has lifted off the tarmac to take on the Iranians. MBS of Saudi Arabia and Zahyed bin Sultan of UAE have been threatening to go to war against Iran, but even today their rhetoric still does not match their actions.

But what really is disturbing is the role of the 15 to 20 odd US air bases in the region. What was the original idea of establishing these bases in the region? Surely it was projection of American power and providing protection to their Gulf allies in the event of a conflict? So, have these objectives been realised in the present conflict?

There are reports emerging that at least 13 of these bases have

been degraded by repeated Iranian drone and missile strikes. Many US personnel have been injured in these strikes. Most of the personnel have evacuated these bases and are seeking refuge in glitzy towers in the main cities. And the Iranians are now targeting those towers!

What it means is this. The raison d'être or reason for being of these bases has not fulfilled their purpose. So, what then is the usefulness of these bases to the six Gulf kingdoms? And then there are reports that the American aerial attacks on Iran are not being co-ordinated from these bases at all. American precision air bombing is being co-ordinated from aircraft carriers stationed well outside the war theatre in the region. American planes are flying in from far-off bases in the Mediterranean and from Israel itself.

In short, it means that the principal combatant is trying to control the region from outside the region. It is best left to the imagination to decide whether such a tactical or strategic war effort can succeed.

Something else is happening on the ground in this region. All the contradictions between the six GCC countries and their dealings vis-à-vis Iran are out in the open. Before the war began, Saudi Arabia and the UAE made no efforts to mask their differences. The Saudis entered a defence alliance with Pakistan and questions are being raised for what purpose? It was certainly not for standing up against India in case hostilities broke out between India and Pakistan.

Saudi Arabia has zero interest in that. The pact was Saudi Arabia's insurance against Iran's aggressive intent. But the Pakistanis failed to oblige the Saudis on that account in the present conflict. They have neither the stomach nor the muscle to take on Iran.

Another pact that miserably failed to take off the ground was the one China brokered in 2023 between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The pact ended years of hostility between the two countries and established a working relationship between them. But as soon as Mr Trump became President of the United States, MBS reneged on the pact and

put his faith in American intervention to shore him up.

This region then has a history of pacts and alliances that are not well thought through and are bound to fail. Ugly, internecine differences between the GCC countries then regularly pop up. Pax Americana is the only common glue that binds these nations together.

People are wrongly obsessed with who is winning the war — America/Israel or Iran? The fact of the matter is both the US and Israel will eventually exit the region. What is pertinent is who has emerged the real predominant power in the region during the war? Who calls the shots? Which country will make other countries bend at their knee? The short and frightening answer to that question is this: it is possibly Iran. Even in the throes of aerial decimation, the Iranians have established their almost hegemonistic sway over the region. They control the Strait of Hormuz; they dictate terms of a significant part of world oil commerce; they toy with the GCC countries at will to intimidate them.

Look at it this way. There are only two players in the present conflict that are clear-eyed about their objectives in the war. Israel is clear that it wants to bomb Iran to the stone age so that it and its proxies in Gaza and Lebanon are neutered forever, posing no threat to Israel. Iran, despite being pulverised from the air, is not only determined to survive but is ready to strike back and establish sway over the region. And the Americans? They keep discovering a new reason to wage war every second day. The wide-eyed clarity which both Israel and Iran have in this war is the real brutal irony of the conflict.

A short explanation then why the Iranians do what they do and why the Americans still haven't figured them out. The Americans, especially under the tutelage of the current American president, work on the principle of unemotional transaction, profit and force multiplier projection.

The Iranians, and that is something they have in common with Indians, work on the principle of 'jazba' (passion), 'izzat' (honour) and 'badla' (revenge). It is difficult for any aerial bombardment to destroy these Iranian attributes. Even if Iran is

reduced to rubble, these three features of the Iranian resistance will survive. And that is why this is a war of civilisation and attrition; of the West and the East arriving at no meeting point. In the long run, the GCC countries will have no choice but to reach a financial and even political accommodation with Iran. Even then, this region will lose relevance for a long, long time. India understands this and it would not be surprising if it is diversifying its oil, LNG and LPG

requirements away from this region. In Japanese Kabuki theatre, the concept of 'kumadori' face shows larger-than-life, exaggerated and emotive facial expressions. The swankiness of Dubai or Abu Dhabi had been the 'kumadori's face of the region. Now that mask has been ripped off by the war, we see the real face of the region. A region riven with differences, double-dealing, contradictions, uncertainty and constantly shot with tension.

(TSAI BUREAU)

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Democrats romp in Wisconsin Supreme Court race, narrow margins in Georgia

- The elections underscore headwinds for President Donald Trump and his Republicans ahead of the 2026 midterm elections.
- The elections flew largely under the radar, thanks to the U.S. war in Iran and Trump's last-minute truce with Iran.



(New Agency) Democrats romped to a 20 percentage point victory in a race for a Wisconsin Supreme Court seat, while Republicans won a special election for a House seat in Georgia by a far less comfortable margin than in 2024.

The elections Tuesday underscore strong headwinds for President Donald Trump and his Republicans ahead of the 2026 midterm elections, which could shift the balance of power in Washington and loosen Trump's grip on power.

Democratic-backed Appeals Court Judge Chris Taylor won a 10-year term on Wisconsin's Supreme Court, defeating conservative Appeals Court Judge Maria Lazar by roughly 20 percentage points, according to the Associated Press tally.

The race was far more subdued than last year's Supreme Court contest in Wisconsin, which turned into the most expensive state supreme court race in history after Tesla

owner Elon Musk injected huge sums of money to support the Republican-backed conservative candidate, who lost. Taylor's 20-point margin of victory is nearly double that of Justice Susan Crawford in 2025, who defeated Musk-backed Brad Schimel by about 10 percentage points. The win cements a 5-2 majority for liberals on the Wisconsin high court.

Meanwhile in Georgia, Republican

Clayton Fuller defeated Democrat Shawn Harris by a roughly 12 percentage point margin in a special election runoff for a House of Representatives seat vacated by former GOP Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, according to the Associated Press tally. The win for the Trump-backed Fuller will pad the narrow Republican majority in the House, which sits at 217 Republicans to 214 Democrats — an effective one-vote margin on any party-line vote for Speaker Mike Johnson. The win may offer little solace for Republicans, however, as Democrats overperformed in the contest. Greene carried the district by 29 percentage points in 2024, more than double Fuller's margin of victory. The result could be a good sign for Democrats, who are hoping to retain Sen. Jon Ossoff's Senate seat in the Peach State to have any chance at gaining a majority in the Senate.

Epstein files: Pam Bondi testimony to House panel canceled, Democrats threaten contempt charges

Ex-Attorney General Pam Bondi will not appear as scheduled on April 14 to testify about the Department of Justice's Jeffrey Epstein files at the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

(New Agency) Former Attorney General Pam Bondi will not appear as scheduled on April 14 to testify before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee about her and the Department of Justice's handling of the Jeffrey Epstein files, the panel's spokeswoman said Wednesday.

Bondi's appearance — which was compelled by a committee-issued subpoena — was canceled because "she is no longer Attorney General and was subpoenaed in her capacity as Attorney General," said the spokeswoman, speaking for the Republican majority that controls the panel.

The committee will contact Bondi's lawyer "to discuss next steps regarding scheduling her deposition," the spokeswoman said.

Democrats on the committee quickly threatened to initiate contempt charges against Bondi



if she fails to testify as scheduled.

"Now that Pam Bondi has been fired, she's trying to get out of her legal obligation to testify before the Oversight Committee about the Epstein files and the White House cover-up," said Rep. Robert Garcia of California,

the committee's ranking Democrat, in a statement.

"Our bipartisan subpoena is to Pam Bondi, whether she is the Attorney General or not," Garcia said.

"She must come in to testify immediately, and if she defies the subpoena, we will begin

contempt charges in the Congress. The survivors deserve justice," he said.

President Donald Trump fired Bondi as attorney general on April 2 after reports that he was unhappy with her handling of the DOJ's files about Epstein, the notorious dead sex offender

whose past high-profile friends included Trump. The DOJ and Bondi have faced strong criticism since last year over the Epstein files.

Bondi and other leading figures in Trump's orbit had promised that the DOJ's documents relating to Epstein would be made public after Trump regained the White House in January 2025.

Bondi reneged on that promise, which in turn led to Congress passing a bill, which Trump signed into law, mandating the release of those files.

The DOJ, since then, has released millions of documents about Epstein and his convicted procurer, Ghislaine Maxwell.

But the department and Bondi have been criticized after that release for withholding many other documents about Epstein and Maxwell, as well as other issues related to the files.

War not over but Trump talks of joint venture with Iran to collect Hormuz toll

US President Donald Trump has floated the idea of a joint venture with Iran on the Strait of Hormuz to collect tolls from ships. Trump's remarks on "big money" by "just hanging around" came within hours of the US's ceasefire with Iran.

(New Agency) Within hours of the announcement of the US-Iran ceasefire on Wednesday, American President Donald Trump said that he was planning a "joint venture" with Tehran to safeguard the Strait of Hormuz and collect tolls from ships. Trump had earlier suggested that "big money" could be made at Hormuz by "just hanging around". On Wednesday, he called the tolls charged by Iran a "beautiful thing". Trump told ABC News that the "US might seek a joint venture with Iran to safeguard the Strait of Hormuz". "We're thinking of doing it as a joint venture. It's a way of securing it — also securing it from lots of other people," Trump told ABC News when he was asked if he would allow Iran to charge tolls from ships passing through the narrow passageway in the Persian Gulf. "It's a beautiful thing," Trump added on the toll being charged by Iran

from the commercial ships. This comes even as several ships in the Persian Gulf received messages claiming to be from Iran's navy saying the Strait of Hormuz remained closed, Reuters reported on Wednesday evening, citing sources. Despite the ceasefire announcement, the war in the Middle East is far from being over. Israel has kept the Lebanon front open and has been targeting alleged Hezbollah positions. Gulf countries — the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait, have reported missile and drone attacks following the ceasefire. Earlier this week, Trump had said the winner of the war could charge tolls from ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in March called the idea of toll collection at the Strait of Hormuz by Iran "illegal", "dangerous for the world" and

"unacceptable". The Strait of Hormuz is a critical stretch in the Persian Gulf for energy and gas supplies and has always been a free waterway. But the strikes on Iran by the US and Israel that started on February 28 changed everything. In retaliation, Iran hit nearby Gulf countries that hosted American military bases and closed the Strait of Hormuz to show its power in the region. Iran reopened the Hormuz to friendly or paying vessels, mainly from China, Pakistan and Greece, among others. They have been allowed through after fees reportedly as high as \$1-2 million per ship. Shipping insiders have named it the "Tehran Toll Booth". On Monday, when Trump was asked about Iran charging tolls on ships travelling through the Hormuz, he suggested that the US might be looking to levy that



charge, according to reports in The Hill and Al Jazeera. During a White House Press conference, Trump was asked by a journalist if the US would allow Iran to keep charging tolls in the Strait of Hormuz. "What about us charging tolls?" Trump asked. "I'd rather do that than let them have them," he said, adding, "Why shouldn't we? We're the winner." "We won, OK? They [Iran] are militarily defeated. The only thing they have is the psychology of 'oh, we're going

to drop a couple of mines in the water," Trump was quoted by The Hill as saying. "We have a concept where we'll charge tolls."

It is definitely the "big money" that can be made by "just hanging around" at the Strait of Hormuz that is luring Trump. He made that intention clear in his post on Truth Social on Wednesday.

"The United States of America will be helping with the traffic build-up in the Strait of Hormuz. We'll be loading up with supplies of all kinds, and just 'hangin' around' in order to make sure that everything goes well. There will be lots of positive action! Big money will be made. Iran can start the reconstruction process," Trump posted on Wednesday. Iranian leaders suggested last week that they would make the toll booth at Hormuz permanent and use the money generated in the rebuilding of the country. They also said that some of the money would be shared with Oman, though they didn't give any formula.

The idea of tolls from ships was criticised by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio as "illegal" and "dangerous for the world". Around 20% of the world's oil and gas supplies pass through the Strait of Hormuz. But now Rubio's boss himself wants to collect tolls from ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz by forming a joint venture with Iran — a country the US bombed and which damaged its military assets worth billions. If you thought the circus was over, this wasn't even the intermission.

Iran's oil refinery hit; missiles pound UAE, Kuwait, Lebanon despite ceasefire

A wave of fresh attacks – from Iran's own oil infrastructure being hit to the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain coming under Iranian missile and drone fire and Israeli strikes intensifying in Lebanon – cast immediate doubt over whether the two-week ceasefire can hold.

(New Agency) The Middle East spiralled back into chaos on Wednesday as Iran, the UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain and Lebanon were all hit by fresh strikes despite a two-week US-Iran ceasefire, casting serious doubts over the truce's durability. In Lebanon, which was not covered under the ceasefire framework, the violence was particularly intense, with at least 254 people killed and over 800 injured in one of the heaviest waves of Israeli strikes on the country. A wave of fresh attacks – from Iran's own oil infrastructure being hit to the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain coming under Iranian missile and drone fire and Israeli strikes intensifying in Lebanon – cast immediate doubt over whether the two-week ceasefire can hold. Just hours after Washington and Tehran agreed to pause hostilities, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait all activated their air defence systems to intercept incoming threats, even as the truce, brokered with

Pakistan's involvement, was meant to halt a six-week conflict that has destabilised the region, according to Al Jazeera. In the UAE, authorities said air defences were "actively engaging" missiles and drones originating from Iran. The Defence Ministry confirmed that explosions heard across multiple locations were the result of interception operations involving ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles. "The air defences are currently dealing with missiles and drones coming from Iran," the ministry said. Officials added that a gas processing facility in Abu Dhabi was set ablaze following incoming strikes, highlighting the continued vulnerability of critical energy infrastructure. The UAE has faced repeated attacks in recent weeks as Iran targeted fossil fuel assets in response to US and Israeli strikes. Kuwait too reported a sustained wave of drone attacks beginning

early Wednesday. Its military said air defence systems intercepted multiple UAVs launched since the morning, Al Jazeera reported. The Kuwaiti Defence Ministry said 28 drones were neutralised during what it described as "intense hostile Iranian attacks," with some targeting key installations such as oil facilities, power stations and water desalination plants.

"Kuwaiti armed forces intercepted many drones, some of which targeted vital oil installations and power stations in the south of the country," it said, adding that the strikes caused "serious infrastructure damage."

In Bahrain, authorities reported two injuries and property damage after debris from intercepted drones fell in the Sitra area. "Two citizens sustained minor injuries and a number of houses were damaged as a result of shrapnel falling from the interception of an Iranian drone," the Interior Ministry said.

Teens who made deepfake porn of classmates were just sentenced. Will it make a difference?

(New Agency) The victims said the boy had taken photos from social media, photos taken at shared parties, and even screenshots from FaceTime calls, and passed them along to the other boy, who used artificial intelligence to morph them into pornography. One victim said she was just 12 years old in one of the photos the boys used to create a sexualized deepfake.

Deepfake abuse is a growing problem at schools across the country, but experts warn that school policies, legal recourse and education lag far behind. That's especially problematic for the often underage victims of this abuse — 90% of which are women — as studies show these deepfake nude images can have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences. Victims, their families and advocates are working to prevent future cases at other schools through awareness, education and policy reform. What happened at Lancaster Country Day School?

Between October 2024 to May 2024, the two boys created 347 sexual deepfake images and videos of 60 girls; 48 of them were other Lancaster Country Day School students, the other 12 were acquaintances of students in the photos, and all but one victim was under the age of 18.

The school received a tip in December 2024 about the deepfakes, but failed to

act, according to lawyers representing at least 10 families in a pending lawsuit against the school.

The school received additional information in May 2024 and filed a ChildLine report with the state, but a criminal investigation began only after parents notified law enforcement, according to an investigation by the Lancaster County District Attorney's Office.

"We continue to prioritize the health and well-being of our students," Emile Kosoff, the head of Lancaster Country Day School said in a statement to USA TODAY. "Our deliberate and intentional approach aims always to ensure that our school community remains informed, continues to heal, and moves forward together."

The proceedings took more than three hours. The two male offenders stood with their parents and attorneys and were given the opportunity to speak at the beginning and end, but both declined.

The perpetrators often looked down at the floor or straight ahead as approximately 30 victim impact statements were read — most from young female victims, but also from distraught parents and Janine Swinehart, the prosecuting attorney. Several victims cried and struggled to read their statements aloud as their



hands shook with the papers they were reading from.

Many expressed the resounding trauma that's haunted them for the past two years. They said they find it difficult to trust male companions, constantly wondering who may be deceiving or sexualizing them. One victim said the first perpetrator took a screenshot during their FaceTime video call and manipulated it to appear as though she were revealing her body to him on the call.

Another victim described the pain of seeing her smiling photos from a party

turned into something pornographic: "Some of the same people I shared that joy with, are now the people who took that joy away."

"When do we, women, get to exist without being turned into something we don't want? When will we be seen for ourselves?" she continued. Victims spoke of the onset of anxiety, panic attacks, depression and PTSD following the incident. Two said they have had nightmares of being sexually assaulted and fear being home alone. Some keep their blinds drawn and their doors locked, afraid to walk down the street.

Iran sets \$1 per barrel crypto toll on tankers transiting via Strait of Hormuz: FT

Under the proposed system, tankers would be required to share cargo details via email. Authorities would then calculate a toll -- set at \$1 per barrel -- to be paid in digital currencies such as bitcoin. Hosseini noted that vessels would be given only a short window to complete payment.

(New Agency) Iran is looking to tighten its grip on one of the world's most critical oil chokepoints amid the fragile ceasefire with the United States. According to a report by the Financial Times, Tehran plans to impose a \$1-per-barrel toll on oil tankers passing through the Strait of Hormuz -- and wants payments made in cryptocurrency.

The proposal comes as global markets remain on edge. While the ceasefire has paused direct conflict, Iran appears determined to hold on to its leverage over shipping routes. Citing Hamid Hosseini, a spokesperson for Iran's Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Products Exporters' Union, the FT reported that Tehran intends to monitor and regulate all vessels passing through the strait. The plan includes assessing each tanker's cargo before granting passage. "Iran needs to monitor what goes in and out of the strait to ensure these two weeks aren't used for transferring weapons,"

Hosseini said. He added that while ships would be allowed through, the process could take time, as Iran is "not in a rush".

Under the proposed system, tankers would be required to share cargo details via email. Authorities would then calculate a toll -- set at \$1 per barrel -- to be paid in digital currencies such as bitcoin. Hosseini noted that vessels would be given only a short window to complete payment.

'NO PERMISSION, NO PASSAGE' WARNING TO TANKERS

The situation has been further complicated by warnings issued to vessels in the Gulf. According to the report, tankers received radio broadcasts cautioning that any ship attempting to pass without prior approval could face military action. "If any vessels try to transit without permission, (they) will be destroyed," the broadcaster said. Iran is also expected to push ships to move along routes closer to its

coastline, a shift that raises the risk for vessels linked to Western or Gulf countries. With tensions still high and passage tightly controlled, many shipping companies are holding back, choosing to wait for clearer signals before moving cargo.

The future of the Strait of Hormuz has emerged as one of the most contentious issues in ongoing negotiations to extend the ceasefire. US President Donald Trump has said that any truce would depend on Iran ensuring the "complete, immediate, and safe opening" of the strait. Meanwhile, Iran's Supreme National Security Council has proposed a new framework for secure passage under its supervision.

GLOBAL MARKETS ON EDGE

The uncertainty has left hundreds of vessels stranded. According to the report, around 400 ships are currently waiting in the Gulf, with executives likening the situation to a "car park". Data indicates that millions of barrels

of oil remain stuck, awaiting clarity on transit rules.

The uncertainty has effectively stalled movement across the Gulf, leaving hundreds of vessels waiting in limbo. Reports suggest close to 400 ships are lined up, with industry executives describing the situation as a "car park". Meanwhile, millions of barrels of oil remain stuck on board, as companies wait for clear rules on when and how transit can resume. Shipping giant Maersk has said it is working urgently to assess the situation but is not yet ready to resume normal operations. This comes after reports that Iran and Oman were exploring a plan to charge transit fees on ships moving through the Strait of Hormuz during a two-week ceasefire. However, Oman has pushed back firmly, stating that existing agreements do not allow any tolls on vessels using the key waterway.

The Rochester Revival: How Kodak Is Engineering a 21st-Century Turnaround

ROCHESTER, N.Y.* — For decades, the name Eastman Kodak was synonymous with the very concept of capturing a moment. But as the digital revolution turned "Kodak moments" into Instagram posts, the Rochester-based giant famously faltered, filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2012. Today, however, the yellow-and-red icon is authoring a different story: a gritty, industrial-strength turnaround focused not on selfies, but on specialty chemicals, high-speed digital print, and a surprising resurgence in analog film.

As of early 2026, Kodak has reported a stabilized balance sheet with a year-end cash balance of approximately \$337 million, a significant leap from the precarious liquidity of its post-bankruptcy years. The architect of this shift is **Jim Continenza*, Kodak's Executive Chairman and CEO, who has steered the company toward a "One Kodak" model since taking the helm in 2019.

Pivoting to Advanced Materials and Chemicals

The cornerstone of Kodak's modern strategy is the *Advanced Materials & Chemicals (AM&C)* division. Rather than trying to compete in the saturated consumer electronics market, Kodak is leveraging its century of expertise in "precision coating"—the process originally used to layer chemicals onto film—to enter high-growth industrial sectors.

In 2025, Kodak expanded its pilot lines for *lithium-ion battery



electrodes. By repurposing the massive coating machines at Eastman Business Park, Kodak has positioned itself as a critical player in the North American EV supply chain. This division saw a **25% revenue increase* in the fourth quarter of 2025 alone, signaling that Kodak's future may lie in powering cars rather than just taking pictures of them.

Furthermore, in January 2026, the company announced a major expansion into *pharmaceutical ingredients*. By manufacturing regulated reagents like Phosphate Buffered Saline (PBS) and Water for Injection (WFI), Kodak is filling a vital gap in U.S.-based biopharma manufacturing. Continenza's vision is clear: diversify away from the volatile consumer market into steady, high-margin B2B industrial contracts.

The Analog Resurgence: A Gen Z Life Raft

While industrial chemicals provide the growth, nostalgia is providing the cash flow. Film photography has experienced a staggering *127% increase in wholesale demand* between 2020 and 2026. This "analog boom" is driven largely by Gen Z consumers seeking authenticity in a world of AI-generated imagery.

Kodak has responded by:

Expanding Manufacturing:* Adding shifts and training new generations of film technicians to keep up with the demand for stocks like Gold 200 and Portra 400.

Consolidating Distribution:* Moving to take back direct control over marketing and distribution for legacy brands, effectively cutting out middlemen to improve margins.

Sustainable Printing:* Its Commercial Print division remains the primary "liquidity engine," utilizing AI-driven workflow tools to reduce ink

waste by 15% and appeal to modern sustainability standards.

Personnel and Leadership Overhaul Continenza has not just changed the products; he has changed the people. Since 2019, nearly *90% of the company's leadership* has been replaced with a team focused on operational efficiency and debt reduction. This "de-levering" strategy has reduced Kodak's annual interest expenses by roughly *\$40 million*, allowing the company to reinvest in its infrastructure.

In late 2025, the company completed a massive *\$1 billion pension reversion*, a complex financial maneuver that strengthened the balance sheet and fully funded new employee benefit plans. This move provided the "dry powder" needed to accelerate the pivot into battery materials and advanced chemicals.

The Road Ahead

Despite the optimism, Kodak faces headwinds. Rising costs for raw materials like aluminum and energy-intensive manufacturing processes remain a challenge. However, with a gross profit margin reaching *22%* in 2025—up from the teens just years prior—the company is no longer just surviving; it is competing.

"We are taking the next step by operating and selling our way to sustainable growth," Continenza stated during the March 2026 earnings call. For a company that once defined the 20th century, the 21st century is finally looking like something worth capturing.

ICE acknowledges it is using powerful spyware

(New Agency)Immigration and Customs Enforcement is using spyware tools that can intercept encrypted messages as part of the agency's efforts to disrupt fentanyl traffickers, according to a letter sent last week by the agency's acting director, Todd Lyons.

Lyons' letter, which was reviewed by NPR, said ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) is using various tools as part of its mission to disrupt and dismantle foreign terrorist organizations, "particularly those involved in the trafficking of fentanyl." Lyons wrote that "in response to the unprecedented lethality of fentanyl and the exploitation of digital platforms by transnational criminal organizations," he approved HSI's "use of cutting-edge technological tools that address the specific challenges posed by the Foreign Terrorist Organizations' thriving exploitation of encrypted communication platforms."

His letter, dated April 1, was a belated

response to an October inquiry from three Democratic members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform expressing concern about the agency's potential use of the spyware Graphite, which was created by an Israeli company, Paragon Solutions.

The letter is the first time ICE has indicated it is using Graphite. The agency initially signed a \$2 million contract with Paragon Solutions for an unspecified software product at the end of the Biden administration. But the contract was swiftly paused until it was revived by the Trump administration last fall.

Graphite uses what is known as "zero click" technology so that it can gain access to encrypted messages on a targeted device even if the user never clicks on a link.

The encrypted messaging app WhatsApp disclosed in early 2025 that it discovered some 90 journalists and members of civil society in various

countries were targeted with Graphite. Researchers at The Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy later identified specific journalists and humanitarian aid providers in Italy whose devices were infected with Graphite through WhatsApp messages. Paragon ended its contract with Italian government agencies in 2025.

Lyons' confirmation that the agency is using spyware comes as ICE has ramped up its use of surveillance technologies to find people in the U.S. without authorization as part of the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign. Those tools have also been used extensively on American citizens who have protested ICE's activities. The revelation also comes shortly before Congress is set to debate whether to reauthorize a surveillance law, and whether to close a legal loophole that allows the federal

government to buy data about millions of Americans in bulk from commercial data brokers. Rep. Summer Lee, D-Pa., one of the authors of the October letter asking for answers about ICE's use of spyware, told NPR in a statement, "The response I received from ICE makes one thing clear. They are moving forward with invasive spyware technology inside the United States." Lee expressed disappointment that Lyons did not provide substantive answers to her questions, including who could be targeted with the technology and the legal basis for using it within the United States. "The people most at risk, including immigrants, Black and brown communities, journalists, organizers, and anyone speaking out against government abuse, deserve more than secrecy and deflection from an agency with a long record of overreach and abuse," Lee's statement said.

Weight Loss Simplified: The Right Drinks And Exercises To Support Your Journey

From green tea and jeera water to HIIT and yoga, experts share the best drinks and exercises to support healthy, sustainable weight loss.



(New Agency) in the world of weight loss, it's easy to get caught up in quick fixes and trending hacks. But sustainable results rarely come from extremes, they come from small, consistent habits that work together. From what you sip daily to how you move your body, the right choices can create a powerful foundation for long-term health.

"Maintaining a healthy weight is not about quick fixes but about

consistent, mindful choices," says Dr Garima Tyagi, Dermatologist, SENS Clinic. According to her, incorporating simple, everyday drinks into your routine can quietly support your weight-loss efforts.

Beverages like green tea, black coffee, jeera water, lemon water, and ginger tea are more than just wellness trends. They are packed with antioxidants, metabolism-boosting properties, and digestive benefits. Green tea,

for instance, helps improve insulin sensitivity, while black coffee enhances fat oxidation. Jeera water aids digestion, lemon water supports hydration and detoxification, and ginger tea helps curb cravings.

"These drinks are low in calories yet promote satiety, helping the body maintain a calorie deficit without compromising on nutrients," Dr. Tyagi explains. Over time, they can help improve metabolism,

increase energy expenditure, and reduce unnecessary snacking, key factors in healthy weight loss.

But what you drink is only one part of the equation.

Movement plays an equally critical role. And contrary to popular belief, you don't need a gym membership to get started.

"Fitness is not about chasing a single body type, it's about embracing movement, balance, and consistency," says Dr Akanksha Singh, Senior Cosmetologist, SENS Clinic.

She emphasises that simple, accessible exercises can be just as effective when done regularly.

Activities like brisk walking, jogging, dancing, or skipping rope are excellent for getting your heart rate up and burning calories. For those looking to build strength, bodyweight exercises such as squats, lunges, and push-ups can be done anywhere, anytime. High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) adds an extra boost by

increasing calorie burn in shorter durations. At the same time, practices like yoga and pilates bring balance to the routine, enhancing flexibility, improving core strength, and supporting mental well-being. "The key is to choose exercises you enjoy and can sustain over time," Dr. Singh notes, highlighting that consistency matters far more than intensity. The real magic happens when these elements come together. Healthy drinks can support metabolism and digestion, while regular physical activity helps burn calories and build strength. Add to that proper sleep and a balanced diet, and the body begins to respond in a way that feels natural, not forced. There's no single shortcut to weight loss but there is a smarter way to approach it. Small, daily habits, when done consistently, create a ripple effect that leads to lasting change. Because in the end, weight loss isn't about doing everything at once, it's about doing the right things, every day.

Is your workout routine healthy or turning into an obsession?

Working out every day is what many of us aim for, but can this habit slowly turn into an addiction? You might be surprised to know it can.

(New Agency) For many, just getting out of bed and making it to the gym can feel like a challenge. But on the other end of the spectrum are those who find it just as hard to stop. Even when their body is asking for rest, through injury, illness, or sheer exhaustion, they feel compelled to keep going. Taking a break doesn't feel like an option; it feels like failure.

While a lack of physical activity can certainly harm your health, constantly pushing your body without adequate recovery can be just as damaging. This kind of behaviour, often described as workout addiction, goes beyond discipline or dedication. It reflects an unhealthy relationship with exercise, where rest is neglected and the body's limits are ignored, sometimes at

the cost of both physical and mental well-being.

Now, you might be thinking, in a culture that glorifies hustle, discipline, and no days off, working out every day is basically seen as the gold standard of health. So...

Can exercise actually turn into an addiction?

Deepti Sharma, fitness expert and director at Multifit, a fitness community, tells India Today that this behaviour is more common than people think.

"There's this growing idea that if you're not working out every single day, you're somehow not disciplined enough. And somewhere along the way, consistency started getting confused with obsession. Yes, exercise can become addictive. The moment it stops feeling like

a choice and starts feeling like a compulsion, that's when the shift happens." Further, Dr Vipul Lunawat, fitness expert and founder-director at the Institute of Sports Science and Technology, explains that workout addiction, sometimes referred to as exercise dependence, often begins with positive intentions.

You may start exercising to improve your health, manage stress, or enhance your physical appearance. Over time, however, this behaviour can shift from being a healthy habit to a psychological necessity. The problem arises when exercise is no longer driven by enjoyment or overall well-being, but by anxiety, guilt, or a constant sense of obligation.

So, instead of improving health, it starts to harm the body

and mind, leading to fatigue, sleep problems, mood changes, and even anxiety if a workout is missed, as the person may tie their self-worth only to fitness goals, adds Dr Sharadhi C, consultant – psychiatry, Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru.

Even though you may know when working out is turning into an obsession, the early warning signs are often easy to miss, especially because society tends to praise extreme discipline. Someone waking up at 5 am every day to work out is often admired rather than questioned.

But when you start feeling distressed, irritable, or restless on days you cannot exercise, it may point to something deeper. "Like many forms of addiction, the change is gradual, an extra session here, a skipped rest day

there, until eventually, even rest begins to feel like failure," Dr Lunawat adds.

And then there's guilt around rest days

Sharma points out that many people don't even realise when things start to go off balance. They begin to feel guilty about resting, calling themselves lazy or worrying that they're losing progress. Some even try to "make up" for it by overtraining the next day. It becomes concerning when rest starts to feel like failure instead of something the body genuinely needs. Vipin Agarwal (name changed), 36, shares how a regular fitness routine slowly turned into an addiction for him. "I started working out to lose weight, and I did end up losing about 25 kg with consistent exercise and diet control.

The Silent Epidemic: How Lifestyle Diseases Are Draining India's Productivity

Employees, he explains, are navigating a far more complex health landscape than before, one shaped by sedentary lifestyles, rising non-communicable diseases, and increasing mental health concerns.

"Today's employees are navigating a complex mix of challenges, from sedentary lifestyles and rising non-communicable diseases to increasing mental health concerns driven by global uncertainty. What is particularly worrying is how normalized these risks have become in everyday life," believes Dr Vora.

This normalisation is at the heart of the problem. Conditions that should trigger concern, fatigue, poor sleep, chronic stress are now worn almost as badges of productivity.

But the cost of this mindset is becoming increasingly visible.

Dr Sunil Rana, Associate Director and Head- Internal Medicine (Unit III), Asian Hospital, warns that lifestyle disorders are directly impacting how people function at work. "The rising prevalence of lifestyle-related disorders is emerging as a significant contributor to reduced workplace productivity and increasing healthcare costs."

He explains that physical health issues often spill over into cognitive performance. "Physical health problems caused by cardiovascular disease and metabolic disorders lead to mental health issues that make decision-making and thinking difficult."

The result is a workforce that is present but not fully productive. "The workforce operates at suboptimal levels because employees choose to work through their health problems which creates presentism."

This idea of presenteeism being physically present but mentally and physically depleted is becoming a defining feature of India's work culture.

Adding to the challenge is how silently these conditions develop. Dr. Rakesh Pandit, Senior Consultant & HOD, Internal Medicine, Aakash Healthcare, notes that many lifestyle diseases progress unnoticed until they begin to impair daily functioning. "The conditions develop without noticeable symptoms which results in patients experiencing extreme tiredness and difficulty concentrating which eventually leads to decreased ability to work."

By the time intervention happens, the impact is already significant. "The process of diagnosing patients takes extended time periods which makes it difficult to treat them while creating higher chances that they will develop future health issues."



This is why, he stresses, prevention must become non-negotiable. "The complete process of preventive healthcare needs to establish permanent screening practices. The population will achieve better health results and increased productivity when we implement measures that promote physical exercise and proper dietary habits and methods to handle stress."

If medical experts are outlining the consequences, nutritionists are pointing to the root causes, many of which are deeply embedded in modern lifestyles.

Rashi Chowdhary, Chief Nutritionist and Founder, Nutrition In Sync, describes the situation bluntly, "India is living through a silent epidemic, and most of the people caught in it do not know it yet."

She highlights how conditions like fatty liver disease, diabetes, and hormonal imbalances are rising across age groups, often without dramatic symptoms.

"These conditions do not announce themselves loudly. They arrive as tiredness that sleep does not fix, as weight that will not move, as hormones that feel off."

The scale of the issue is staggering. "A 2025 report by the Confederation of Indian Industry found that 86 percent of corporate employees are struggling with their health."

Yet, she adds, there is also a starting point for change. "What gives us reason to believe things can change is that food, it remains one of the most powerful places to begin."

But beyond biology and behaviour, there is also a deeper cultural layer to this crisis, how we define work, success, and endurance. Dr Malini Saba,

psychologist and Founder, Saba Family Foundation, connects the dots between individual burnout and national productivity. "India's economic heartbeat is intrinsically linked to the physical and mental health of its citizens."

She paints a familiar picture of modern life—fast, relentless, and quietly draining. "They eat whatever is quick, sleep late, wake up tired, and then do it all over again." Over time, she explains, this manifests in both physical and emotional symptoms that are often ignored. "Things we earlier associated with 'age' are now showing up much earlier." What is more concerning, she adds, is how this state has been normalised.

"Feeling tired all the time is almost expected now." And that has direct implications for performance. "They might still show up to work, but the mind isn't fully there, it affects decision-making."

Scaled across millions, the consequences are far-reaching. "When a

significant portion of our workforce is sidelined by preventable chronic conditions, we don't just lose man-hours; we lose the creativity, emotional resilience, and overall productivity." Her conclusion is both simple and urgent, "If people are not feeling good, nothing else really works properly. Not work, not growth, not anything." What emerges from these perspectives is a clear pattern: this is not just a health issue, it is an economic one. The solution will not lie in occasional wellness drives or surface-level interventions. As Dr. Vora emphasises, "Organizations must move beyond episodic wellness initiatives and adopt structured, data-driven strategies that prioritize prevention, early detection, and holistic wellbeing." Because ultimately, the future of India's productivity will depend not just on how hard its workforce works but on how well it lives. And right now, that balance is under serious strain.

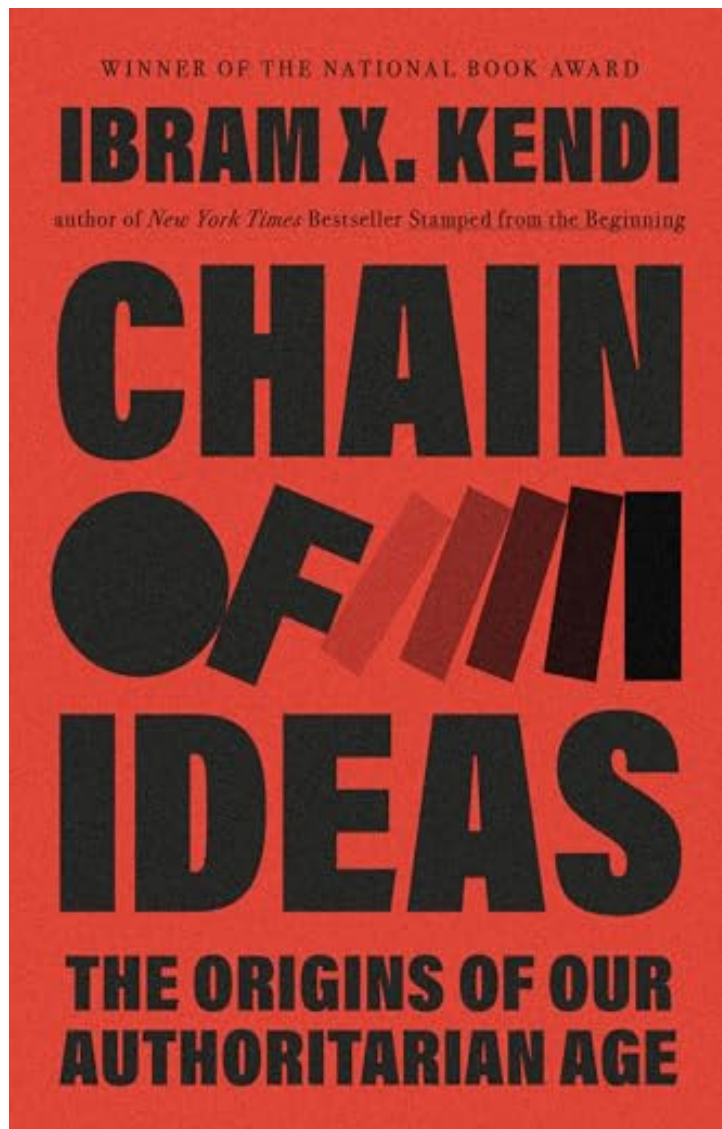
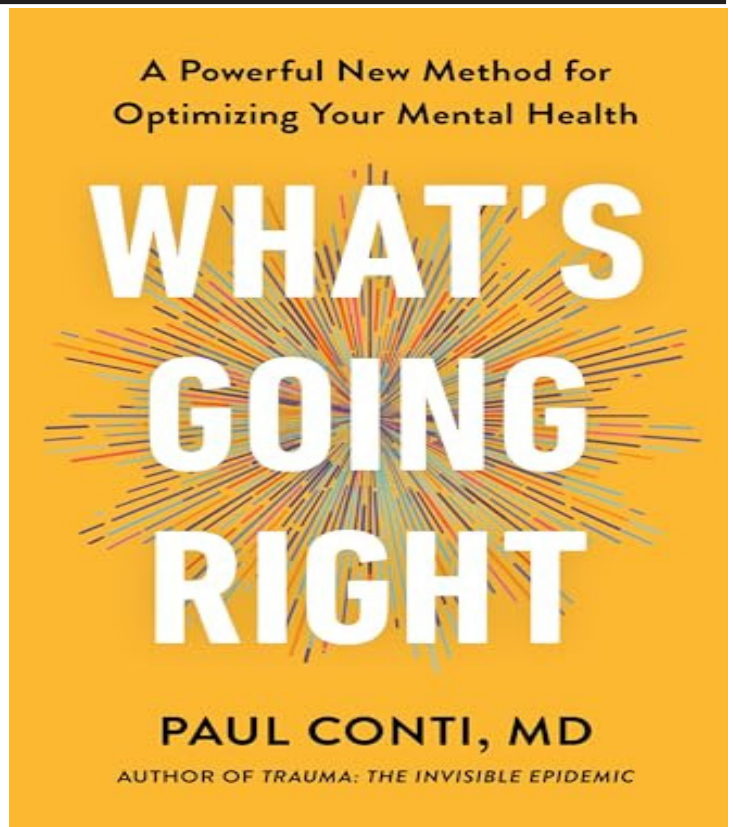


What's Going Right

A Powerful New Method for Optimizing Your Mental Health

(New Agency) Based on the wildly popular four-part series on Andrew Huberman's podcast, this affirming book from world-renowned and celebrity-endorsed psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Conti, offers a paradigm-shifting approach to optimizing mental health -- offering readers a proven way towards a joyful life. More than one in five US adults are living with a mental illness. Since 2010, adults ages eighteen to twenty-five have experienced a 139 percent increase in anxiety. For all of the increasing and well-intended mental health resources at our immediate disposal, we could easily ask where we are going wrong. Yet, Dr. Paul Conti wants to know, "what's going right?" Backed by celebrities and esteemed colleagues such as Lady GaGa, Peter Attia, and Kim Kardashian, Dr. Conti

poses that the best place to start addressing our mental health isn't in focusing on what's going wrong, but rather what's going right. And the key to embracing this new narrative is tapping into our often ignored and long overlooked generative drive, the primary factor that's already going right in each of us. The generative drive helps you get things done, solve problems creatively, help others and feel connected to something larger than yourself. When activated, it brings you peace, contentment, and delight. With Dr. Conti's notorious straightforward sincerity, he shares the exact method he uses on his patients and celebrity clients, offering readers a proven off-ramp from the toxic pursuits that keep them stuck and an on-ramp toward a joyful life.



Chain of Ideas: The Origins of Our Authoritarian Age

(New Agency) The National Book Award-winning historian of *Stamped from the Beginning* charts how "great replacement theory" has moved from the margins to become the most dominant political theory of our time—and what we can do to safeguard democracy from this insidious threat.

Recall the words chanted in Charlottesville, Virginia, but heard around the world: "You will not replace us!" Recall the string of mass shooters around the world—in Oslo and Christchurch, Buffalo, El Paso, and Pittsburgh—who claimed their crimes were a defense against "White genocide." Recall business and media figures cultivating anxiety and furor over demographic change. These incidents only scratch the surface of this ascendant idea: Popular and ruling politicians in every region of the world have been expressing some version of great replacement theory, eroding democratic norms in the name of preventing demographic change and restoring national greatness.

What is great replacement theory? Variations on the theory have existed for centuries, but it was given this name by a French novelist in 2011 who believed Black and Brown immigrants

were "invading" Europe, brought by shadowy elites to "replace" Europe's White population. From there, politicians and theorists—whether in the United States or the United Kingdom, Germany or Chile, Hungary or Australia—repackaged the conspiracy as a story of "globalists" welcoming "migrant criminals" and diversity initiatives to take away the jobs, cultures, electoral power, and the very lives of White people. Over time, great replacement theory has expanded the threat to include citizens, men, Jews, Christians, heterosexuals, and ethnic majorities in countries as distinct as Russia, El Salvador, Brazil, Italy, and India. All are targeted with the message that they are under an existential attack that only a strongman can prevent.

In our fast-shifting political landscape, most people are unfamiliar with this theory's origins and its spread, which isn't a coincidence. In *Chain of Ideas*, international bestselling author Ibram X. Kendi uses exacting and clear prose to uncover the roots of great replacement theory and its various mutations around the world. It is an unsettling but indispensable global history of how great replacement theory brought humanity into this authoritarian age—and how we can free ourselves from it.



Coorg, Karnataka: Coorg produces high-quality Arabica and Robusta beans. Visitors can walk through sprawling green estates, participate in berry-picking during harvest season, and enjoy luxurious stays in homestays nestled deep within the fragrant, shade-grown coffee plantations.

India's Coffee Exports Hit Record High Of \$2.13 Billion 6 Must-Visit Coffee Plantations For Caffeine Lovers



Chikmagalur, Karnataka: As the legendary birthplace of Indian coffee, Chikmagalur offers a deep dive into history. The hills are dotted with heritage estates where you can learn about bean processing, visit the Coffee Museum, and hike to the scenic Baba Budangiri shrine.



Wayanad, Kerala: Wayanad is famous for its organic, shade-grown Robusta coffee, often intercropped with aromatic spices like black pepper. The plantations here are exceptionally scenic, featuring mist-covered trails, hidden waterfalls, and diverse wildlife, providing a tranquil escape for every nature-loving caffeine addict.



Yercaud, Tamil Nadu: Perched on the Shevaroy Hills, Yercaud is a serene destination for those seeking high-quality Arabica. The "MSP Coffee" estate is a major highlight here, offering guided tours that explain the journey from blossom to brew amidst a cool, temperate climate.



Munnar, Kerala: While primarily famous for tea, Munnar boasts stunning coffee estates in its lower altitudes. These plantations offer a unique dual experience for beverage lovers, allowing you to witness the overlap of tea and coffee cultures in one breathtakingly emerald location.

Chocolate, cheese and yogurt linked to longer life in detailed study of 3 million people

Analysis of 50 studies found fermented dairy and chocolate associated with reduced cardiovascular mortality risk



A new large-scale study suggests that yogurt, cheese and even chocolate could help people live longer.

The analysis found that certain fermented and fermentation-derived foods may be associated with a lower risk of death, according to a study published in *Frontiers in Nutrition*.

Researchers analyzed data from 50 studies involving more than 3 million people to examine how these foods — made using beneficial microbes like bacteria or yeast — are linked to overall mortality risk, as well as deaths from heart disease and cancer. "Higher consumption of chocolate, cheese and fermented milks (including yogurt) was associated with lower all-cause and CVD mortality," the researchers wrote in their paper.

While cheese intake was linked to a slight reduction in all-cause mortality, associations with heart disease and cancer deaths were less consistent, they

noted.

Chocolate, which is derived from fermented cacao beans, was also associated with a lower risk of both all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, the researchers reported. But not all foods in the fermented category showed the same results.

Items like miso, a fermented soybean paste, and fermented bread, such as sourdough, did not show consistent links to reduced mortality.

The potential benefits seen in foods like yogurt and fermented milk may be tied to their impact on gut health, as these foods can contain beneficial bacteria and compounds that influence inflammation, metabolism and immune function, the study noted.

Chocolate's potential effects could be linked to cocoa's polyphenols — plant compounds that may support heart health

by improving blood vessel function and reducing oxidative stress. "Fermentation is one of the oldest food processing methods and remains central to human diets worldwide," the researchers said.

Besides helping to preserve food, fermentation produces compounds and byproducts that can benefit health, connecting fermented foods to possible long-term protection against disease and death, they noted. They said their work was the first meta-analysis to take a comprehensive look at how fermented food consumption is linked to mortality.

For the most beneficial fermented foods, look for foods that contain 'live active cultures' that are refrigerated," said Robin DeCicco, a New York-based certified holistic nutritionist who was not involved in the study. "These are usually better than foods that are heavily processed and shelf-stable."

She noted that options like yogurt and kefir are typically refrigerated and offer a wide range of probiotic cultures.

Other good choices include tempeh, refrigerated pickles, sauerkraut and kimchi, DeCicco said, though she cautioned that some fermented foods are high in sodium and may not be suitable for those with high blood pressure. Many yogurts, kefirs and kombucha brands use added sugar, making the seemingly 'health food' a very high-sugar food — defeating the whole purpose," DeCicco added. The researchers also emphasized that the findings are based on observational data, meaning they can show links but not cause and effect. Dietary patterns, lifestyle factors and overall health behaviors may also play a role in the observed outcomes, even when studies attempt to adjust for these variables.

Simple dinner table habit linked to poor diet and higher health risks in adults over 60

Study of 8,000 older adults links salt use to several key lifestyle habits

Reaching for the salt shaker at the kitchen table may seem like second nature for some — but it could reveal troubling details about your health.

Recent Brazilian research, published in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health*, investigated the impact of adding salt to food with a focus on older adults.

The study used national survey data from more than 8,000 Brazilians over the age of 60, collected between 2017 and 2018. Participants were asked the question, "Do you have the habit of adding salt to food at the table?" The researchers then deciphered certain traits that were linked to the habit.

About 10.9% of older adults said they used salt at the table. Men reported this habit more than women — 12.7% compared to 9.4%, according to the published study. Men not following a diet for high blood pressure were more than twice as likely to add salt compared to men who follow this diet.

Men who reported living alone had a 62% higher likelihood of using salt compared to men who lived with others. Women not following a high blood pressure

did not eat fruit, and 40% higher in those who did not eat vegetables.

Women who have a high concentration of ultraprocessed foods in their diet were more than twice as likely to add salt to food, as were those living in urban areas. As this study was cross-sectional, it showed an association but could not prove that one thing caused another, the researchers acknowledged. Some of the information was self-reported, which could also limit the findings.

Diets high in sodium are known to cause an increase in blood pressure, which also raises the risk of heart disease, gastric cancer, obesity, osteoporosis and kidney disease, according to the World Health Organization. About 1.89 million deaths each year are associated with consuming

too much sodium, the organization reported. The WHO recommends that adults consume less than 5 grams of salt per day, or just under a teaspoon, for best health outcomes.



diet had 68% higher likelihood of using extra salt. Adding salt was also associated with a lower intake of fruits and vegetables among women. The odds of adding salt to food were 81% higher in women who

Study reveals one simple eating habit that may help boost weight loss

Those who repeated meals more often lost an average of 5.9% of their body weight, study finds

Losing weight might be as simple as sticking to the meals you know, a new study found. People who ate the same meals more often lost more weight during a 12-week weight-loss program, according to a new study published in *Health Psychology*. "Maintaining a healthy diet in today's food environment requires constant effort and self-control," lead author Charlotte Hagerman of the Oregon Research Institute said in a statement. "Creating routines around eating may reduce that burden and make healthy choices feel more automatic." Hagerman and fellow researchers from Drexel University and the Oregon Research Institute analyzed food logs from 112 adults who were overweight or obese who tracked their meals in an app and weighed themselves daily, according to the study.

The researchers measured "routinized" eating in two main ways —how much participants' daily calorie intake fluctuated and how often they repeated the same meals and snacks over time, according to the paper. Those whose diets included more repeated foods lost an average of 5.9% of their body weight compared to 4.3% for those whose eating patterns were more varied, according to a press release from



the American Psychological Association. People who kept their daily calorie intake more consistent also lost more weight, according to the researchers. Liza Baker, a Vermont-based nutrition expert and founder of Simply: Health Coaching, said the findings line up with what she has seen firsthand in more than a decade of working with clients. "Removing the mental load of 'What's for breakfast, lunch or dinner?' can make the wellness journey much more sustainable," Baker told Fox News Digital. She said repeat meals can reduce decision fatigue and make it easier for people to stick to healthier habits, especially when they are packing lunches, cooking at home and

following a simple routine.

Baker said people do not necessarily have to repeat every meal to see benefits. "One can start by eating one meal that is repetitive, usually breakfast or lunch," she said. "As results start to show, it's then more conducive to increasing to two to three repetitive meals a day." At the same time, experts cautioned that the findings do not prove cause and effect. The study was observational, meaning it found an association between routine eating and greater weight loss but could not show that repetition alone caused the better results, according to the researchers. Baker also warned that repeat meal plans can backfire if they are not nutritionally balanced or if they trigger perfectionism.

"Unless someone is well-versed in nutrition, setting up a repeat meal plan can quickly become a nutritional nightmare that leads to becoming deficient in one or more nutrients," she said.

The study authors similarly noted that too little variety could come with trade-offs. Future research is needed to determine whether a more repetitive diet should be actively recommended as a weight-loss strategy, they said.




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Alia Bhatt's mogra pallu saree might be the next big wedding trend



Alia Bhatt wore a stunning ivory saree for an awards night in Mumbai. Its mogra pallu was the most scene-stealing element, and it totally deserves your attention.

Alia Bhatt made a notable style statement at a recent awards show in Mumbai. Hosting the evening, the actor chose a dreamy ivory saree by Gaurav Gupta, and in doing so, may have just set the tone for the upcoming wedding season. This wasn't your classic ivory drape. The saree's defining feature - a delicate mogra pallu - was a scene-stealing element. Instead of a conventional fall, the pallu was adorned with dainty, almost real-looking mogra buds, lending the ensemble a soft, fragrant romance. The floral detailing cascaded into tassels that moved with an understated drama, making them the undeniable cynosure of the look. Alia balanced this statement detail with a pearl-encrusted blouse. The pairing worked seamlessly.

Why mogra pallu could be the next big trend Expect the mogra pallu to have a moment. For bridesmaids looking to move beyond predictable sequins, or even for brides drawn to

a minimalist aesthetic, this could be the next big cue. There's also a visible shift towards pieces that feel personal yet unfussy. Bhatt's saree fits squarely into this mood. It's the kind of ensemble that doesn't rely on heavy embellishments or overt opulence, but instead leans into texture, movement, and thoughtful detailing. In a sea of high-shine occasion wear, this look stands out for its softness. And so do these sarees looks that Alia Bhatt has sported in the past. If you're in the middle of planning your wardrobe for an impending wedding, consider this your cue to embrace understated elegance. Think beyond the obvious - perhaps a pastel green saree that captures the freshness of spring, or even a striking black drape paired with an encrusted blouse for evening celebrations. These looks prove that minimalism need not be boring; when done right, it can be quietly powerful.

Nita Ambani sparkles in daughter Isha Ambani's Sabyasachi saree

Nita Ambani stepped out in a shimmering Sabyasachi saree for a recent outing, and she took a fashion lesson from her daughter, Isha Ambani.

Whenever we're in doubt about what to wear, we often turn to our mum's closet for inspiration. But trust the Ambanis to flip the script, and they will never disappoint. At a recent event, Nita Ambani stepped out in style, and she took a cue from her daughter, Isha Ambani.

For the outing, the businesswoman and philanthropist wore a shimmering gold 'Akashtara' Sabyasachi saree that perfectly blends glamour with timeless grace. The saree, drenched in sequins, catches the light beautifully, giving the entire look a soft, radiant glow without feeling over-the-top. Her sleeveless blouse, with its satin-like finish, balanced the shimmer beautifully, while her statement diamond chandelier earrings added just



the right touch of drama. A sleek bracelet and a humongous diamond ring amped up the sparkle, but it was her Patek Philippe diamond watch that truly stole the spotlight. Nita

Ambani completed the look with a Chanel pearl ring minaudiere bag. Back in 2020, Isha Ambani wore the same Sabyasachi saree for one of Armaan Jain and Anissa Malhotra's wedding

functions. She had paired the drape with a minimal sleeveless blouse. As for jewellery, she went for a statement diamond choker and coordinated cocktail rings. Over the years, the

mother-daughter duo has shared stunning jewellery on many occasions, but this saree twist proves their fashion choices are just as in sync. What do you think?

Gulkand Benefits: Why This Sweet Rose Preserve Is A Summer Essential

From beating the summer heat to improving digestion and skin, gulkand offers multiple health benefits.



Gulkand, a fragrant preserve made from fresh rose petals and sugar, has been a cherished part of traditional Indian wellness practices for centuries. Often associated with cooling the body during scorching summers, this sweet delicacy is more than just a treat, it is deeply rooted in Ayurveda. Known for its soothing properties, gulkand is commonly consumed with milk, paan, or even on its own, offering both flavor and health benefits in every spoonful.



Preparing gulkand at home is surprisingly simple. Traditionally, it is made using fragrant desi rose petals, particularly the damask variety, which are known for their strong aroma and therapeutic value. The petals are first washed gently and dried to remove moisture.

They are then layered in a glass jar with an equal amount of sugar. Some people like to add a touch of cardamom or fennel seeds for extra flavour. The jar is sealed and placed under direct sunlight for about two to three weeks. During this time, the sugar slowly dissolves, and the petals release their natural oils, transforming the mixture into a rich, jam-like preserve.

Stirring it occasionally helps achieve an even consistency. Once ready, gulkand can be stored for months and used as needed.



One of the most well-known benefits of gulkand is its natural cooling effect on the body. It helps regulate body temperature, making it especially useful during hot weather when heat-related issues like fatigue and dehydration are common. In Ayurveda, it is often recommended to balance excess heat in the system, providing a calming effect from within. This cooling property also extends to the digestive system, where gulkand can help soothe acidity and reduce the discomfort of heartburn.



Another significant benefit of gulkand lies in its ability to aid digestion. It acts as a mild laxative, helping to relieve constipation without causing any harsh side effects. Regular consumption in small quantities can promote gut health and support smoother bowel movements. Because of its gentle nature, it is often considered suitable for people of all ages, including children and the elderly.



Gulkand is also known for its positive impact on skin health. Its detoxifying properties help cleanse the body from within, which can reflect in clearer, healthier skin over time. Many believe that it helps reduce issues like acne and dullness by flushing out toxins and cooling the system. This internal nourishment often complements external skincare routines, making it a holistic addition to one's wellness habits.



Beyond physical health, gulkand is valued for its calming effects on the mind. It is believed to help reduce stress, fatigue, and even mild anxiety. The natural compounds found in rose petals are known to have mood-enhancing properties, which can help promote relaxation and improve overall mental well-being. Consuming gulkand regularly may also support better sleep by calming the nervous system.

Why Does Ayurveda Swear By Honey For Immunity And Digestion?

Stirred into tea, drizzled over breakfast, or taken by the spoonful when your throat feels off, honey is one of those ingredients you instinctively reach for. But have you ever wondered why it always seems to help, no matter the situation? What is it about this simple, golden liquid that has kept it relevant in everyday routines for generations?

For over 5,000 years, India's ancient system of holistic healing has hailed honey as a "golden elixir" — a powerful natural remedy capable of balancing the body, strengthening immunity, and

supporting digestion like few other ingredients can.

In Ayurvedic practice, honey is not treated as a simple sweetener. It is what practitioners call a functional food, something that actively works within the body. Dr. Ankita Sharma, Senior Ayurveda Physician, explains it clearly: "In Ayurveda, raw honey is not seen as just a sweetener, but as a functional food that supports balance in the body. It is known to enhance the effect of other ingredients it is combined with, which is why it is often used in traditional formulations."

What this really means is that honey acts as a carrier. When mixed with herbs or spices, it helps the body absorb their benefits more effectively. This is one reason you often see it paired with ginger, turmeric or tulsi in traditional remedies.

The Digestive Connection

Digestion sits at the centre of Ayurvedic health. If the digestive system is functioning well, the body is better equipped to absorb nutrients and eliminate waste. Honey, when consumed in the right amount, is believed to support this process. "It supports digestion and

helps in clearing metabolic waste," adds Dr. Sharma. Unlike refined sugar, which can feel heavy on the system, honey tends to be lighter and easier to process. Lavleen Kaur, Chief Dietitian and founder of Santushti Holistic Health, offers a modern perspective. "Raw honey is often perceived as a 'healthier sugar,' but the difference lies in how the body responds to it. Unlike refined sugar, honey comes with trace enzymes and antioxidants, and tends to have a slightly gentler impact on blood sugar levels when used in small amounts."

Nitesh Tiwari shares why Ramayana's Ravana isn't a typical villain

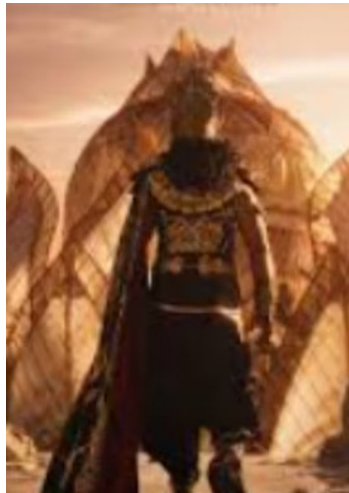
Nitesh Tiwari reveals a bold new take on Ravana in Ramayana, challenging his traditional villain image. Here's how the filmmaker plans to reshape the epic narrative.

Director Nitesh Tiwari is reimagining one of mythology's most debated figures in his upcoming Ramayana. At the film's teaser launch, Tiwari revealed that Ravana will not be framed as a conventional villain but as a benevolent and complex king—marking a significant shift from traditional portrayals.

Addressing questions around the Lanka ruler's characterisation, Tiwari explained that Ravana's story carries a deeper lesson. Rather than reducing him to a one-dimensional antagonist, the film will explore his intellect, devotion and leadership, presenting a layered figure whose downfall stems from ego and vengeance.

Why is Ravana being portrayed differently?

Tiwari noted that Ravana was far more than a "black character". "He was a great warrior, an



accomplished musician, a scholar, a benevolent king and a devoted follower of Shiva," he said. By foregrounding these qualities, the filmmaker aims to highlight the moral complexity of the character rather than simply

positioning him as evil. He added that the intent is to underline a broader lesson: even individuals with admirable traits can fall if driven by pride and revenge. The portrayal, therefore, seeks to balance reverence with

realism. **What can audiences expect from the film's scale?**

Beyond its reinterpretation of Ravana, Ramayana is being positioned as a large-scale cinematic experience. Tiwari

emphasised that the film will not rely solely on spectacle but will be rooted in emotion. He also promised that the kingdoms of Lanka and Ayodhya would be depicted in a way "no one has ever seen before".

The project is backed by Prime Focus Studios in collaboration with DNEG and Monster Mind Creations.

Who stars in Ramayana?

The film features Yash as Ravana, Ranbir Kapoor as Rama, and Sai Pallavi as Sita. Producer Namit Malhotra described the project as a seven-year journey, calling filmmaking a "speculative and lonely process" and expressing hope that audiences will connect with the final product. Ramayana is slated for a two-part release during Diwali 2026 and 2027, with music composed by Hans Zimmer and A R Rahman.

Anurag Kashyap on casting Mrunal Thakur: I have something crazy for her in mind

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has hinted at a bold, unconventional role for actor Mrunal Thakur in an exclusive interview. He also reflected on her standout performances, saying Thakur often underestimates her own abilities.

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap has expressed strong admiration for actor Mrunal Thakur. He has described her as a rare talent who brings genuine emotional depth to her performances. The 53-year-old also said that Thakur often underestimates her own abilities. Thakur's acting style, he said, relies less on conventional gestures and more on conveying emotions through her eyes. He expressed that this connection with her inner self is something few actors possess, making her performances particularly compelling.

'She underestimates herself' In an exclusive interview with India Today, the filmmaker reflected on her craft, saying, "She really underestimates herself. She has no idea how good an actor she is. She's a very good actor." He went on to distinguish Thakur's approach from conventional acting methods. "Actors, you know; they act with their hands, with their eyes, with all of that. But she feels things, and they translate through her eyes. If you see

any random image of her from any film, generally, you know exactly what she's feeling – it's all there in her eyes. That connection with self, very few actors have," he added, underlining his admiration.

Kashyap hints at future collaboration When asked what kind of role he would cast her in, Anurag said, "I have something crazy in mind for her. She's been wanting to let loose and abuse in a film for a while now- so whoever she wants to abuse, she can do it in my film." Performances that stood out Kashyap also revisited some of Thakur's standout performances that left a lasting impression on him. Speaking about her breakout role in Love Sonia, he admitted he came to it slightly late. "I didn't watch her series at the time, Kumkum Bhagya. I got to know about it later. My family used to watch it, but when I saw Love Sonia for the first time, I was totally blown away," he said. He further mentioned Sita Ramam as another performance that resonated



deeply with him. "Sita Ramam really stayed with me," Kashyap noted. Recalling her work in Super 30, he highlighted a specific moment that, according to him, captures her ability to communicate emotion with subtlety. "I have watched her closely in Super 30, because I sat on a few of the edits myself. The very first sequence I remember is when she's dancing, and Hrithik Roshan's character comes and

looks at her. The way she stops – that surprise in her eyes – I still have that image in my head. The way she looks at him, pauses, then turns again, trying to communicate something to him that was beautiful. So much. Because we remember those things," he said. Mrunal will be seen in the upcoming film Dacoit, alongside Adivi Sesh. The film also stars Anurag Kashyap and will release in theatres on April 10.



Reclaim Your Health

Over seventy percent of diseases in the world today are self-created. It is ironic that after a century-long fight against contagious diseases, we are now on "self-help." Now we make ourselves sick. Essentially, the origin of chronic ailments is within us.

What is ill-health? Leaving aside infectious diseases because they are different—an external invasion that needs some kind of medicine—most ill-health today is from chronic ailments, ailments that we create within ourselves.

Over seventy percent of diseases in the world today are self-created. It is ironic that after a century-long fight against contagious diseases, we are now on "self-help." Now we make ourselves sick. Essentially, the origin of chronic ailments is within us.

Every cell in the body is wired for health. Our body wants to be healthy. So why would it cause ill health? There are various dimensions to this. One is definitely food. The poor are not eating the right way, or they do not have choices. The affluent are eating too much and making compulsive choices. So both ways, people are suffering.

Another dimension is that there is no education about how to keep the human mechanism. We do not even have to think of how to create health because the body is structured to be healthy. Our business is just to not create ill health.

There are many ways to look at this. One simple way is—suppose as I sit here, my hand starts popping around, punching me and poking me in the eye. You would definitely think there

is an ailment—at least in my hand, if not in my whole self. This is exactly what people's minds are doing right now. It hops all over the place; it punches, scratches, and pokes them; it makes them cry, it makes them miserable. We have not done anything about it. We know today that for every thought and emotion created in your mind, the very chemistry of your body changes. But people have not even looked at the basic user's manual as to how to use their mind. Another way of looking at it is that this human body is a chemical soup—a great soup or a lousy soup is the question. The soup becomes lousy either because the ingredients or the way you cook it is not good. Poverty is a place where ingredients are bad, so the soup is messed up. Affluence is a place where the ingredients are good but the cook is bad, and again you have a lousy soup.

Accessing the Manufacturer
One thing we must understand is that you only gave material to your body, but the body was manufactured from within. You did not make it from outside. Or in other words, the manufacturer of the body is inside. When there is a repair job to be done, you go to the manufacturer of course. You go to the local mechanic only when you have no access to

the manufacturer.

There is an intelligence within you that can transform a piece of bread into the complex mechanism of the human body. If you have access to this intelligence or the source of creation within, health will be a natural consequence. Health should be the last of concerns, but today it's one of the biggest concerns. It would not be the biggest thing if you live in tune with the life that you are. A tree, a bird, a buffalo in the wild are not worrying about their health.

They are just in tune with nature, and they are healthy.

Don't Surrender Your Health

We must understand that it is in pursuit of human wellbeing that we started commerce. So

commerce should always serve human wellbeing. Right now, for the health of the economy, we are surrendering the health of the human being. Commercial forces are deciding what you should eat and drink, and how you should live. It should never be so. Human consciousness should decide the nature of human existence, and commercial forces should serve that purpose. We have reversed this. This is the fundamental place where we have gone wrong.

I have three clear-cut steps to change this. The first thing is to campaign so that people become aware of the way they are being used by commercial forces. The next thing is education as to how to fix in

individual lives. The next thing is policy. These three things must happen, and in this order if you want a global transformation. Whatever kind of social structures, individual situations, and global situations we are placed in, individuals still have choices. But not every individual is capable of making the right choices. They go by what the majority does. Unless health becomes a mass movement, there will be no global health. But if you as an individual want to create health for yourself, that is within your reach. There is a little bit of poison that you have to breathe and drink, which is unavoidable, but the poison you generate from within, you can stop it instantaneously if you wish.



This micronation in the US has a Sultan and 31,000 citizens

This place has its own quirks. You can easily become a citizen, buy a passport, and if you get lucky, you might even get a seat in its Parliament. This place will tickle your funny bone at every step. So, scroll down and decide if this deserves a place on your bucket list.

It's not just social media trends that are bizarre and ridiculously funny. Travelling can be too. At least, if you visit this micronation. This place sprawls across 11-acre of land (read: desert). And it's got some weirdly funny rules too.

There's this whole offbeat travel thing, and then there's The Republic of Slowjamastan in San Diego, California. It is one of the youngest micronations. Most countries have history, culture, and governance; Slowjamastan has a Sultan and a sense of humour. Currently, ironically, it has over 31,000 citizens from around the world. Just digitally. There are no homes, no residents living there in real time.

In case you're wondering, a micronation is essentially a self-declared "country"—one that claims independence but isn't officially recognised by bodies like the United Nations. It's often owned by individuals who mimic sovereign states. To name a few, there is Principality of Sealand (UK), Republic of Molossia (US), and Principality of Hutt River (Australia). Kailasa in India, is also a rather infamous one.

While not officially recognised, these "countries" have carved out their own identities, turning imagination into oddly fascinating travel curiosities.

Their supreme leader? Randy Williams, a.k.a. "Sultan of Slowjamastan", a.k.a. "R Dub."

Welcome to Slowjamastan

It all started with Williams and his

wanderlust to cover every country in the world, at least the ones recognised by the United Nations. However, when the pandemic happened, his quest had to be put on hold as the world went into lockdown. During that wait, it occurred to him: "If I can't visit another country, why not create one?" he mentioned in an interview with BBC.

A few months later, his visit to Molossia—another micronation in Nevada—inspired him to build such a place of his own. The rest is history.

Slowjamastan was founded on December 1, 2021, when Williams purchased 11 acres of Imperial County desert for around \$19,000 (Rs 17,58,545 approx) and declared it an independent nation. The nation sits off California State Route 78, about 100 miles east of San Diego, landlocked entirely within the United States.

It has a flag, currency, a government, a national anthem, and it's titled, "Slowjamastan (I Think It's Gonna Be an Awesome Place)". You bet it is!

You can easily become a citizen and also apply to be a member of Parliament. Just fill a form. And for a passport, all you need to do is pay \$59.99 (approx Rs 5,570). That's it. Oh, did we mention you don't have to pay taxes here!

The laws, because there are laws Crocs are legally banned.

Probably the only turn-off. Because everyone is wearing those Crocs, and flaunting their charms these days. The

website maintains a live Croc Threat Level (currently Periwinkle, not sure what that's about). Our guess is that it's better to wear shoes when visiting a desert with several insects and the risk of snakes hissing all around.

Next, mumble rap is illegal. Using the reply-all function on emails is prohibited. Eating string cheese by biting directly into it is an offence. Speeding is only permitted if you are rushing home with tacos. The Sultan hates people who put their feet on car dashboards. These are the things that keep him up at night—and honestly, same.

Now for your travel plans

Here is the thing: you need a visa. Slowjamastan does have an official visa application form on its website, and approval is instant, which is more than you can say for most actual countries. However—and this is where it gets geographically awkward—Slowjamastan is completely surrounded by the United States. There is no Slowjamastan international airport. There is no Slowjamastan airline. Well, there are no roads. Just sand as far as you can see. Don't expect hotels or homestays, it's just good for a drive or 'I visited that viral micronation I saw on social media' list. You cannot stay there overnight.

So, before you worry about the Slowjamastan visa, you need a US visa, which is a whole other enterprise involving

interview appointments, bank statements, and a government that is not run by a slow jams enthusiast.

Get to California first. Then get your Slowjamastan visa. Then drive into the desert. Simple, right?

What to expect?

Once you arrive, you will find: a large border sign, a border control post, a desk under a tarp, and a lot of sand, plus the occasional curious traveller trying to figure out if this is all real or an elaborate joke. It's an elaborate joke turned reality. Creativity peaking. Best time to visit: When there's an event there, as it's flocked with several people and you might just spot the Sultan himself, in full uniform. But if you are in the neighbourhood, you may just drop in and click a selfie.

It's more like you've accidentally walked into an episode of Just for Laughs Gags. Slowjamastan is not a real country; it's a nation that's going viral with a very real sense of humour. If you're in and around San Diego, you can drop by, buy their passport, and maybe even walk away with a cabinet title. Might look good on your resume.

The Sultan wants everyone to enjoy themselves when at this micronation and leave behind all the stress. Apart from Slowjamastan's politics, it's forbidden to discuss any politics at all.

Did you think of anything stressful while reading about this quirky place? We did not. And that's the point.

Reminder: Don't pack your crocs.

The Beginning

MAD MEN

OF

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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



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OF

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The 'Munir Doctrine' That Drove Pak's US-Iran Brokering Project

The spate of calls, social media messaging, and diplomatic efforts from Pakistan in recent weeks, especially involving PM Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir, raises many questions.

Pakistan's re-emergence as a diplomatic conduit in the ongoing West Asian conflict nudges us to revisit an age-old question: Who really conducts Pakistan's foreign policy? The spate of calls, social media messaging, and diplomatic signals coming from Pakistan in recent weeks, especially involving Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, offers a window into the country's prevailing civil-military dynamics.

When Yahya Khan Mediated Between US And China

In 1971, former US President Richard Nixon persuaded General Yahya Khan to secretly mediate between China and the US - the channel through which Henry Kissinger met with Mao Zedong. Its architecture was similar to the present circumstances, where a civilian government held the official line, with the military managing the geometry of negotiations. Pakistan's dual-track foreign policy can also be traced to the erstwhile Soviet Union and Afghan war, where the government under Zia-ul-Haq coordinated with the US and Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan's security establishment, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was covertly arming the Afghan mujahideen.

In the current scenario, Pakistan relayed proposals between Iran and the US, including a 15-point plan from Washington and a 10-point plan from Iran. Tehran has now agreed to a two-week ceasefire with the US, with its National Security Council stating the commencement of talks in Islamabad on April 10.

Twin-Track Diplomacy

US President Donald Trump and Iran both acknowledged the role of Munir and Sharif in pausing strikes against Iran. Meanwhile, Sharif urged the US to extend its negotiation timeline while pressing Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. However, the mechanics of this mediation bring to light something more



structurally significant. Pakistan's diplomacy continues to unfold through a dual-track civil-military arrangement, with the civilian government conducting public diplomacy while the military manages strategic ties and back-channel communication. Understanding this blueprint requires situating it within its long history of civil-military dynamics.

Pakistan's civil-military dynamics have always been a spectrum of overt military rule or hybrid co-governance. While former army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa only spoke of geoeconomics, Munir's position informs an intent where Pakistan refuses to project itself as a soft state. Since the early decades of the state, the military held influence over strategic decisions, especially in matters of security and strategic policy with major powers. Munir's direct engagements with Gulf monarchies and Washington suggest that the strategic brokering is in the hands of the army. The civilian government essentially inherits, rather than controls, these foreign ties that are established by the military. Even now, Munir's engagement with the White House has reportedly been crucial to transmitting messages and negotiating deadlines in the conflict. To put it simply, Munir manages the backchannel, while

Sharif is the face of the front desk.

The Munir Framework

The Munir doctrine can be perceived through three aspects: projecting a softer image of Pakistan, positioning itself as a middle power in the region, while also prioritising geoeconomics. The soft power portrayal of Munir is for foreign projection, while his hard approach is employed for consolidating domestic power. After decades of being associated with links to extremist elements and grey-list sanctions, the military has managed to reposition Pakistan's place in the world as a responsible state capable of effective diplomacy. Pakistan's emergence as a regional middle power is essentially rooted in the country's geography - strategically located between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, and West Asia.

Pakistan's future is also positioned in the context of geoeconomics, instead of geopolitics. This includes using diplomatic ties to gain economic opportunities - more recently involving a mineral deal with the US, and a security agreement with Saudi Arabia. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz and associated disruptions to energy flow from the Gulf are also a domestic issue for an economically fragile Pakistan. Rising oil prices could worsen its

trade deficit and debt burden, exacerbating domestic pressures for Munir.

Another crucial element is diplomatic acceptability. Unlike other regional actors, Pakistan maintains a relationship with all stakeholders in the conflict: brotherly ties with the Gulf, which is also enshrined in its Constitution, its ethnic and border ties with Iran, and an economic relationship with the US. As such, the intermediary role fits well within this framework. Acting as a diplomatic messenger allows Pakistan to deepen trust within the Trump administration, especially after ties with the US saw a low following the latter's withdrawal from Afghanistan. It further signals to China and the Gulf that Pakistan remains a crucial strategic partner. To be clear, Pakistan's role still fits more as a facilitator between hostile nations that enables communication as a middleman when formal negotiations are untenable.

As the world's second-largest Muslim-populated country and a nuclear-armed Islamic state, or, as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said, an "Islamic bomb", Pakistan holds symbolic relevance. While this may not translate to influence, it offers credibility.

A Big Day For Pak Military

For the Pakistani military to

sustain its dominance, a successful mediation effort also elevates its global standing, thereby contradicting the Indian narrative and global profile. Similarly, the military establishment gains from appearing indispensable to Pakistan's foreign policy, in a way legitimising its position against the civilian government.

Ultimately, while the Islamabad Accord will find its place in the history books, the decisions that will determine the trajectory of the West Asian conflict will be made in Tehran and Washington/Tel Aviv. In that light, Pakistan's ability to influence outcomes remains limited, despite its credibility as a messenger.

As for Pakistan's foreign policy, it will remain inseparable from its civil-military equation, a dual-track system that will shape the country's diplomacy for the foreseeable future. For Munir, in the immediate term, this means providing cover for Pakistan's military campaign in Afghanistan, maintaining an international stature against India's global image, and distracting from former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who continues to be ignored if not forgotten.

The front desk is helpful, but the back room is indispensable.

(Aishwaria Sonavane is a research analyst at the Takshashila Institution)